AQA

General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)
January 2012

Sociology **41901**

(Specification 4192)

Unit 1: Studying Society;
Education;
Families

Report on the Examination

41901

General

This was the fourth examination series for this unit of the new specification and the great majority of students found the question paper very accessible. As in previous series, a wide range of responses were seen, although in comparison with the June examination series, more high quality scripts were viewed, which was a very pleasing development. Indeed, some really excellent scripts were seen, and students, along with their teachers, are to be congratulated for the meticulous way they prepared for this examination.

Encouragingly, there were fewer numbers of incomplete scripts, although for some students, time management remains an issue. For example, a significant minority spent too much of their time on the lower-value questions in the Education and Families sections of the paper. Also of note was the welcome drop in students who made rubric errors. Those few that did make such errors would no doubt benefit from directing their time and efforts into reviewing and improving upon their existing answers to the optional 'mini-essay' questions.

The following are some areas for improvement that teachers may wish to consider when giving advice to their students regarding Unit 1:

- Ensure that the information presented to the examiner is of relevance and clearly addresses the particular question. Some students misinterpreted key words of the set questions, for example, simply *identifying* when asked to *describe.*
- Students often failed to maximise their marks by not fully answering the question set. For example, no reference to the 'how far' aspect of the twelve mark questions 16/17, 24/25. Therefore, students should ensure their answers include both sides of the argument, and in sufficient detail to display good sociological knowledge and understanding.
- Teachers are encouraged to highlight to students the importance of planning their two 'mini-essay' answers. Students should present their answers to the 12-mark extended writing questions clearly and in a logical manner, ensuring for instance, that each considers paragraphing, avoids including material which does not address the issue under consideration and instead focuses on the specific question being asked of them. Students should therefore endeavour to avoid presenting irrelevant information and instead only include sociological material which adds substance to the particular issue they are debating.
- Some students appeared to lack knowledge and understanding of certain parts of the Studying Society content of the specification. Questions 07-09 were often poorly answered, with students displaying a general lack of knowledge of research issues, as well as not focusing on the research topic they had been asked to consider. Teachers are encouraged to spend time and effort with their students in preparation for this part of the examination paper.
- Some students appear unfamiliar with key sociological concepts. Attention should be drawn to the bullet points of the Unit 1 subject content section of the specification alongside the sociological terms listed in the glossary, which is located in the Teacher Resource Bank part of the AQA GCSE Sociology webpage.

Topic 1 – Studying Society

Question 01

The vast majority of students correctly identified the downward trend in the number of marriages between 1975 and 2007, although some provided a figure.

Question 02

Most students were able to identify interviews as the research method used by the sociologists. However, a notable minority incorrectly identified a *sampling* method.

Question 03

Many good answers were witnessed, offering both an appropriate advantage and disadvantage of using interviews. Most gave the disadvantage of interviews as being 'time consuming', whilst the advantage of the method is that 'questions can be explained and clarified'. Some unnecessarily long answers were seen, although far fewer than in the previous examination series.

Question 04

Few students answered sufficiently to gain full marks for this question. Many simply stated differences within families, rather than outlining the variety of family types that exist in society. More sophisticated responses gave a clear indication of the range of family types that exist and explained why there are such differences in multicultural Britain.

Question 05

The majority of students answered this question well, clearly highlighting the different approaches in relation to studying families. However, some struggled to describe both, especially (and perhaps somewhat surprisingly) when trying to describe the approach a sociologist would take.

Question 06

Quite a few students seemed to be unaware of the importance of having clear research aims when carrying out a sociological investigation. It is imperative that students have the opportunity to conduct some small-scale research study, so that they become familiar with how sociologists construct their investigations into certain aspects of society. This is clearly cited in the Studying Society subject content section of the specification. Not all students struggled with this question though, with some able to explain what a research aim was and why it is important to have them, highlighting their need in order to keep the study focused.

Question 07

A notable minority of students just stated 'the internet', or 'official statistics', without further elaboration; few related the usefulness of the source to the topic – investigating attitudes towards marriage. Stronger responses explained how previous sociological research of marriage would be useful for comparative purposes

Question 08

Weaker responses to this question gave simplistic, vague answers, for example by simply stating that 'people might get offended'. However, some students were able to provide good responses which referenced issues of 'confidentiality' and the need for 'informed consent' – 'anonymity' and the need to be extra careful with 'sensitive' issues linked to attitudes towards marriage.

Question 09

Some very full answers were witnessed, which identified an appropriate method of interviewing (unstructured, informal) and offered several advantages this had over postal questionnaires. However, many students did not link this to the particular investigation they were asked to consider. Others did not identify a specific method of interview, comparing 'interviews' in general with postal questionnaires. Some students described an interview method, but did not consider postal questionnaires. Weaker responses selected an inappropriate method, eg observation, while a few chose to discuss 'sampling'.

