GCE

Sociology

Advanced GCE A2 **H581**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS **H181**

OCR Report to Centres June 2014

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Advanced GCE Sociology (H581)

Advanced Subsidiary GCE Sociology (H181)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

G671 Exploring Socialisation, Culture and Identity

General Comments:

This examination series, once again, saw a wide range of candidate performance, and overall, there was an improvement in performance across all four questions. It is pleasing to note that increasing numbers of candidates are responding accurately to the question stem instructions. For example, question 2 will always ask for "two ways/ types/ features" and many candidates plan their answer into two distinct paragraphs, citing "the first way...." followed by "a second way..." There were very few rubric errors and the vast majority of candidates attempted to answer all four questions, which indicate that the questions were clear and accessible to all. The majority of candidates allocated their time appropriately, recognising, for example, that since question 4 has half the marks for the exam paper, they should be spending half the time(45 minutes) answering this question. There remains a significant number of candidates who don't include precise sociological evidence in their answers. There is a more detailed commentary on these questions in the section below.

It may be useful to, once again, clarify the role and purpose of the pre-release material. The pre-release material is specifically related to question (4) on the examination paper, as this question contains the instruction "using the pre-release material…". The focus of question (4) is always on sociological methods and the research process. The aim of this question is to enable students to discuss methodological issues in the context of a piece of contemporary research, focused on culture and/or identity and/or socialisation (the pre-release material). The other three questions on the examination paper aim to test candidates on the specification content from this unit, which is outlined clearly and explicitly under seven key issues in the specification content. That is not to say, however, that the pre-release material can *only* be used for question (4). As the instructions on the front of the examination paper state*: "You may interpret and apply the pre-release material as well as your own sociological knowledge for any question, wherever it is relevant and appropriate".* This is because the pre-release material is based around research into culture, socialisation and identity, which means that any other questions (1-3) asking students to write about these areas may wish to draw upon the pre-release as a piece of sociological evidence. It may happen, as it did this session, that the pre-release material could be referred to in questions 1 and question 3: For question 1, candidates could make references to the playground segregation as an example of cultural diversity; and question 3, in support of or evaluating the notion of cultural hybridity. Of course, candidates who only rely on the pre-release material as their only source of evidence, are not going to score highly as they will fail to display a 'wide range' of knowledge & understanding, which is required for the top band. In other series, there may not be so many links to the pre-release material in questions 1, 2 or 3 and students will need to be able to draw on a range of sociological evidence.

Teachers' tip:
Keep copies of previous pre-release studies, not just to use as mock examination practice, but also as a bank of resources to add to the range of evidence students could draw upon. This can also be cross referenced with methods, so that methods are taught "in context" throughout the course, rather than as a discrete unit.

With every question, in order to achieve marks in the highest mark band, candidates need to include a range of sociological evidence and to discuss these in some depth. Some candidates were able to use the same studies for question 1,2 and 3, for example, Charlotte Butler's study, and the ones who did this well made sure that their relevance to each question was well explained. A large number of responses, particularly for questions (2) and (3), failed to include the required range and depth of sociological evidence. "Evidence" can include studies, theories,

concepts and contemporary examples, although it should be noted that responses which rely heavily on contemporary examples will not score very highly, as, on their own, contemporary examples are not good sociology. It is also worth noting that there is a difference between contemporary examples and anecdote. Contemporary examples mean events in society that can inform sociology but may not have been formally researched or studied; or events that are happening as sociologists are carrying out their research. For example, some candidates used the examples of feral children for question 2. Anecdotal evidence, on the other hand, is bordering on 'common sense' knowledge and this is not rewarded in the examination; for example, by claiming that "working class parents don't socialise their children as well as middle class parents". Responses which were wide-ranging in their use of sociological studies, in questions (2) and (3) tended to score highly and there are some examples of good practice in specific individual question section below.

Most candidates allocated the use of time effectively, spending the longest on question 4 which is worth just over half marks of the whole paper. There is some evidence that question (4) responses have improved in quality since the start of this specification. However, some candidates did experience timing issues; most commonly by spending too much time on question 1 which should be allocated approximately five minutes, or by spending too long on question 4 at the expense of the other three questions. Some candidates spent far too long on question 2, sometimes writing up to 2 sides for a question which should be answered in approximately 15 minutes. There is some evidence that where candidates choose to answer question 4 first, they often spend too long on this and then run out of time for questions 1, 2 or 3. Candidates who had been prepared well, even those who were clearly of weaker ability, managed to pick up marks on all questions, by knowing the assessment requirements and using sociological evidence appropriately. However, some candidates did not seem to have been adequately prepared either by having very little understanding of the role of the pre-release material, for example, by copying out large chunks of the findings, or being armed with very little sociological knowledge for questions 1, 2 and 3. In this session, there were a number of candidates who did not offer an answer for question 3 and it is worth reminding teachers that any concept or debate written on the specification could form the basis of an examination question.

On the whole there was a clear difference between the high and low achieving candidates. At the top end, there was a range of sociological evidence contained in answers to all of the questions. Such responses included relevant and detailed explanations including sociological studies, concepts and theories where appropriate. The lower achieving candidates were often unable to provide sociological knowledge and understanding and their answers became very anecdotal and common sense like. Candidates must be encouraged to back up their answers with sociological evidence; be it concepts, studies, relevant contemporary examples or theory. For example, in answers to question (2), candidates who discussed ways of being socialised, concepts and theories scored more highly than those who wrote about, for example, girls playing with skipping ropes and boys being called "little soldiers".

In terms of assessment objectives, Knowledge and Understanding (AO1) remains the strongest area; good candidates were able to offer a whole range of sociological knowledge, mainly in the form of concepts and studies, but sometimes making relevant use of contemporary examples and theory. AO2a (Interpretation and analysis) seemed to be the most difficult skill area for candidates; whilst many have been trained to evaluate evidence and arguments, they are less successful at interpreting knowledge and applying it to the specific question or context. For example, in question 3, candidates were able to offer a range of studies relating to hybridity, such as Johal and Butler, but they failed to focus explicitly on how these demonstrated the concept of hybridity, which was the focus of the question. It is also worth pointing out that a significant number of students are not offering any evaluation for question 3, which is worth 4 marks and candidates must be reminded that there is also an evaluative element to this question.

Teaching tip: Devise a mark sheet (or request one from a fellow sociology teacher on the e-community), based on the published mark schemes that you can attach to your students work so that they are aware of being marked according to the three separate assessment objectives.

Comments on Individual Questions

1. In general this question was answered relatively well and most candidates were able to express a core understanding of the concept 'cultural diversity' as being about cultural difference. The best responses explained the different types of cultural diversity, using the work of Parekh, for example, which gave development to their answers. However, some candidates had difficulty developing their definition. Candidates need to be able to develop the concept beyond just core meaning – many missed the additional two development marks. There were some excellent examples, using specific cities such as London or Bradford, and examples such as diversity in food, music or fashion. Strong responses made good use of examples taken from ethnicity, religion, sexuality, class and subcultures. Weaker candidates were unable to explain their examples and why they illustrated diversity, or just repeated the same explanations for both examples, often two cities, which could not gain full credit. Many weak responses did nothing more than reiterate the concept in the question; for example, by stating that "cultural diversity is where cultures are diverse". These type of responses were awarded very few marks. Other weak responses, confused cultural diversity with global culture. There were some candidates who spent too long on this question and wrote a one whole page answer. This obviously had implications for later questions and candidates should be reminded that they should spend approximately 5 minutes only on this question. At the other end of the scale, some candidates chose not to answer this question at all, therefore limiting their overall marks.

    Teaching tip: Question 1 is always a concept question taken from the specification content. Ensure that your students have detailed definitions and examples for each one. Encourage students to keep a glossary with all of these key terms.

2. This was a broad, open ended question which allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the process of socialisation. The most common approach was to use primary socialisation/ family for the first way, commonly using Oakley's concepts of gender role socialisation to develop this. The second way was sometimes given as secondary socialisation, with a range of evidence used, or more commonly, a specific agent of secondary socialisation, often peer group, media or education. Stronger candidates successfully applied their 'ways' to identity, giving examples from gender identity, ethnic or class identity. Commonly used studies were Ghuman, Mac an Ghaill, Sewell and Modood for those who linked to ethnic identity, and Bourdieu and Reay commonly appeared for class identity. Sometimes more narrow 'ways' were selected, such as sanctions, or role models. These were creditworthy, but candidates sometimes struggled to support them with the range of evidence required for full marks. Range of evidence was the main problem seen in this question, and weaker candidates were still prone to just support their 'ways' with common sense examples, rather than using sociological studies and/ or concepts/ processes.

    Candidates should be encouraged to use a range of studies/ evidence for questions 2 & 3 to support points made.

3.   This question was not well answered on the whole.   The best answers contained a wide range of evidence and a real focus on ethnic hybridity, using supporting studies, such as Butler, Johal & Bains and Back and included concepts related to ethnic hybrids, such as Brasians, Blasians, Wiggas and Jafaicans. Other strong responses were able to offer relevant contemporary examples to illustrate ethnic hybridity; for example by reference to films such as "East is East". There were, however, a large number of weak answers to this question which failed to include any real sociological evidence or interpreted 'hybridity' to be about mixed-race families. Many answers did offer potentially relevant studies, such as Sewell, but fell down in terms of Interpretation and Application marks by failing to make the answers relevant to the question, specifically in term of how these studies illustrate ethnic hybridity. There were a number of responses which seemed very confused by the concept of 'hybridity' despite it being clearly stated on the specification. Theory was often applied inaccurately in this question; by, for example, stating that Marxists agree with cultural hybridity. Postmodernism appeared in many answers, but it was confused on the whole.

One feature of stronger responses was the presence of explicit evaluation of the question. The most common approach was to note that ethnic hybridity does not exist. Stronger answers were able to include some evidence, such as Jacobson's study on commitment to Islam. However, candidates need to be reminded that their evaluation needs to contain sociological evidence; it is not enough to simply state that ethnic hybridity does not exist. Studies commonly used in evaluation were Jacobson, Modood, Alexander, Sewell (cultural comfort zones) and Said (othering). Some candidates attempted evaluation, but found difficulty in actually evaluating the view in the question – i.e. that hybrid ethnic identities exist. So some thought they were evaluating by saying that hybridity can be found in many ethnic groups, using examples of white ethnic hybrids – this was credited as knowledge, and not evaluation in relation to the question. It was interesting to see the changeable use of the concepts 'code switching' and 'dual identity'; some candidates saw it as a sign of hybridity, others used them as points of evaluation. Both worked. Those who used such concepts evaluatively were arguing that there is not a mix of identity, but a fake switch to avoid racism**.** Where evaluation was weaker, candidates only evaluated in an implicit and assertive way by, for example, just stating how individuals are socialised into their ethnic identities. Some candidates spend far too much time evaluating the view in the question, whilst there were also a significant number of candidates who did not offer evaluation points at all and therefore lost four potential marks. Candidates need to be reminded that this question will always start with the instruction to "*explain and briefly evaluate*".

4.   There was, once again, a wide range of responses to this question. The vast majority of candidates knew how to define mixed methods as being about using a number of different methods, and in this case linking them to the mainly quantitative methods of overt non-participant observation, structured questionnaires and secondary data. Most candidates were able to discuss issues surrounding the wider research process, such as sampling, access and ethics, and relate the methods to theory, particularly positivism. A key differentiator in marking this question was candidates' use of the key concepts as highlighted in the specification - validity, reliability, representativeness and generalisability. Some weaker responses did not explicitly use these concepts and therefore achieved marks at the bottom of level 2. Others did attempt to use the concepts, but the concepts were very confused, partial or undeveloped. To reach level 3 of the mark scheme, and beyond, for both AO1 and AO2b, responses needed to address the key concepts in an accurate, and wide-ranging way. Even where candidates correctly discussed the key concepts, they were often not developed enough in explanation to reach level 4. For example, responses which state that the sample was large and therefore representative were not fully demonstrating a core understanding of the concept 'representativeness'. There were a significant number of responses which focused on mixed methods producing qualitative data, despite the fact that this research clearly focused on quantitative methods.

Centres need to be reminded that it is not recommended practice to "question spot" for this question. Candidates need to be taught the pre-release in a detailed and analytical way, which will enable them to answer any potential question in the examination.

The high achieving responses tended to systematically explain mixed methods, offering a range of strengths and weaknesses and including key concepts. Another characteristic of strong responses was the discussion of aspects of the wider research process, for example, sampling, access, ethics and the impact of these. Many candidates made good use of theory in their responses, linking Holden's research design to the positivist tradition and offering an interpretivist critique. Strong responses recognised the quantitative nature of the findings and used these to illustrate strengths / weaknesses of the method. Such responses tended to be conceptually strong, referring to issues surrounding social desirability, Hawthorne effect and researcher imposition. Teachers need to ensure that they spend some time teaching the content of the pre-release material in preparation for the exam. One real problem is in the number of candidates who waste time copying out the pre-release material and describing the findings of the study, once again, it should be reminded that this is stimulus material, not source material. The philosophy behind the pre-release material is to give candidates the opportunity to look at some real research in depth but the exam question will always require them to go wider than this; to address research issues, methods, process and concepts and using the pre-release as an illustrative example.

It must also be noted that twelve marks are awarded for AO2a and in this question it is about how well the candidate contextualises their responses. The majority of students offer very generalised answers or just threw in the words children's play' or 'ethnicity'. To score highly in this skill area, candidates need to be asking themselves "What is the problem/advantage of using this method for studying THIS particular group (children) on THIS particular topic (ethnic identity and play). Candidates need to be encouraged to highlight the actual question on the question paper, particularly where it states "to research....". Stronger responses in this area offered some very thoughtful comments about, for example, how quantitative methods were fit for purpose, as one of the aims was to investigate how much play overcomes segregation; how a gatekeeper needed to be contacted to gain access to schools; how parents may be anxious about a researcher observing their children and how the nature of 'play' is operationalised. Candidates who did score more highly on this skill engaged much more fully with the context.

The findings were included in the pre-release material to enable candidates to gain an understanding of the value of this research and to discuss the idea of the method being 'fit for purpose'. There were some strong responses which linked the findings into the research methodology; for example by recognising the limitations of quantitative data in terms of it not offering explanation / meaning. Some centres had trained candidates to make reference to other research, which had either used a similar methodology or which was focused on a similar topic. This was rewarded where they were being used to support or criticise a methodological issue, but centres need to advise students not to spend time describing the findings of other studies as this is a question about methods.

G672 Topics in Socialisation, Culture and Identity

General Comments

The Family continues to be by far the most popular option, followed by Youth and Religion. There were very few scripts submitted for the Health option. An overwhelming majority of candidates chose to answer both Family questions and only a small number of candidates chose questions from more than one option. Generally candidates used their time appropriately, producing between ¾ to one page of the answer booklet for part (a) and at least three pages for part (b). Only a few appeared to run out of time on the second part (b) question. Very few candidates answered either too many questions or only one question. Overall, candidates fulfilled the requirements in terms of quality of written communication, producing work written in continuous prose and with clarity of expression.

Most candidates demonstrated sociological knowledge and understanding by referring to theories, studies, concepts and relevant contemporary evidence. Some candidates needed to explain ideas more fully to show the extent of their knowledge and understanding and apply evidence in support of the point being made. The best answers were both wide-ranging and detailed and showed a broad and in-depth knowledge and understanding of the topic. Some responses were brief and needed a wider focus on different aspects of the topic. Others covered a range of issues but needed greater depth or development of evidence to achieve higher marks.

