



**General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)  
June 2012**

**Sociology** **41901**

**(Specification 4192)**

**Unit 1: Studying Society;  
Education;  
Families**

***Report on the Examination***

Further copies of this Report on the Examination are available from: [aqa.org.uk](http://aqa.org.uk)

Copyright © 2012 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

**Copyright**

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334).

Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

# 41901

## General

The overwhelming majority of students found the question paper accessible. As is to be expected for a non-tiered paper, a very wide range of responses were seen. Pleasingly, in comparison with the previous summer examination series, more high quality scripts were viewed, with many students offering well thought out and intelligent responses to the set questions. Examiners were treated to many excellent answers for each of the topic areas which constitute Unit 1, and students, along with their teachers, are to be congratulated for the detailed preparation they clearly had put in for this examination.

Encouragingly, there were few incomplete scripts, although for certain students, time management remains an issue. For example, a significant minority spent too much of their time on the lower-mark questions in the Education and Families sections of the paper. Also of note was the small amount of 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:

- 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 endeavour to avoid presenting irrelevant information and instead only include sociological material which adds substance to the particular issue they are debating. Of concern was the number of students who appeared to re-write pre-learned essays on certain topics. These were often not linked to the questions and, as a result, few marks were obtained. Also some students presented inaccurate and irrelevant accounts of what a Marxist or a functionalist might say about a particular issue.
- When attempting the questions worth five marks, it is worth students considering the allocation of marks for these, by ensuring that explanations are clear and fully developed. It may be an idea to possibly respond to these questions by producing two distinct, albeit concise paragraphs in order to ensure both aspects of the questions are covered appropriately.
- A notable minority of students appeared to lack knowledge and understanding of certain parts of the Studying Society content of the specification. Of particular concern is a lack of awareness of how sociologists go about studying aspects of society and the people within it in comparison with journalists, biologists or psychologists.
- Answers to questions 07-09 were often underdeveloped, 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. In order to access the top mark band, students are required to address the part of the question which states 'for *your* investigation', which in the case on this examination was an investigation into the extent of racism in schools.

- As witnessed in the previous series, 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

Almost all students were able to state the ethnic group that had the highest rate of school exclusions in the academic year of 2008/9.

### Question 02

The vast majority of students were able to identify questionnaires as the research method used by the sociologist. However, a few incorrectly identified a *sampling* method.

### Question 03

Many students answered correctly, offering both an appropriate advantage and disadvantage of using questionnaires. A sizable minority though contradicted themselves in their answers by stating, for example, that the advantage of using this method is it is 'quick' and then going on to give the disadvantage as being 'time-consuming'.

### Question 04

Most students collected a mark for basic statements such as 'journalists are biased/need to sell stories', but many responses seen lacked a comparative element, with answers failing to address how the two approaches may *differ*. Frequently answers were seen which only described the approach of either a journalist or sociologist. Few students focused their response as to how they would approach the issue of racism in British schools.

### Question 05

Generally students were able to answer this question well. Whilst some students only provided basic statements about race, the majority were able to move beyond this by acknowledging that ethnicity meant more than simply someone's race, and referred to culture, language and beliefs. Some students, however, confused ethnicity for ethical issues, thus failing to score any marks. Only a few students mentioned specific shared customs of particular ethnic groups, although many gained credit for reference to a certain example of one, often referring to one listed in the source material.

### Question 06

Many students focused on either what sociologists could do in terms of research OR what schools could do with the information to address racism. Often students managed to gain a couple of marks for statements such as 'sociologists would examine racism in schools and then authorities could use this information to stop bullying', without giving any specifics. More successful responses were able to suggest policies that may be adopted resulting from the findings of specific research in this area. A significant amount of students appeared to be unclear as to what is meant by a policy. It may be worthwhile for teachers to address this with their students as it forms part of the specification content for the Studying society topic; to quote from section 3.1 of the subject content 'Candidates should be aware of the ways in which ...the

results of sociological research may be useful in making and implementing policies in the fields of education, welfare and criminal justice.'

### **Question 07**

The vast majority of students were able to gain at least one mark for providing an appropriate definition of secondary data. Many students offered some brief comment on how statistics on racist incidents in schools may or may not be useful for their investigation into the extent of racism in schools, by stating that they could be used to see whether racist incidents have gone up or down. However, some students neglected the second part of the question once they had explained what sociologists mean by secondary data. More successful responses explained that secondary data was collected by someone else, provided a suitable example, and then demonstrated how the figures on racist incidents in schools could supplement their own primary research.

### **Question 08**

Responses to this question, based on ethical issues which should be considered when conducting a sociological investigation, were an improvement on the January series, with noticeably fewer students answering poorly, although a significant minority still confuse ethics and ethnicity. Weaker responses commonly included statements along the lines of 'anonymity, because participants might not want people to know their views', thus gaining a couple of marks. Some students extended this to how it could affect their research/why they should consider it when investigating the extent of racism in schools. Whilst it is pleasing to see certain students producing excellent responses which relate how the issue would directly affect research, a large number were vague and only implied ethical issues such as harm to participants and consent rather than explicitly referring to them.

### **Question 09**

On the whole this question was well-answered, with many students gaining at least four marks for comparing two observational techniques. There were many responses which showed good knowledge and understanding of covert/overt and participant/non-participant research methods and were able to compare the methods. However, many students did not relate the method chosen specifically to the issue being researched, namely the extent of racism in schools, so failed to achieve full marks for this question. There were a significant number of students who wrote about research methods that were not 'observation' such as questionnaires and interviews. Some candidates did not refer to observational methods using their technical names (eg covert) and used terms such as 'hands on' and 'viewing from afar', with others who described the contrasting approaches with reasonable success in terms of 'observing secretly' versus 'telling them who you are'.

## **Topic 2 – Education**

### **Question 10**

Nearly all students were able to answer this question correctly. A few re-worded the information inappropriately, eg 'to be socially accepted' with no reference to peers.

### **Question 11**

The majority of students had no trouble spotting the trend had increased for both boys and girls, but some referred only to gender differences, eg 'the trend was that the girls were always on

top'. Those that answered this question incorrectly often tried to identify the difference between girls and boys in the amount of increase (e.g. 30 and 20 per cent) or said that only girls or boys had increased rather than both.

### **Question 12**

Overall, this question was answered well, with many students able to cite both an appropriate advantage and disadvantage of setting for pupils. A small minority of students did not know what setting was, whilst a handful misunderstood 'setting' as meaning 'environment' and wrote about eg the effects of parental encouragement versus material deprivation.

### **Question 13**

A large number of students scored well, referring to the labelling process by people in higher authority positions. Indeed, most students knew what a self-fulfilling prophecy was, and even if they could not explain it in terms of labelling by teachers, still scored a few marks for something along the lines of 'being told they're not good enough, and believing it, so they give up, eventually getting worse'. Weaker students confused it with self-motivation or with reference to someone setting themselves goals and reaching them.

### **Question 14**

Most students earned at least one mark out of five for identifying league tables or Ofsted as a way of measuring the standards of a school. Some went on to describe the performance measurement they had stated, although often students' descriptions were underdeveloped. A lot of students scored at least two further marks by outlining how it makes it easier to compare schools/lets parents make an informed decision/doesn't account for class background of students/improvements by students/happiness of students etc.

### **Question 15**

Some very successful answers were provided, with many students showing a good understanding of the functions of schools. However, weaker responses made basic statements such as 'education educates people, which helps them get jobs' or 'secondary socialisation, which helps people survive in the real world' or even 'social control keeping children off the streets'. Disappointingly, more often than not students struggled with the explanation, rarely providing enough depth to warrant the full three marks.

### **Question 16**

This question was overwhelmingly the preferred choice, with the majority of students attempting it reasonably well. They identified peer pressure in simple terms at least, explaining how it could stop pupils attending school and therefore affect educational achievement. Some students went further and considered how peer pressure could be both positive and negative as an influence on educational achievement. Better responses discussed the 'how far' aspect of the question through referring to other factors such as parental values, material deprivation, labelling, gender and ethnic background of the pupil. Overall, however, these factors were not discussed in great detail by many students, which curtailed their potential for reaching the top mark band.

