



General Certificate of Secondary Education

Sociology 4190

41902

Report on the Examination

2011 examination – January series

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41902

General

This was the first examination series for Unit 2 of the new specification, and the overall entry was low, with only a few centres choosing to enter candidates. The small size of the entry needs to be taken into account when reading the comments made in this report. It also needs to be borne in mind that most candidates had (presumably) only spent about six months preparing for this paper, which possibly impacted on the quality of some of the answers from a minority of candidates. Conversely, there were some excellent responses which displayed a maturity of approach and good sociological knowledge, and centres are to be congratulated for these.

The 41902 paper requires candidates to choose three topics from four (Crime and Deviance, Mass Media, Power, and Social Inequality). Overwhelmingly candidates chose Crime and Deviance and Mass Media topics, with the majority then doing Social Inequality, and a smaller number Power.

Most candidates followed the rubric instructions correctly, but a minority disadvantaged themselves by answering questions from all four topics, or by starting a topic they had not been taught, realising this midway and crossing out their responses to that topic. Needless to say such candidates were then short of adequate time to complete the paper.

The majority of candidates completed the paper in the time allocated. Such candidates appeared to have heeded the advice on the paper as to time allocation per topic, and consequently responded to all three topics in the same level of depth. The minority who ran into time management issues in their last topic typically wrote at excessive length in the first two topics on questions carrying relatively few marks, occasionally compounding the issue by copying out the questions as well. Some of these candidates also misused time by introducing evaluative or other extraneous material into responses where this was not required.

Most centres appeared to have covered the full range of material from the specification in their chosen topics, though (somewhat surprisingly given their everyday use of mobile phones) most candidates did not distinguish between 'old' and digital media in responses to questions in the Mass Media topic. Despite this, many candidates demonstrated good sociological knowledge and understanding across their chosen topic areas, often referencing theoretical positions and/or studies in their responses. However, some seemed to lack a full understanding of the concepts tested in the four mark questions, particularly those in the Crime and Deviance and Mass Media topics, and many candidates are still inclined to quote examples drawn from their own and their peers' immediate lives as evidence, eg when discussing the impact of ASBOs.

The Unit 2 paper followed the template laid out in the specimen material and the latter two sections of the already-examined Unit 1. This should have assisted centres to prepare their candidates regarding the division of marks in the five mark questions and the requirement to address the 'Discuss how far ...' aspect of the extended writing twelve mark questions. In the former up to two marks are available for the 'Describe one ...' part of the question, and a further three for the 'and explain ...' part; in the latter, candidates who do not address the evaluative aspect of the question cannot progress beyond the four to six band.

Many candidates wrote at excessive length in the first part of the five mark questions. Typically such candidates had obviously revised a lot of material and were determined to demonstrate this to the reader, whereas one or two sentences would have sufficed in most cases. A few of

these candidates seemed to lose sight of the 'and explain ...' part, responding in almost peremptory fashion. Centres might find it useful to ensure candidates are clear about the mark distribution in the five mark questions, and possibly suggest that they respond with two distinct paragraphs to ensure both aspects are covered appropriately.

More successful candidates were clearly aware of the mark scheme requirements for the twelve mark responses, and offered two or more contrasting viewpoints, explanations and/or sets of evidence on the debate posed in the question. Less well-prepared candidates tended to confine themselves to making general/anecdotal points about the issue, perhaps with a very basic quasi-evaluative point thrown in. It should be noted that candidates who present answers which as a whole are insufficiently detailed and/or lack sociological insight will not automatically progress beyond the 4-6 mark band simply by offering a passing reference to an alternative viewpoint, etc.

It was pleasing to note that some candidates were able to reference material they had encountered in the Unit 1 topics in their responses to the longer questions. Whilst this is not in itself essential, centres that endeavour to highlight the interrelationship of the sociological approach are to be commended, and their candidates (especially the more able) benefit accordingly, particularly when, for example, they are able to introduce theoretical or conceptual knowledge to their answers. A good example of this was the way better responses to question 31 were able to introduce functionalist perspectives from the Education topic into their answers, using terms like role allocation, meritocracy and so on to support an argument.

A final point to note about the twelve mark questions is that the two items at the start of each topic have a link or 'hook' into these; for example, candidates who attempted Question 15 on the media's treatment of ethnic minorities might have found Item C a good place to start. Very few candidates took advantage of this, and centres may wish to ensure that candidates in forthcoming series are aware of this linkage and make good use of the Items.

Topic 1 – Crime and Deviance

Question 01

This question was answered correctly by the vast majority of candidates, though some answers were excessively long.

Question 02

This question was also answered correctly by the vast majority of candidates, once more with some answers of unnecessary verbosity.

Question 03

Most candidates were able to present two reasons, drawn either from the process of labelling (eg by reference to the role of the media), or by reference to things like appearance, image, language, etc. Centres should note that it is not necessary for candidates to write at length (up to half a side in some cases) to respond to this sort of question – one or two succinct sentences will suffice.

Question 04

A substantial minority of candidates did not appear to understand what conformity was, and gave definitions of deviance instead. It is possible that some of these misread the question. Other candidates lost marks by producing what was effectively a circular definition ('Conformity is when you conform ...'). Better responses were able to cite appropriate sociological concepts such as norms, values, etc and/or produce examples such as being quiet in libraries and so on.

Question 05

Nearly all candidates were able to quote an appropriate way in which statistics were collected, though sometimes this was done too vaguely to achieve two marks. A small minority produced tautological answers that said the government collected statistics 'by collecting statistics'. Most candidates responded to the second part by referring to issues such as lying, exaggeration, the non-reporting of certain types of crime and so on. The degree to which this was 'unpicked', possibly via examples was the main differential in the marks awarded for the second part of the question. Centres should also note the remarks about this type of question in the 'General' section of this report.

Question 06

Candidates were able to refer to a range of approaches in their responses to this question, predominantly ASBOs, the use of CCTV and various projects such as youth clubs. Almost without exception the issue of anti-social behaviour was seen as a phenomenon solely associated with young people, and the explanation for the success or otherwise of the chosen approach was located in this age group, usually citing issues such as the 'badge of honour' effect, the problem simply moving elsewhere and so on. Several candidates became quite anecdotal and/or cited examples from their own community – the latter can present problems of verification for examiners and should be used with care. Centres should also note the remarks about this type of question in the 'General' section of this report.

Question 07

There were some good answers to this question, with most candidates referring to issues around social expectations, socialisation, opportunity, the role of agents of social control and so on. More successful responses were able to discuss contemporary issues such as the rise of so-called 'girl gangs, 'ladettes' and the like by way of contrast, sometimes then moving on to discuss whether increased equality would lead to the decline of the gender gap in crime rates. Candidates often cited specific crimes committed by women by way of supporting evidence. Weaker responses tended to focus at a basic level on why men commit crime, taking it as axiomatic that women committed less. Centres should also note the remarks about this type of question in the 'General' section of this report.

Question 08

The quality here was more variable than in responses to Question 07. Weaker answers usually made one or two vague references to the possible causes of working class crime, usually making sweeping generalisations such as 'the working class commit more crime because they can't afford to feed their families', and did not address the level of convictions issue. More successful responses began to address this aspect by looking at the role of the agents of social control and/or the 'crimes of the powerful' debate, often by way of reference to Marxist approaches, or by discussion of the difficulties in detecting and prosecuting white collar crime. A few candidates were able to cite specific examples by way of evidence, with a positive impact on their marks. Centres should also note the remarks about this type of question in the 'General' section of this report.

Topic 2 – Mass Media

Question 09

The vast majority of candidates gave the correct answer here, but once more some candidates wrote more than was necessary.

Question 10

Most candidates correctly identified 'digital shoppers' as the parents of digital natives. A few candidates responded with 'mostly middle aged adults', which, being technically a category (though not the desired one) was credited. About a third of candidates wrongly responded with 'young adults' and it is possible that greater care was needed in reading this question and the item.

Question 11

Most candidates were able to identify two ways, usually referring to bias, gatekeeping, amplification and so on. As with Question 03 many answers were far too long. A minority of candidates mis-interpreted the question as requiring two **types** of media.

Question 12

Most candidates could explain deviancy amplification to at least a basic level, usually via reference to media exaggeration, with better answers analysing aspects such as moral panics and social reaction. Some candidates cited recent examples (eg swine flu), or mentioned the work of Stan Cohen, and gained credit for so doing. Given that this concept is explicitly referred to in the specification, it is unfortunate that a substantial minority of candidates seemed to have little or no idea as to its meaning.

Question 13

Candidates cited a variety of ways the mass media is used by politicians, with the recent debates between party leaders the clear favourite. A few candidates again misread the question as requiring one type of media. The second part of the question was done with varying degrees of quality, with the majority of candidates not really addressing the 'main political **parties**' aspect (as opposed to losing faith in one particular party). However, better answers were able to cite issues such as cynicism at politicians' motives, lack of trust, failure to deliver and so on. Centres should also note the remarks about this type of question in the 'General' section of this report.

Question 14

Almost all candidates were able to produce a response to the 'describe' part of this question; many of them doing so in exhaustive and unnecessary detail (well over half a side on occasions). Answers made reference to the hypodermic syringe model, amplification, desensitising and so on, with many candidates giving detailed accounts of Bandura's experiment as part of this. The 'explain' part was generally answered reasonably well, with most candidates able to cite issues such as ethical concerns, the difficulty of establishing causation, the impact of other social factors and so on. Better answers were once again distinguished by their ability to, for example, explain **why** ethical issues might be a problem. Centres should also note the remarks about this type of question in the 'General' section of this report.

Question 15

Almost all the candidates answering this question were able to give examples of negative images or stereotypes of ethnic minorities, usually specific ones from television, and some contrasted these with more positive ones. Basic responses did not move beyond this, and lacked any real sociological focus. More successful answers discussed the issue of media images in a more analytical fashion, with some referencing pluralist audience effects approaches and/or the work of Stuart Hall. In questions such as this, many candidates are inclined to present an argument by contrasting examples of stereotypes, but care should be taken in their use – candidates should not assume that examiners are familiar with the characters in every soap on television, and need to ensure they include some sociological debate as well. Centres should also note the remarks about this type of question in the 'General' section of this report.

Question 16

As indicated in the 'General' section, most candidates who answered this question chose to re-interpret it into a question on the media in general, usually with only passing reference to the impact of digital media, and often no reference at all. Many candidates saw the question as an opportunity to discuss issues like media representation of women, making generalised references to 'skinny' models in teenage magazines and so on, and did not address either the digital media's role or the 'main influences' aspect. The relatively few successful answers made some sort of reference to the impact of the new media (usually social networking sites) and contrasted this with, eg the role of more traditional agents of socialisation, occasionally referencing basic functionalist theory. Given its prominent and increasing role in modern social life (and its importance in the specification) centres may wish to ensure that candidates have a good understanding of the way in which our lives have been affected by the new media, and how this might differ from the impact of traditional media. Centres should also note the remarks about this type of question in the 'General' section of this report.

Topic 3 – Power

Question 17

As with the first two topics candidates found this question unproblematic.

Question 18

Candidates found this question straightforward.

Question 19

The majority of candidates were successful in identifying two appropriate ways, such as petitions, demonstrations, leaflets, stunts and so on. Once again responses to this question suffered at times from excessive length.

Question 20

There was some variation in the quality of answers to this question, with some candidates seemingly only vaguely aware of what discrimination was, or reliant on citing a generalised example from the world of work. The circular 'discrimination means to discriminate against someone' type of answer was also apparent on a few occasions. More successful responses were able to cover the notion of using a social variable like gender or ethnicity as a reason for treating someone less well or unfairly, with good answers quoting specific examples and/or examining the power aspects of the process.

Question 21

It was pleasing to note that some candidates were clearly aware of the current debate around the coalition government's plans to reform benefits, and this gave the first part of their responses added topicality. Others were less precise and made fairly vague references to benefits in general without addressing the 'change' aspect. Most candidates answered the second part either via allusions to the claimed political standpoints of the Labour and Conservative parties (with few candidates able to do this with any degree of precision), or by more generalised statements about 'welfare cheats'.

Question 22

This question caused problems for some candidates because they did not really address the 'have increased' aspect, and simply identified one aspect of police power. Such responses argued, for example, that the police had powers of arrest (which they have always had) without specifying precisely how these might have changed, or made generalised reference to the power to use force. More appropriate responses tended to focus on areas such as 'stop and search', powers acquired under anti-terrorist legislation and the increased access to firearms. In the second part of the question most candidates were able to cite concerns around alleged targeting of minority groups, lack of accountability, the impact of firearms use and so on. A few candidates made very topical reference to the methods used by the police in managing student demonstrations against increases in tuition fees. Centres may wish to consider how to ensure candidates address all aspects of questions such as these – words like 'increased' will mean candidates have to be explicitly aware of how things have changed to answer fully. Centres should also note the remarks about this type of question in the 'General' section of this report.

Question 23

This question was answered reasonably well by many candidates, albeit within a fairly narrow definition of 'young people' as teenagers. Most responses took it as given that young people were not interested in politics, explaining this by the fact that under-18s did not have the vote and/or were not taught effectively about politics in schools. These arguments were then contrasted with statements around participation in organisations like the Youth Parliament and/or various pressure groups. Many candidates cited the recent demonstrations against increases in tuition fees by way of example, occasionally setting the debate within a broadly Marxist/pluralist juxtaposition. A few candidates saw the question as an opportunity to explain why they found politics boring which was usually of limited sociological value.

Question 24

This question produced some well-informed, if somewhat narrowly-focused responses which often showed a good understanding of Marxist and/or pluralist positions. Candidates tended to deal primarily with the distribution of political power, often using examples based on the social background of MPs and the present Cabinet. Most candidates took it as axiomatic that power resided with the more privileged, but then offered issues like universal suffrage, the existence of pressure groups and so on by way of contrast. Only a small minority looked at economic and other types of power, and centres may wish to consider how they might move this debate on to look at such aspects, and the way power is exercised as well as its distribution.

Topic 4 – Social Inequality

Question 25

This question was very largely managed without problems, and (possibly because it was often the last section chosen by candidates) answered without excessive verbosity, unlike earlier item-related questions.

Question 26

A substantial minority of candidates presumably misread the question and assumed it asked who had criticised the ‘new underclass’ rather than who was criticised for raising one, consequently incorrectly responding with ‘a Scottish MP’.

Question 27

Most candidates were able to identify two examples of poorer life chances, usually relating to educational and health outcomes. The same issues around excessive length were apparent here as in earlier sections, even when it was clear the candidates were pressed for time. Centres do need to emphasise that half page answers to this type of question can still only access two marks, however detailed they are.

Question 28

Virtually all candidates were able to gain at least one mark here because they were aware of what racism was. Most attempted to address the ‘institutional’ part via reference to the police service, the world of work or the education system, with better responses able to distinguish between intended and unintended consequences and/or cite specific examples like the Stephen Lawrence case. Centres may wish to remind candidates that where a concept or term contains two or more distinct parts it is likely that they will need to explain all of them explicitly to reach maximum marks.

Question 29

Almost every candidate who answered this question was able to refer to some aspect of equality legislation, albeit fairly generally in some cases, and couple this with some sort of reference to eg the glass ceiling and/or pay differentials. More successful responses moved on from such general discussion to identify, for example, specific aspects of equality legislation and/or give more detailed explanations which looked at the culture of other workers, the impact of maternity, the way firms might get round the law and so on.

Question 30

Most candidates were able to identify a reason why people found themselves in poverty, albeit doing this quite generally in some cases. Typically such candidates referred to issues such as unemployment, and then made fairly vague reference to ‘not having the money to go to job interviews’ in the ‘explain’ part of the question. Better responses cited issues such as the poverty trap, cultural aspects and so forth and usually developed their answer via, for example, reference to low aspiration, poor health, material deprivation and the like. Centres may wish to note that some candidates had clearly experienced time management problems at this point in the examination, with a few not attempting the question at all.

Question 31

This question was met with a range of responses, some very good and some quite poor, with lack of time as well as lack of understanding being a factor in the latter. Weaker responses tended to consist of brief, generalised statements about the value of education in getting a good job, in which any consideration of social mobility was implicit or non-existent. More successful answers tended to draw on, for example, material from Marxist and functionalist perspectives, and the very good ones introduced concepts like meritocracy and closed elites, often discussing them within the context of the social origins of eg MPs and the present cabinet. Centres should also note the remarks about this type of question in the 'General' section of this report.

Question 32

As with Question 31 there was a range of responses, and in some cases the same time issues. Some candidates limited themselves with making generalised statements about 'welfare cheats', but did not really cover the 'social problems' aspect to any degree. Other candidates saw the question as an opportunity to write everything they knew about social class distribution and/or poverty, and lost focus as a result. More successful responses homed in on the alleged links between the underclass and problems like teenage pregnancy, crime/anti-social behaviour and the cycle of poverty, with the best beginning to dispute the existence of the underclass as a separate group. Such candidates were able to reference material from Marxist and New Right perspectives, with one or two setting the debate within the context of the coalition government's policy on welfare reform, etc. Centres should also note the remarks about this type of question in the 'General' section of this report.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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