Part (a) Questions

Most candidates seemed to understand what was required by the instruction 'identify and explain', but a significant number still covered three or more points and didn't group ideas together under two clear ways or reasons. As a result many responses achieved the 'good' mark band (level 3), but did not achieve level 4 because their answers were underdeveloped. Candidates need to be aware that to achieve full marks points should be developed with supporting evidence in the form of research findings or other data together with relevant theories and concepts.

An effective approach to achieve Level 4 is to identify two broad reasons/ways/factors etc. that can be developed in a number of ways within the answer e.g. citing 'effects of legislation' rather than a specific Act allows the candidate to include a wider range. Similarly, 'changing norms and values' as a broad point gives scope for a variety of issues to be included within this, rather than specifying a particular aspect of changing norms and values, e.g. secularisation, which then needs to be supported in a wide-ranging and detailed way. Additionally, a significant number of candidates did not explicitly state what the two points were, leaving this implicit in their answer.

Candidates can improve their marks by making sure that they:

- Carefully select the two points that can be best supported with evidence.

- Consider if they can identify two broad points that can be developed in a number of ways within the answer.

- Fully explain the two identified points with relevant sociological theories, studies, concepts and/or contemporary evidence to develop their answer.

- Choose two points that don't overlap.

- Avoid lengthy and unnecessary introductions to part (a) answers before actually proceeding to identify and explain the two points.

- Include only material that is required, e.g. criticisms are not needed in part (a) questions as there are no marks for evaluation.

> **Teachers' Tip for part (a) questions** - Use a separate paragraph for each of the two points to be identified and explained. An effective format to start the first paragraph is, for example, 'One way in which...' The second paragraph can then begin with 'A second way in which...' Candidates should be encouraged to write about one side of a booklet page for a part (a) answer.

Part (b) Questions

On part (b) questions most candidates showed a grasp of broad theoretical perspectives, but some candidates didn't support these with empirical evidence. Perspectives-based answers along the lines of 'functionalists would argue x while Marxists would argue y' should offer evidence to illustrate/support these arguments, for example, in the form of studies, contemporary example and/or statistical data. Most candidates answered questions in a sociological, rather than purely common sense manner and even the less developed responses usually included some references to sociological concepts, studies and/or theories. Most answers contained some element of evaluation, but on weaker scripts this was often in the form of juxtaposed theories or studies which didn't explicitly address the question and/or the debate. The best answers used evidence to explicitly support evaluative statements about a specified view or theory and reach conclusions. Such answers tended to use evaluative language which created an 'evaluative tone' to the discussion. In some cases, points of evaluation were presented without any supporting evidence to develop the point. Very good answers also tended to be ones which used up-to-date and contemporary research.

Some candidates showed confusion in their understanding of some theories, for example, Marxism, where they wrote about Marxists supporting the exploitation of the proletariat. This confusion continues to be a recurring theme each examination series.

Candidates can improve their marks by making sure that they:

- Include sufficient sociological evidence to demonstrate wide and detailed knowledge and understanding. The best responses made accurate use of a range of sociological theories, concepts and/or studies.

- Carefully select the material to be included to make sure that it is relevant and used in such a way that it supports or refutes an argument being made and avoid simply listing evidence.

- Address different sides of the argument and support with evidence.

- Offer critical comments about evidence, weigh up arguments and draw a reasoned conclusion.

- Write an answer that covers at least 3 pages of the booklet.

> **Teachers' Tip on Knowledge and Understanding** - To achieve the highest marks in the skill of knowledge and understanding candidates need to show a detailed understanding and so must learn as much about the evidence they are using as they can to be able to write about it in an informed way. Teachers should aim to select teaching material that will best facilitate this process and use evidence that gives depth and detail.

The skill of interpretation and application is challenging for some candidates who tend to list evidence without applying it to the question.

> **Teachers' Tip on Interpretation and Application**- To achieve the highest marks in the skill of interpretation and application candidates need to select and apply different types of data including theories, concepts and/or contemporary evidence on various sides of the argument. Candidates should aim to identify the most relevant data and then show how this relates to the question, highlighting patterns and trends, supported with evidence where appropriate. Applying sociological material to the question can be enhanced by including phrases that explicitly use the wording of the question, e.g. 'This study shows that radical feminists view relationships in the family as oppressive to women'.

Many candidates demonstrate very good skills in analysis and evaluation. Others need to avoid simply juxtaposing views by analysing arguments so that they can then evaluate the strengths and weaknesses. Analysis involves breaking down an argument to gain a clearer understanding. This is an essential stage in the evaluation process. A sustained evaluation is needed to achieve the best marks and this involves candidates using an evaluative tone from their introductory paragraph onwards so that evaluation is evident throughout their answer.

> **Teachers' Tip on Analysis and Evaluation** – A sustained evaluative approach can be demonstrated by candidates writing an evaluative introduction, making some pertinent evaluative points about studies, theories and ideas used, and summarising the different views in relation to the question. Candidates could be encouraged to use key evaluative terms that signal that they are evaluating the evidence or the argument at a given point, e.g. 'however', 'on the other hand', 'conversely', 'on the contrary', 'in contrast', 'this evidence can be criticised because...'

Comments on Individual Questions

1 (a) The vast majority of candidates were able to identify two reasons, with the most widely used being secularisation, women's greater independence, diversity and choice, the cost of marriage, fear of divorce and contraception. Some reasons such as contraception and cost of marriage tended to contain answers that were underdeveloped and supported with little or no evidence. The best answers tended to cite broad reasons that were more theoretical and conceptual, for example, linking together ideas of postmodernity, choice, fluidity and confluent love, or on women's independence typically citing studies such as Sharpe and Wilkinson's concept of genderquake.

1 (b) Many candidates showed narrow knowledge of the functionalist view, with basic answers often talking about functionalism and/or segregated roles in a general way. Better answers were able to refer to Parsons and Murdock and relevant concepts such as instrumental and expressive roles. Some candidates discussed family functions but these were not always effectively linked to responsibilities within the family. The best answers considered

how other approaches might support aspects of functionalism, typically the New Right, but some candidates also cited evidence of continued gender segregation, often from a feminist slant. Some candidates wrote quite extensively on debates about gender roles in the UK but didn't apply material to the functionalist view or use it in evaluation. Most candidates were able to offer at least some evaluation points, though sometimes more juxtaposed. The best responses typically drew on feminist arguments about patriarchy and gender inequality and on evidence of moves towards more symmetrical families and joint conjugal roles. Some candidates also drew on Marxist and postmodernist arguments in evaluation.

2 (a) Most candidates showed some understanding of this question. Answers covered a range of ways including acting as a unit of consumption, reproducing the labour force, socialising children into a dominant ideology and women performing free labour. More basic answers tended to identify two ways with limited development and were not supported by concepts or studies. The best answers tended to draw on Marxist and Marxist feminist theories, most commonly citing writers such as Zaretsky, Engels, Benston, Marcuse and Ansley. Answers were also differentiated in terms of how clearly candidates linked the working of families to supporting capitalism.

2 (b) There was a range of responses to this question as it focused on views rather than a specified view. Weaker answers tended to simply either juxtapose two or three views e.g. postmodernism and the New Right, or listed different forms of diversity, e.g. sexual and cultural, with little attempt to evaluate. Better answers tended to consider a range of views typically considering research on different types of diversity together with interpretations offered by different theoretical views. In evaluation many candidates compared views in favour of diversity, e.g. postmodernism and feminism, with those against, e.g. New Right and functionalism. Some candidates also considered Marxism but were often confused as to how to apply it, e.g. some candidates assumed Marxists were in favour of the nuclear family because it supported capitalism. The best answers tended to be those which actually evaluated the extent of family diversity, e.g. using Chester's ideas about neo-conventional families, feminist ideas about the persistence of patriarchy and arguments about the universality of the nuclear family, e.g. Murdock.

3 (a) There were a variety of responses to this question, with a number that were more commonsensical and lacking sociological material and were only able to achieve either level one or two of the mark scheme. Typically, such responses would identify physical and mental disability as the two points and give descriptive answers. The two most commonly cited definitions were biological and social and the best answers were developed with empirical and/or conceptual evidence, e.g. personal tragedy, labelling etc. Some candidates were confused in their understanding and used evidence from the social model to support a biological definition.

3 (b) There was a range of levels of response to this question but very few achieved level 4 for AO1. It was noticeable that even the better answers showed a narrower knowledge and understanding of the view in the question. Some weaker responses offered little in the way of material in support of the view and simply juxtaposed different views on the role of medical professionals, with little or no reference to the question. Some other unbalanced answers showed stronger knowledge of counter views and went through these in detail, with some engagement with the debate in the question, e.g. 'while Marxists believe…, Weberians argue that ...' . The best answers outlined Marxist views covering a range of issues such as ideological control, false consciousness, medicalisation, and reproduction of labour and the role of pharmaceutical companies, and evaluated these with counterviews related to the point/question. Such answers typically also drew on contemporary evidence, e.g. relating to government policy, the pharmaceutical industry, etc.

4 (a) There were a variety of levels of understanding of this question. Some candidates did not explicitly state the factors but left them implicit in a generalised response. There were also a number of weak responses that were very brief and included little sociological material. Some candidates drew on stages related to the sick role to construct their answer and these were differentiated by the depth and detail shown. Better answers tended to identify the sick role as one factor and cultural factors as a second. This approach allowed responses to be wide-ranging and detailed.

4 (b) Overall, this question was better answered that 3(b). There was a broad range of responses with most candidates showing some understanding of cultural, biological and structural explanations. Some responses were very brief and contained little supporting evidence. Better answers cited three or four explanation and then developed each with empirical, conceptual and/or statistical material. A number of candidates used artefact explanations with varying degrees of success, depending on the clarity of their understanding of this view. The best answers employed an evaluative tone to distinguish between each explanation and also included some explicit evaluation of each explanation. This approach enabled such responses to reach level 4 for AO2b.

5 (a) A range of reasons were cited in response to this question; these included the problems of using attendance/membership data to measure religiosity, believing without belonging/privatised religion, the problems of defining what religion actually is and the difficulties of assessing how religious some new religious movements are. Better answers tended to cite studies such as Day, Davie, Haddaway and Bruce and were more conceptual in their explanation. Some very good answers also referred to case studies of specific religions or movements.