### **Question 17**

A minority of students attempted this question, and unfortunately on the whole it was poorly answered. Many students struggled to identify any specific educational reforms, and of those

---

that did, many unfortunately referred to reforms from over 25 years ago. Those that did focus on applicable reforms referred to the 1988 Education Reform Act and the introduction of school league tables. Little mention was made of reforms made under New Labour in an attempt to drive up educational standards. Frequently students discussed other things that had possibly led to educational improvements, such as changing job opportunities and qualification requirements. Some students focused on the significant improvement in the performance of girls and gave reasons why this improvement in educational achievement has occurred.

### **Topic 3 – Families**

#### ***Question 18***

Although the majority answered correctly, a surprising amount of students got this question wrong, writing six months instead of two weeks.

#### ***Question 19***

Almost all students were able to obtain the correct answer from the information presented to them, although some offered a different year, stated the number of divorces, or simply put 'no'.

#### ***Question 20***

Most students were able to identify at least one possible consequence. A few overlooked the requirement to relate the point to family members, or wrote about the causes rather than the consequences. Those who did stay focused on consequences of divorce usually focused on issues for any children such as the limited exposure to one parent and financial problems for parents. Only rarely did students offer two consequences that were too vague or similar to credit, eg 'it could affect the children, and children could get upset'.

#### ***Question 21***

Most students responded very well to this question. Many earned marks for 'norms and values taught in the household', and could offer an appropriate example. Some could explain that this was to benefit functioning in society, while a few missed out on marks by failing to point out that this occurred in the early years of a child's upbringing. Those students that offered poor responses referred to this as general 'socialising', such as going out with friends. A sizeable number of students misread the question as primary methods and therefore failed to achieve any marks for this question.

#### ***Question 22***

A range of appropriate responses were seen, mainly based around nuclear/cereal packet/lone parent/reconstituted family types, but with occasional appearances from extended/empty nest/beanpole. Many students unfortunately did not provide a developed description before moving on to the comparison. Although the majority of students could compare two types of family found in Britain and were able to score at least four marks out of five, few were able to show a clear difference between the two types of families they had described. These students also did not refer to how the families were explicitly different, such as a lone parent family having less financial stability when compared to a nuclear family.

**Question 23**

Students offered a range of interesting responses to this question. Pleasingly, very few talked about divorce which was excluded in the question wording (*apart from* divorce), with many focusing on a child moving from a nuclear family to a living in a student household due to going to an university far from the home of their parents. A number of responses chose to focus on the changing life course of the family rather than one specific change. Although a number of students could say how an individual's family or household situation might change, it was rare that a detailed explanation of explicitly why was given.

**Question 24**

This was the most popular choice of the two 12-mark questions for students, and some really good and well-developed answers were seen. Stronger answers presented both sides of the argument. These included some very good references to feminist studies applied, in order to discuss the extent to which symmetry really exists in families as certain functionalists would claim, and the patriarchal nature of many families still in existence in contemporary Britain. Most students gave details of 'traditional' conjugal relationships 50 years ago. This was then compared with the scene today, with references often made to househusbands and the 'New Man'. Weaker responses explained how the men and women's roles had changed in the workplace, or more generally in society, rather than within the family. A sizable amount of students gave an answer which would have been more suited to how men and women have become more equal in wider society, rather than in the context of the family.

**Question 25**

Fewer students opted for this question. Responses produced were often of reasonable quality, covering the changes in the law, by citing for instance the 1969 Divorce Reform Act, but comparing how far with other social changes, eg secularisation, changing roles of women, changing social attitudes towards divorce. Many students who attempted this question just stuck to general terms about how women have more rights now, so have money so don't need men. Some responses veered away from divorce rates and onto women's rights in general. Weaker answers lacked knowledge of specific legal changes and showed no consideration of the 'how far' aspect of the question.

**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](http://www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion)