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SOCIOLOGY

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General comments

This was the first examination with the new syllabus and it is pleasing to report that the candidates produced a high standard of response overall. The compulsory question on research methods (**Question 1**) was answered particularly well, with the responses demonstrating that most of the candidates were well prepared both in terms of the knowledge and the skills required to achieve high marks in this part of the examination.

There was greater variation in the standard of the answers to the other questions. Some candidates appeared to spend too long responding to the questions that carried least marks i.e. parts **(a)** and **(b)**, with the consequence that answers to the parts **(c)** and **(d)** were often rather short and poorly composed. At the other extreme, there were some outstanding scripts that merited very high marks for each question attempted. Candidates producing work of such quality would be well placed to undertake work at AS and A Level in Sociology.

The most frequent rubric error, once again, was the case of candidates attempting more than the specified number of questions. Centres are asked to remind candidates that in the examination their efforts should be focused on answering only the specified number of questions. Rarely is any advantage gained for the candidate by answering more questions than necessary, and usually it detracts from their chances of achieving a mark that fairly reflects their ability.

Congratulations to Centres and candidates for coping so well with the transition to a new syllabus. Examiners would like to take this opportunity to remind Centres that the CIE Sociology web discussion group is an available forum for commenting on or raising questions about this year's examination or any other matter related to the syllabus.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a) Most candidates had no difficulty defining the three terms accurately for full marks. There was some confusion about the difference between pre-coded and open-ended questions for **(i)** and for **(iii)** definitions of participant observation sometimes failed to explain what the 'participant' aspect of this type of research method involves.

(b) A few candidates defined the terms the wrong way around, but most gave clear and full accounts of each term.

(c) Very well answered, with the main discriminator being how clearly each acceptable reason was expressed.

(d) Weaker answers were restricted to a few commonsense observations about the advantages and/or disadvantages of interviews. Better answers were sociologically well informed and described each point with clarity and appropriate detail.

(e) Very much the same comments made above about the answers to **(d)** apply here.

Question 2

(a)   Well answered, with the only common misunderstanding being the case of candidates who confused socialisation with the notion of 'socialising'.

(b)   Most candidates clearly understood what the distinction refers to, but some struggled to describe the difference with sufficient clarity and/or accuracy to gain full marks.

(c)   Better answers were sociologically informed, often containing references to relevant studies and/or sociological concepts.

(d)   Candidates who saw this question as an opportunity to enter the nature/nurture debate generally achieved high marks.

Question 3

(a)   A good understanding of this term overall, though some confused social control with socialisation.

(b)   Weaker answers were often confined simply to giving examples of how each type of social control is enforced. Better answers offered an accurate definition of each term.

(c)   Good answers covered a range of sources of informal social control and described each in reasonable detail.

(d)   Good answers had an appropriate theoretical structure, such as the Marxist versus functionalist views of social order. Weaker answers were confined to a few commonsense points about who may benefit from the rules of society.

Question 4

(a)   Well answered.

(b)   Most candidates were able to identify two ways in which a person may move from one social class to another, with education and marriage being the points covered most often.

(c)   Some candidates struggled to identify relevant factors, but others provided full accounts of the obstacles faced by disadvantaged groups in achieving upward social mobility.

(d)   Some candidates made good references to the distinction between ascribed and achieved social status. Others answered in the context of the different economic structures of modern and traditional societies.

Question 5

(a)   Some candidates confused life chances with disease and mortality rates.

(b)   Answers to this question were very good in almost every case.

(c)   Weaker answers covered only one or two relevant factors, such as ethnicity and gender. Better answers looked at a range of factors.

(d)   Good answers considered factors that affect the structuring of the labour market, including trade union activity, status differentials, market capacity, and employment discrimination.

Question 6

(a)   Many candidates struggled to define the term effectively, though most clearly had some understanding of what it meant.

(b)   A lot of clear and accurate answers, but also some that demonstrated only a weak understanding of the role of elections in a democracy.

(c)   Good answers noted how dictators might use elections to create the appearance of popular consent and legitimacy, and to appease the international community without truly embracing democracy.

(d)   Weaker answers were based on a few commonsense insights. Better answers identified powerful groups and made a sociologically well-informed attempt to explain the basis of their power.

Question 7

(a)   The answers to this question were mostly poor. Setting the agenda refers to the ability of powerful interests within the media to define what issues are important and the terms on which they are debated.

(b)   Most candidates were able to identify two relevant factors, but many struggled to describe the factors adequately and so failed to gain full marks.