Topic 2 – Education

Question 10

Most students gave the correct percentage, although a notable minority misread the graph.

Question 11

This question posed few problems for students, with virtually all providing the correct answer.

Question 12

Overall, this question was answered well, with many students able to cite both an appropriate advantage and disadvantage. A few though gave the advantages/disadvantages of children with special needs being educated in special schools.

Question 13

Some students responded very well, clearly knowing what a pupil subculture was, with reference made to particular pupil subcultures and why they form. Others gave poorly expressed answers, often involving just making simple statements about peer groups.

Question 14

Most students offered appropriate descriptions, with some describing labelling in great detail. Many used positive and negative examples to address both parts of this question, some very successfully. However, often simple or partially developed explanations in terms of the consequent educational achievement restricted the marks. A few students did not address the second part of the question.

Question 15

Many students could describe the merits of a tutor or mentor, but struggled to explain in sufficient detail how their help could improve educational achievement.

Question 16

The majority of students opted for this question, with some excellent responses seen. Many took the line of agreeing with the proposition, contrasting the poor position of the working class with the privileged position of the middle class. Responses included the impact of material deprivation as well as parental values. Some students referred in detail to both in and out of school factors, whilst others referred factors such as ethnic background and gender.

Question 17

A minority of students attempted this question, and on the whole the question was disappointingly answered. Many responses simply discussed 'gendered subject choice'. Some recognised that 'traditional' subject divisions are not as they were in the past. Stronger answers developed this through reference to the impact of the National Curriculum and/or the initiatives to encourage girls into science. A small number of students made fine use of comparative attainment and the change of emphasis to underperforming boys. A few made reference to the post-16 position, or gender differentials in the teaching profession, and a couple referred to sexism in school. Nevertheless, in general many students struggled to provide enough material to address the issue of 'how far'. A number of students ignored the need to discuss 'education' and discussed gender divisions in society in general.

Topic 3 – Families

Question 18

The vast majority stated the correct percentage.

Question 19

Almost all students were able to provide an appropriate definition based on the item presented to them.

Question 20

Most students were able to identify at least one possible consequence. Perhaps unsurprisingly, most students who identified two consequences focused on the negatives of stepfamilies rather than the positives.

Question 21

A sizeable number of students described 'relationships' within the family without referring to 'power' and/or control. On the other hand, there were some very clear and detailed explanations of 'power relationships' making use of the 'patriarchal' example, the husband, the dictate to the wife and children. Others described a hierarchy of power relationships within the family. Some made use of the stimulus material to good effect.

Question 22

Most students were able to describe a change, but the explanations tended to be very simple. Many referred to wider changes in society without linking the impact on the family. Weaker answers gave very distorted views of the history of women and the vote, or how women now go to work, or even stating they are now able to get an education. However, stronger responses mentioned the move toward more joint conjugal roles/symmetrical families and gave reasons for this, citing changing social attitudes ('new man') and women putting career before children and the subsequent impact this had had on the family. A few indicated that some women were now the main or even sole breadwinner due to changes in the labour market and the employment opportunities for some women, or pointed to the fact that there has been a significant rise in female educational achievement, meaning that they are qualified for careers with higher pay rates than men.

Question 23

Most students were able to offer a partial description, stating that the general pattern had been an increase in the number over the last 50 years. Some gave a more developed description indicating that the scale of the increase had been dramatic. A few commented on recent trends – gradually declining after the large increases. Often, a simple description was given, such as women had 'rights'. Other explanations included that people were 'fed up with marriage', 'not religious anymore' and divorce is easier or cheaper. Some developed their explanations further, referencing actual legislation (1969 and subsequent changes), more detailed implications of changing social attitudes, a consequence of high expectations of marriage not being realised, etc.

Question 24

Most students opted for this 'mini-essay' question. Many were able to provide evidence to support the view that there was no longer a 'typical' British family – defined as a nuclear family, by reference to the diversity of types to be found, and in many instances offering some discussion or reasoning for the diversity.

Some students used a more sophisticated definition, of the 'traditional' nuclear family, thus opening up a discussion of the decline in marriage and/or changing conjugal roles.

Generally the issue of 'how far' was addressed by reference to the media and the 'stereotype' still being important, some referred to the sizable number of nuclear families still around, and its popularity as an 'ideal'.

Question 25

This was the less-popular choice of the two 12-mark questions for this topic, and there were unfortunately few very good responses viewed. Most answers revolved around fewer children automatically leading to more care and attention being given. Some students went further and discussed changing attitudes towards children, and the consequence of delayed parenting. A few students picked up on the 'lone parent' family being more child centred, whilst some others used the 'pester power' stimulus to good effect. A few discussed how some dual income families parents might be more concerned with earning money. Rarely did students who attempted this question refer to legislation or changing attitudes towards parenting and the welfare of children.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website: http://www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion