



General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)
June 2011

Sociology **41902**
(Specification 4192)

Unit 2: Crime and Deviance;
Mass Media;
Power;
Social Inequality

Report on the Examination

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41902

General

Introductory Remarks

This was the second series of the new specification for Unit 2, and the first occasion on which a substantial number of students were entered. As one might expect with a much larger entry the range of responses was somewhat wider than that seen when this paper was first examined in January 2011. There were some outstanding scripts which demonstrated highly sophisticated sociological understanding, and some centres where the overall standard was consistently high. Unfortunately, in a small number of centres candidates were not adequately prepared for the demands of the examination, either organisationally (see next section) or in terms of their grasp of the specification.

Rubric and Organisational Issues

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 the Mass Media, with the vast majority then doing Social Inequality, and a considerably smaller number Power.

Unfortunately, a considerable number of candidates (about one in four in many centres) failed to follow rubric instructions and answered questions from all four topics. In a few cases students started a topic they had not been taught, realised this midway and crossed out their responses to that topic. Needless to say, students in both situations were then short of adequate time to complete the paper. Typically such students followed the paper through in numerical question order and started the Power topic instead of the Social Inequality one, almost invariably with a considerable impact on the quality of responses to the latter.

Rubric infringements were not limited to less able students, and some quite capable candidates were also guilty of failing to follow the instruction to answer questions from just three topics. As there was no evidence of candidates being in breach of the rubric requirement to respond to just one of the two twelve mark questions in each topic, it would suggest that some students simply failed to read the instructions at the front of the paper or perhaps (in a few cases) had been told to answer all the questions by the centre, presumably on the basis of a 'best three out of four' strategy. It is absolutely imperative that centres ensure students are totally clear about rubric requirements for future series of this paper.

Other than in the above situation, most candidates completed the paper in the time allocated, although a significant number of these were clearly running out of time in their third topic. As this was invariably either Topic Three or Topic Four (depending on choice), the standard of response in these was therefore lower than in Topics One and Two. Those who ran into time management issues in their third topic typically wrote at excessive length earlier in the paper, usually on questions carrying relatively few marks, but occasionally on the twelve mark questions as well. Typically, for students with time management problems, the level of focus on the question was in inverse proportion to the length of the response. Centres may therefore wish to consider a formula of 'a minute a mark' as part of their preparations for the paper.

General Points

Overall most centres covered the full range of material from their chosen topics in a thorough fashion. Students from such centres demonstrated competent sociological knowledge and understanding, with the best candidates able to reference relevant concepts, theoretical positions and/or studies in their responses. However, very few centres appear to teach all four topics as advised in the specification. As Power is very much the least-taught topic, this means students have an incomplete understanding of its nature and distribution as these apply to the other three topics. Centres which choose not to teach this topic should therefore ensure students are aware of the relevance of power as an issue across the rest of the specification for this paper.

It was pleasing to note that many students could use contemporary events or evidence to support their arguments, for example in discussions of media ownership and control. Conversely, some students have a somewhat distorted view of recent history, with several responses to Question 21 confidently asserting that women did not get the vote until twenty years ago.

The one mark questions based on the items at the start of each topic offer an opportunity for students to 'bank' some marks before proceeding to the more complex questions elsewhere. Most manage to do this successfully, but a minority of candidates lose marks, some through straightforward carelessness, some through wanting to use synonyms where these are not called for and some by introducing material that is not explicitly in the items. This latter was particular issue on Question 26 (see below). Students should be advised that the best way to gain marks in these questions is to use only the material in the items. Centres should also note that one or two word answers (where appropriate) are perfectly acceptable here, and it is not necessary to write out the question.

Two mark questions were generally answered well, though in a few scripts they were done in a more variable manner, occasionally because students appeared to have misread them, but also because of a tendency simply to repeat the question in the response (see the comments on Question 11 below in particular). Many students write far too much in these questions – one or two simple sentences is sufficient.

Many candidates (including those who were otherwise well prepared) lacked a full understanding of the key concepts tested in the four mark questions, with Question 04 on labelling the only real exception to this. Centres will find it helpful to refer to the lists of key concepts for the specification that is available on the AQA website, particularly as the application of relevant concepts to a sociological debate can help students demonstrate higher order skills such as analysis and evaluation.

Another common issue on four mark questions is the tendency to respond with a tautology, such as 'Labelling is when you label someone', or 'Mass popular culture is culture that is popular with the masses'. Where students were able to offer some insight beyond this approach it was possible to award some marks, but centres should ensure students are aware of the need to avoid such circular responses.

As in the first series for this paper, many students wrote at excessive length in the first part of the five mark questions, despite the 'Describe one ...' part only being worth a maximum of two marks. Some candidates seemed to lose sight of the 'and explain ...' follow-up, either not addressing this aspect at all, or doing it in a very limited fashion. Many students compounded the issue by a failure to delineate the two sections in a distinct manner, and often left the examiner having to undertake a 'cut and paste' exercise to ensure credit was given to

potentially relevant material. As advised in the report for the first series, centres might find it useful to ensure students are clear about the mark distribution in such questions, and possibly suggest that they respond with two distinct paragraphs to ensure both aspects are covered appropriately.

The responses to the twelve mark questions were generally pleasing. Less able candidates usually managed to offer some relevant sociological material even where they may have struggled on some of the shorter questions, and most centres were clearly aware about the linkage between the items at the start of each topic and these questions. More able candidates often showed a quite sophisticated grasp of complex issues, often applying theoretical and conceptual knowledge to their argument in a structured and considered fashion.

A substantial majority of students appeared to have grasped the notion that 'Discuss how far ...' required them to offer at least one contrasting viewpoint or argument, although the degree to which this was done effectively obviously varied considerably according to their ability. In this context it should be noted that a passing reference to an alternative position in a debate does not axiomatically mean the response will move beyond the lower mark bands – there has to be an appropriate level of depth across the whole answer.

Topic One – Crime and Deviance

Question 01

This question was answered correctly by most candidates, though a minority responded 'black and Asian'. A few candidates introduced terms (such as 'black Afro-Caribbean') that were not in the extract, which is to be discouraged, and some wrote at excessive length.

Question 02

This question was answered correctly by virtually all students, once more with some examples of unnecessary verbosity.

Question 03

Most candidates were able to present two types of formal social control, usually referencing the police and the legal system, or examples of their activities. A few students who chose this latter approach lost marks because they gave examples drawn from the same aspect, eg of the imposition of legal sanctions.

Question 04

Most students were able to offer relevant material here, although many seem to see labelling and stereotyping as synonymous. Better answers were distinguished by their ability to 'unpick' the process, referring to aspects such as power, master status and rejection, or could offer relevant examples drawn from the Crime and Deviance topic as opposed to the Unit 1 topic on Education. However, credit was given in the latter case if, for example, the response cited deviant behaviour in a school.

Question 05

This question was generally answered quite well, with many candidates referring to specific pieces of legislation and their claimed impact on eg the labour market. Other candidates quoted attempts to reform police attitudes, discussing issues such as institutional racism and canteen culture, often in a well-evidenced manner. Some very good responses contrasted the variable impact of educational initiatives such as community cohesion on attitudes ingrained in a local culture.

Question 06

Answers here were of variable quality, with some students losing sight of the second part of the question. A sizeable minority of students were sidetracked into discussing the causes of violent crime, only sometimes picking up marks if, for example, they discussed the impact of the media. Better responses usually referenced either the impact of media amplification or the 'dark figure' issue, and then carried this through into the second part of the question by referencing, eg moral panics on knife crime, distortion of statistics for political purposes, etc.

Question 07

Pleasingly virtually everyone who attempted this question was able to offer some sort of discussion of the stereotyping issue, sometimes using material from Item A, and, in the case of fuller responses, referring to data from crime statistics, issues such as canteen culture and the impact of targeting, etc. Most students who went onto the 'Discuss how far ...' aspect did this via a discussion of other possible causes of crime, which on occasions lost sight of the need to tie this into ethnicity. More focused responses considered issues such as gang and rap culture, the impact of media reporting and so on.

Question 08

The quality here was more variable than in responses to Question 07, with poorer answers doing little more than making one or two basic, general points about the alleged impact of peer pressure on behaviour in schools (the term 'young people' is clearly seen as synonymous with 'teenagers' for the great majority of candidates). Better responses were distinguished largely by their ability to move beyond anecdote and to introduce conceptual debate around, for example, the impact of other factors such as inadequate socialisation, lack of role models for young men, material deprivation and the like. There were some very good answers which were able to tie these into discussion of New Right and other theoretical positions, but even these tended to conflate deviance and criminality. Centres should note that where both such terms appear in a question there is an expectation that they will be dealt with separately if candidates are to achieve very high marks.

Topic Two – Mass Media**Question 09**

Virtually all candidates gave the correct answer here, though a few seemed to have misread either the question or the item, responding with 'half an hour'.

Question 10

This question was almost invariably answered correctly.

Question 11

As with Question 03 many answers were far too long. Most students were able to identify two ways, usually referring to bias, negative stereotyping, belittling, amplification of eg violent acts at demonstrations, etc. A minority of students misinterpreted the question as requiring two *types* of media, and some simply repeated the question ('One way is by showing a negative image ...'). A few students only gained one of the two marks available because they effectively repeated themselves (eg 'negative stereotyping on the TV and negative stereotyping in newspapers').

Question 12

Responses to this question were largely quite poor, with a substantial number of students having little or no idea what mass popular culture was. Many students simply repeated one or more of the terms in the question in a circular type of response; others at least sought to find synonyms for the three words even if they were unclear about the meaning of the concept as a whole. Few candidates were able both to explain the concept and to discuss the role of the media therein explicitly, although there was some limited discussion of, eg the impact of global media on our way of life.

Question 13

Most candidates could identify one relevant issue around news presentation, although many did not explicitly link this to 'newspaper owners'. Typically such answers made general statements around, eg bias without explaining how the owner might affect a political slant on a story. Better answers usually elaborated via an example, almost invariably citing Rupert Murdoch's newspapers (although many students seem sure that 'The Sun' is Labour-supporting). Once again, many students spent too much time on the first part of the question and often lost some focus in the process. The second part of the question tended to be answered less well, with many students making vague or generalised assertions about how bias was 'unfair'. Better answers were distinguished by an understanding of democracy and/or the democratic process and the media's role in these.

Question 14

Almost all candidates were able to produce a response to the first part of this question, although once again a few simply repeated the question ('by using the internet'). Most students referred to some aspect of digital media or gave examples thereof (eg Google, social networking sites, etc), and once again many did this in excessive detail. The response to the second part of the question was more variable, with most students content to make brief reference to, eg the vast number of websites or the speed at which information could be spread. However, there were some outstanding responses which quoted contemporary events such as the so-called 'Arab spring', Wikileaks and so forth.

Question 15

At least half the students responding to this question seemed to think it was asking them to discuss the impact of the mass media on *socialising*. Consequently examiners were presented with many largely anecdotal accounts of how young people now use Facebook and other such sites, occasionally contrasted with statements about family outings to, eg theme parks. Such answers occasionally made one or two more relevant points about the impact of the media on norms and values, and were therefore able to move into the bottom of the 4-6 band. Better responses usually proceeded via a discussion of the impact of the media on some aspect of socialisation (often children and gender socialisation), contrasted with an account of the continuing importance of the family drawn from a functionalist standpoint. Some answers were developed via a discussion drawn from media effects models as to how far the media really affects us, although on occasions such responses lost sight of the question somewhat, becoming list-like in the process.

Question 16

This question was generally less popular than Question 15, and responses fell into two distinct categories – generally poor ones which did little more than repeat the answer to Question 13, and some detailed, sophisticated accounts which were able to set out conflict and pluralist positions, citing a variety of accurate contemporary evidence in support, often drawing examples from the impact of digital media on opinion formation. The very best responses explicitly applied such debates to the ‘political views’ aspect of the question, as opposed to more general discussions about, eg the content of newspapers, footballers and super-injunctions, etc.

Topic Three – Power

It should be noted that this topic was intentionally attempted by only a few students (as opposed to those who breached the rubric), and therefore the evidence base for the comments below is of necessity smaller than for the other topics. Comments are based solely on those scripts where it was clear that the topic was attempted intentionally.

Question 17

Candidates found this question unproblematic, and almost everyone responded correctly.

Question 18

Again, candidates found this question straightforward.

Question 19

Most students saw this question in terms of various types of economic benefit, although a few mentioned aspects related to social care or mental health issues. A few misread the question as being about social problems *caused* by an ageing population.

Question 20

Most students had some sort of idea as to what an elite was, usually via a brief example of a person or a group ‘at the top’. Better responses featured more sociologically-developed language and linked the concept more explicitly to the distribution of power.

Question 21

Answers to this question were variable in quality, and once again too much time was often spent on rambling discussion of the first part of the question, often demonstrating a serious lack of chronological understanding in the process. Better answers tended to focus on female politicians' profile in the media, sometimes quoting a contemporary example, or on measures adopted by political parties to increase the number of female MPs. In the second part of the question many students offered little more than a general statement about the continued dominance of our society by men, but better answers explored issues such as patriarchy, the impact of gender socialisation, glass ceilings and the like.

Question 22

This question caused problems for most candidates because they made factually incorrect statements about students today having a choice of subjects, or about students twenty years ago being caned in schools. Where they explored the former via the notion of entitlement and the latter via the notion of children's rights it was possible to credit marks, but few did this. Surprisingly, given the high profile it currently receives from Ofsted, very few mentioned student involvement in inspections, and a similarly small number cited aspects of student voice such as students' involvement in, eg developing teaching and learning approaches. Most responses to the second part of the question made vague statements about teachers not liking students having power, and only those who had been sufficiently specific in the first part of the question were able to expand this in any depth.

Question 23

Answers to this question were largely fairly basic in nature, with candidates usually making some general statements about ethnic minorities and the labour market or ethnic minorities and the law (often recycling responses from Topic One in the process). Some candidates offered a few evaluative points via discussion of the universal franchise and/or the existence of politicians from ethnic minorities (usually citing Barack Obama rather than an example from 'Britain today' as specified in the question). Very few dealt with the issue of power in anything other than an implicit fashion.

Question 24

Weaker answers to this question tended to be little more than some basic statements about class and claimed political party affiliation, with such students seemingly unaware that we do not have a two-party parliament. Better responses recognised the impact of other variables such as gender and ethnicity on party affiliation, and were also able to discuss the impact of issues such as instrumental voting, the image of the leader, the impact of the media and so on. Such responses were able to use a range of contemporary evidence, often quoting the televised debates between party leaders at the 2010 election and the editorial policy of mass circulation papers, but still without any real recognition of the increased diversity of political party choice in the UK as a whole.

Topic Four – Social Inequality

Question 25

Many students answered this question incorrectly, quoting either the decline in manufacturing jobs or the change in skill levels. Some chose to use synonyms for 'blurred', which is not necessary, and a few copied out the entire item word for word, which wasted time that in some cases was already in short supply.

Question 26

A sizeable number of students answered this question incorrectly, usually because they cited social groups (such as the underclass) that were simply not mentioned in the item. Some students are also quite careless in assuming that terms such as 'children' and 'the young' are interchangeable, which they are not.

Question 27

This question proved unproblematic for the vast majority of students who were able to identify reasons such as the level of skill required, the value to society, the qualifications needed and so forth. A small minority misinterpreted the question as asking about the consequences of higher status, but overall this question was done well.

Question 28

Once again there was a spate of circular responses ('social exclusion is when you are excluded from society'), occasionally qualified by an example, usually drawing on the impact of poverty. Better responses unpicked the notion of exclusion and were able to describe the impact on those with disabilities, ethnic minorities, the underclass and so on. A few students clearly have little or no idea what social exclusion is, and talked about having no friends.

Question 29

The majority of students reinterpreted this question as asking for the *causes* of poorer life chances for minority ethnic groups, and therefore effectively answered the question in reverse order. It was usually possible to credit such responses, since almost invariably they would quote an example such as poorer educational achievements, more limited access to high-status occupations and so on during a discussion of, for example, the cycle of poverty or the impact of material deprivation. Such responses were often quite rambling and over-long, a major issue for those already struggling with time management problems in this topic.

Question 30

Few candidates answered this question correctly, and a sizeable number scored no marks at all because they misread the question as asking for the definitions of relative and absolute poverty. Most students clearly knew these, and often spent a lot of time expounding them to no avail as they totally ignored the 'use' aspect in the question. Those who did score often did so almost inadvertently via a passing comment about politicians wanting to 'look good'. The few good answers were able to cite reasons such as the need to take account of cultural and similar factors, the subjective nature of the experience of poverty and so on in the first part, and to produce a more systematic and elaborated account of the simplistic assertion about politicians noted above.

Question 31

This question was met with a range of responses, a few very good and some quite poor, with lack of time as well as lack of understanding being a factor in the latter. The question was very much the minority choice for candidates, and even the better ones did not really get to grips with the 'traditional' aspect. Poorer responses consisted largely of vague assertions about class and/or occupational status, and those which went beyond this usually made general statements about class inequality, occasionally linking this to a generalised juxtaposition of Marxist and functionalist views on the matter, in which there was usually some discussion of, eg the existence or otherwise of a meritocracy and so forth. Those candidates who did respond to the 'traditional' part usually talked about the decline in heavy industries, such as coal mining, shipbuilding and so on, with a few outstanding candidates also able to link the economic issue into the changed cultural values of the 'new' working class via issues such as embourgeoisement and increased affluence.

Question 32

This was much the more popular question in this topic. As with Question 31 there was a range of responses, and in some cases the same time issues. Some students contented themselves with making generalised assertions about people who 'can't be bothered working' which could at a pinch be described as indicative of a basic New Right perspective, but did not move beyond this and often degenerated into an unsociological rant. Better responses attempted to address the 'attitudes and values' aspect by looking at issues such as immediate gratification, the culture of poverty, low aspirations and the like, and were able to offer a range of alternative explanations by way of contrast, usually citing issues such as the poverty trap, the cycle of poverty, situational constraints and so on. There were some very good answers which were able to locate their response within a wider theoretical debate which drew on Marxist, functionalist and New Right positions. Perhaps as a sign of the cultural values of most candidates, even the poorer answers suggested that anyone could rise up from poverty and be a star like Cheryl Cole if they wanted it enough.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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