(c)   The answers to this question often lacked detail and depth of understanding.

(d)   Good answers covered a range of relevant factors, such as government influence, social attitudes, technical issues linked to news production, editorial values, etc.

Paper 0495/02

Paper 2

General comments

The questions from **Section A** and **B** proved most popular, though there were also many answers to the **Section C** and **D** questions. The standard of response was evenly spread between the different levels of achievement. While some scripts were almost flawless in the depth and range of appropriate material used to address the questions, others demonstrated only a partial understanding of the relevant concepts and issues.

At the bottom of the scale, some candidates attempted to answer the questions by using commonsense observations only, with no evidence that they had studied sociology as an academic subject. Such answers merited very few marks and their failure underscores the point that to be successful in the examination candidates must have studied appropriate sources of sociological knowledge, such as the recommended textbooks for the syllabus.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Family

Question 1

(a)   Most candidates gained two marks by identifying functions as the socially prescribed contribution or roles of an institution.

(b)   Two relevant functions identified without any appropriate description gained two marks. Two further marks were awarded for a brief description of each function.

(c)   Weaker answers made a few basic observations, often relying on assertion rather than sociological evidence and reasoning.

(d)   Weaker answers relied on a few isolated points of general relevance to the question. Better answers were organised around appropriate sociological debates about the importance of the family today.

Question 2

(a) Many candidates gained one mark only, as they correctly noted that divorce is a type of marital breakdown but failed to note that it involves the legal dissolution of the relationship.

(b) Some candidates inappropriately discussed the reasons for marital breakdown rather than describing two forms that such breakdown might take.

(c) Good answers covered a range of factors, including relevant changes in the law, attitudes, and social relationships.

(d) Weaker answers tended to be confined to a few consequences only. Better answers demonstrated greater range and/or depth of understanding.

Section B

Education

Question 3

(a) Well answered overall, although a few candidates failed to recognise that the hidden curriculum relates to education specifically.

(b) Good answers used examples from relevant sociological studies of gender and education.

(c) Weaker answers were confined to a few simple observations about how peer group pressure might influence pupils. Better answers covered a wider range of points, often well illustrated with appropriate examples.

(d) Good answers demonstrated a sound understanding of the role of labelling and the self-fulfilling prophecy in influencing the performance of pupils.

Question 4

(a) Most candidates recognised that the term refers to the genetically determined level of intelligence a person has.

(b) Well answered, with good references to factors such as family background, type of schooling, and the pupil/teacher relationship.

(c) Many of the answers were very generalised. Better answers demonstrated a sound understanding of the relevant sociological critique of IQ tests.

(d) This was well answered by the majority of candidates, with the main discriminators being the range of factors covered and use of relevant examples from studies and other relevant sociological sources.

Section C

Crime, Deviance and Social Control

Question 5

(a) The term was adequately defined by most of the candidates.

(b) Most of the candidates were able to describe two relevant groups.

(c) Weaker answers referred to powerful groups in general, without specifying the actual composition of those groups. Better answers identified specific groups with the power to label others, such as the media, the law enforcement agencies, the government, and certain campaign groups.

(d) Many of the answers failed to cover more than one or two consequences. Better answers made a wider range of relevant points and also provided appropriate examples.

Question 6

(a) Well answered.

(b) Ignorance that a crime has been committed and fear of repercussions were the main reasons described for full marks.

(c) Some candidates clearly failed to understand what is meant by 'white-collar crimes'. Good answers provided an accurate and developed explanation.

(d) Good answers detailed several ways in which the activities of the police may be reflected in the composition of the official crime statistics.

Section D

Mass Media

(a) The term was defined adequately by most candidates.

(b) Most candidates were able to identify two appropriate reasons.

(c) Good answers highlighted the importance of television as an influence on political debate and decision making in democratic societies.

(d) Weak answers demonstrated little or no awareness of the relevant sociological research and theories. Better answers focused on appropriate explanations, such as the hypodermic syringe model, the audience selection model, and the cultural affects approach.

Question 8

(a) Well defined in most cases.

(b) The examples offered were often rather weak and/or poorly articulated, so that it was rare for candidates to gain full marks for this question.

(c) Good answers identified several relevant factors and gave examples to illustrate how each may influence the selection and presentation of news.

(d) Weaker answers were confined to a few brief suggestions that revealed little understanding of the underlying issues. Better answers offered a reasoned account of several well-informed recommendations.