5 (b) There were a broad range of responses to this question. A number of candidates showed very narrow knowledge of class and religion and spent much of their answer discussing other factors such as gender and ethnicity. Better answers typically discussed Marx on religion as an opiate and Weber on theodicy of disprivilege. The best answers often considered how new religious movements were related to class using case studies such as The Moonies, Jehovah's Witnesses and the New Age Movement. In evaluation many candidates simply juxtaposed material on gender and ethnicity but better responses were able to question the relevance of class to religion directly e.g. by pointing out the weakening of links between specific religions and social classes e.g. the church of England and the upper and middle classes, individualisation of religious belief and how NRMs traditionally attracted to disprivileged were now often more middle class.

6 (a) Most candidates showed some understanding of this question but answers tended to be under-developed in terms of supporting studies, examples of NRMs or other evidence. Commonly cited reasons included individualism/privatisation of religion, irrelevance of traditional religions to people's lives, a concern with spirituality/self rather than communal religion and aspects of social deprivation. Some candidates identified reasons that proved difficult to develop into a wide-ranging and detailed answer e.g. the appeal of charismatic leadership.

6 (b) Again, this question yielded a range of responses. Most candidates interpreted this as a question about secularisation, typically looking at arguments on both sides of the debate. Such answers were differentiated in terms of the range of evidence offered, the extent to which there was explicit evaluation rather than juxtaposed points and the use of concepts and studies. Some very good answers also considered the view that religion might be changing rather than weakening, usually drawing on postmodern approaches. Some weaker answers offered a basic discussion about whether particular aspects of religion could be seen as a strength or a weakness.

7 (a) Answers to this question were well differentiated. Nearly all candidates were able to identify two ways and responses were differentiated in terms of the quality of development. More basic answers often focused on aspects such as subject choice and boy's anti-school behaviour and offered less sociological explanations. Better answers tended to draw on studies such as Sharpe, Mac an Ghaill, Blackman, Kelly, Skelton, Willis and Mitsos and Browne to produce wide-ranging and detailed responses.

7 (b) A significant minority of candidates seemed to have only very narrow knowledge relating to ethnicity and youth subcultures, often just citing a couple of examples of youth subcultures, such as Rastafarians and Rude Boys. Some candidates then proceeded to juxtapose large amounts of material on gender, class or other aspects of youth subcultures. Better answers showed knowledge of sociological studies such as Hall, Gilroy, Sewell, Johal, Hebdige, Alexander etc. and concepts such as resistance to racism, hybridity, cultural comfort zones etc. Some very good answers were seen with a range of relevant studies considering different reasons why ethnicity might be important in youth subcultures. Some candidates also considered how ethnicity might be important in all white subcultures e.g. Teddy Boys using Hall and Jefferson and Skinheads using Clarke. In evaluation, less sophisticated responses tended to simply juxtapose material on gender and class, better responses used this material more evaluatively and also considered how ethnicity might be declining in importance e.g. with the emergence of hybridity, neo-tribes and supermarket of style typically drawing on the work of Bennett, Maffesoli and other postmodern writers.

8 (a) A few candidates misinterpreted this question or identified ways of marginal relevance, for example, some candidates discussed class differences in education, e.g. relating to cultural deprivation or cultural capital, but did not relate these to the economy. A few candidates also offered two points which overlapped to a large degree, e.g. opportunities for young people to gain part-time jobs and youthful affluence. Better answers tended to focus on issues that as youthful affluence in the post-war period, the impact of recession and deindustrialisation, the media and creation of youth as consumers. The best answers developed these with examples and evidence and made reference to relevant studies, e.g. Abrams, Hall and Jefferson, Thornton and Polemus, to produce wide-ranging and detailed responses.

8 (b) There were a number of candidates with quite narrow knowledge of Marxist views, often limited to the idea that youth subcultures involved resistance to capitalism. Some candidates also engaged in lengthy discussions of approaches to youth subcultures, citing them as Marxist when they were not, e.g. status frustration theory, labelling theory and strain theory. While such answers showed much more extensive knowledge of other theoretical approaches, where these were not used evaluatively they did not score well. Better answers were able to explain key Marxist concepts such as magical solutions, exaggeration, bricolage and semiotic analysis. The best answers applied a range of relevant studies and examples of youth subcultures to illustrate these ideas.   In evaluation candidates tended to use alternative perspectives including feminism, functionalism and postmodernism, though these were often juxtaposed rather than engaged with the view in the question. Disappointingly, few candidates were able to offer specific criticisms of Marxism beyond stating that they tended to ignore gender and ethnicity, though a few candidates used postmodernist views effectively to argue that the age of spectacular subcultures was over and that youth style now lacked any deeper meaning.

G673 Power and Control

General Comments:

Many candidates displayed a wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of concepts and studies, showing that they had obviously prepared well for the examination and that their grasp of sociological theories was very good. As in previous sessions, the range of theories understood by most candidates was very good, with most being able to identify and apply appropriate theories, and the strongest being able to make links between them, both evaluative and analytical.

However, lack of depth is an issue which is preventing some, clearly knowledgeable candidates from achieving higher levels. Some responses were very list-like and though they contained a very good selection of studies, these were not always explained and developed effectively in relation to the question. Accuracy was also an issue, for example, in Question 1 relating to the Marxist view of the law, and Question 4 relating to the functionalist view of meritocracy. Important ideas were wrongly attributed, and some named theorists were credited with many ideas which were not theirs, affecting the marks which those candidates achieved.

The other main issue seen in many of the options, which hampered candidates' ability to maximise the marks they could achieve, was lack of focus on the precise question asked. For example, in question 3, in relation to crime in cities, where candidates often discussed generalised explanations of crime or solutions to crime instead, or question 5 in relation to ethnic differences in achievement, where some candidates spent more time discussing social class. This affected the Interpretation and Application mark, but also the mark for Knowledge and Understanding, since it lacked relevance in many cases. As has been suggested in previous reports, candidates should be encouraged to consider the material they have included in terms of how it relates to the question set, and constantly try to link back to the question. Some had clearly been encouraged to do this, and did well, but there were still examples of candidates who had clearly pre-prepared answers and ploughed on regardless, though the question set was not the same as the one they were expecting.

Evaluation and Analysis was often demonstrated strongly, with many candidates managing to link ideas together and show support or criticism within their arguments. Again, lack of depth is an issue here, and 'throwaway' evaluative points should have been explained a little more, which would have attracted more marks. Candidates should make clear why they are making the point and how it challenges the view being discussed. The use of connectives such as 'however' seemed, for some candidates, to be just a way to discuss an alternative point rather than a means to criticise an idea. For example, in Question 4 writing 'However, Marxists disagree' and then explaining the Marxist view, with no link back to exactly *how* they disagree with the Functionalist view or reference to meritocracy. Very little credit is given in terms of AO2b marks for such an approach. Evaluation needs to be explicit and relevant, and fully developed.

The strongest candidates sustained their evaluation throughout their response, creating a critical commentary. Fewer candidates now leave evaluation till the end, creating a list of underdeveloped points, which is encouraging. However, some candidates spent a lot of time evaluating opposing views, which, due to lack of focus on the question at hand, gained very little credit. In questions requiring or inviting a range of different explanations, such as Question 3 or Question 5, some candidates 'forgot' to include any explicit evaluation at all, possibly assuming that the different explanations would suffice. Candidates should be encouraged to always make explicit evaluative points of each explanation discussed, to maximise AO2b marks.

There was still a tendency for some candidates to spend overly long on introductions and conclusions, which added little or nothing to the overall essay, and were thus a waste of their time. For example, there were some candidates who wrote very generalised introductions, in which they defined crime and deviance, or explained what is meant by 'the media'. Candidates should be encouraged to get focused on the question set immediately, since such generalised knowledge attracts very little credit. Similarly, conclusions, sometimes lengthy, which merely re-hash all the arguments presented in the essay itself, would be better avoided, since they gain no additional credit.

There were very few rubric errors this session, and the vast majority of candidates answered 2 questions from within the same option.

Comments on Individual Questions:

CRIME AND DEVIANCE:

This was by far the most popular topic area, with many extremely good responses. Most candidates seemed engaged with the subject matter and were able to select from a wide-range of theories and ideas and apply them effectively to the questions set.

Question No. 1

This was the most popular question from this option. The vast majority of candidates had no problem in identifying the view in the question as a broadly Marxist one, though many candidates also successfully applied Neo-Marxists, Left Realists, Interactionists and even Functionalist subcultural theorists in support of the view. Good understanding of Marxist ideas was shown, though some candidates spent too long explaining Marxist ideas in a very general way without focusing on the question. Many were able to focus on both law creation and law enforcement, interpreting 'the law' as also about policing. Some applied this to include ethnicity and institutional racism as a way of dividing the working class, which was credited as relevant knowledge. White collar and/ or corporate crime were also successfully discussed, with some good use of contemporary examples, such as the MPs expenses scandal, or Starbucks/ Amazon tax avoidance. There were also frequent references to Jimmy Carr and Gary Barlow.

There was an issue of accuracy, with many candidates using writers such as Bonger, Chambliss, Althusser, Snider, Box and Gordon interchangeably, and not being clear on who said what, or attributing everything to Karl Marx. A minority of candidates simply explained reasons for working class crime & failed to engage with the question. Some also seemed confused by the term 'law' and argued that it was the ruling class or 'society' which oppresses the working class.

Candidates tended to evaluate the view in the question effectively with reference to other perspectives, with Functionalism being the most likely. However, Left Realists and Interactionists were sometimes used to challenge the view in the question or to evaluate the Marxist view, which was credited. Another common approach was to argue that the law oppresses females and/ or ethnic minorities instead, using appropriate material to support this. However, some candidates went off at tangents and lost focus on the question, discussing functionalist or feminist views at length and not relating this to a discussion about the oppression of the working class.

The most often cited names were: Chambliss, Snider, Althusser, Croall, Gordon, Box, Lea & Young.

Common concepts included: hegemony, ISA/ RSA, criminogenic, white collar and corporate crime, institutional racism, moral panics.

Question No.2

Candidates interpreted this question in different ways. Some took 'over representation' to mean that males are falsely represented and do not actually commit more crime than females. Such candidates tended to use the chivalry thesis, labelling and/ or moral panics in support of this view. Others discussed why males are over represented numerically in comparison to females, and looked at explanations for male criminality and the lack of female criminality, using sex role theory, ideas of social control from feminists and ideas on masculinity, such as Messerschmidt and subcultural theorists such as A Cohen and Miller. Both approaches were fully credited, as were candidates who took a combination of both of these approaches. Some candidates, rightly recognising that crime statistics can include victim surveys, discussed rates of victimisation for males and females as well. When subcultural theorists such as Cohen and Miller were used, weaker candidates did not fully focus on how these ideas particularly relate to males. Similarly, the postmodernist views of Katz and Lyng, and Left Realist ideas of relative deprivation and marginalisation were often used, but less successfully explicitly related to gender.

The accuracy issue was seen in this question as well, with many feminist writers such as Heidensohn, Smart and Carlen being used interchangeably, Pollak often being cited as a feminist, and Messerschmidt and Connell being mixed up. A minority of candidates seemed confused by the question, or ignored the precise wording, and just wrote very general essays about gender and crime.

In evaluation, candidates sometimes used the alternative approach to the one they took as knowledge, so argued that the statistics may not be accurate, or argued that males actually do commit more crime. Some successfully used feminist arguments relating to sexual offences and domestic violence to argue that males are actually under-represented, and also referred to double-deviance and the demonisation of female offenders. Others discussed Liberation theory, using Adler, and references to girl gangs and ladettes, to argue that the view in the question is becoming outdated and female crime is rising. All of these evaluative points were acceptable and many candidates scored very highly for evaluation in this question.

The most often cited names were: Messerschmidt, A.Cohen, Miller, Pollak, Heidensohn, McRobbie, Lees, Carlen, and Smart.

Common concepts included: chivalry, double deviance, hegemonic/ normative masculinity, public and private sphere, social control, bedroom culture, moral panics, labelling, status frustration, focal concerns.

Question No.3

This question was equally as popular as question 2 and generally answered extremely well. The most common approach was to focus on Shaw and McKay, with generally accurate, though sometimes under-developed, knowledge and understanding being demonstrated. Tipping was a well understood and frequently used concept, though sometimes incorrectly attributed to and discussed alongside Shaw & Mackay. Other popular explanations discussed included Hobbs and the night-time economy, and Right and Left Realist ideas. These were sometimes muddled up, and there was a tendency to drift into discussions of solutions to crime and lose focus on the question.

This loss of focus was a problem with many responses to this question, with some candidates using a whole variety of general explanations of crime and then throwing in a couple of sentences about cities to try to make it relevant. Some even forgot to do this much. Most views could however, have been successfully applied, and were by many candidates, including ideas relating to labelling, over-policing, poverty, the underclass, illegitimate opportunity structures and anomie. Less common was a theoretical approach, though some candidates did successfully apply a Functionalist, Marxist and Interactionist analysis to address the view in the question.

In terms of evaluation, there were a significant minority of candidates who did not include explicit evaluation at all, just moving from one explanation to the next, possibly assuming that this consideration of alternative views would be credited as evaluation. Candidates should be encouraged to always be explicit, including directly evaluative points on any view discussed in relation to the question, regardless of the question format.

The most often cited names were: Shaw and McKay, Sutherland and Cressey, Baldwin and Bottoms, Wilson and Kelling, Morris, Hobbs, Brantingham and Brantingham.

Common concepts included: zone of transition, social disorganisation, cultural transmission, differential association, cognitive maps, night-time/ nocturnal economy, tipping, anomie, broken windows, relative deprivation, underclass.

EDUCATION:

This was the second most popular option.

Question No.4

This was a straightforward question and usually answered well with a focus on Durkheim, Parsons and Davis and Moore. The slight narrowness of the available material in support of the view in the question was recognised and accounted for in the marking of this response, and many candidates were able to reach the top 2 levels, though lack of depth, accuracy and focus were the main issues which hampered candidates. Some strong responses included references to Saunders and New Right ideas, some linked to the Social Democratic view to provide further support to the ideal of meritocracy, and others linked in policies and/ or studies such as Sugarman to demonstrate that 'you get what you deserve'.

Some candidates wrote too generally about Functionalist views without relating their ideas to meritocracy, or too briefly, spending just one paragraph on the Functionalist view before moving on to consider other, critical views. Durkheim, Parsons and Davis & Moore were used interchangeably by weaker candidates, with no clear understanding of who said what.

Evaluation was usually focused on Marxist and/ or Interactionist views on inequalities within education. There was less tendency towards juxtaposition in this session, which is often common in questions such as this one, but there were many candidates who wrote a lot more about these opposing views than about Functionalism, and did seem to forget that they were meant to be evaluating the Functionalist view. It is suggested that candidates are encouraged to apply any section about a competing view back to the view in the question, to ensure it is focused evaluation. Lengthy evaluations of Marxism and Interactionism were given by some candidates, which attracted little credit, since they were not focused on the question, unless they were linked to the Functionalist view.

The most often cited names were: Durkheim, Parsons, Davis and Moore, Saunders.

Common concepts included: meritocracy, equality of opportunity, universalistic standards.

Question No.5

This question produced some very strong responses, though, surprisingly, was less popular than Question 4. Most responses considered a range of explanations – cultural, material, in-school etc. Stronger candidates were able to discuss and explain the differences between different ethnic groups - there were many references to 'Chinese tiger mums' for example. Some candidates used an extremely wide-range of relevant studies, though sometimes at the expense of depth, and some responses tended to be 'list-like'.

Surprisingly, given the wealth of research out there, a significant number of candidates focused on class based studies and tried, some more successfully than others, to apply them to ethnicity. So Becker, Rosenthal & Jacobson and Hargreaves were all used to discuss teacher-pupil relationships, and Bernstein, Sugarman & Bourdieu were used to discuss cultural factors. More successfully, studies such as Mac an Ghaill, Connolly, Gillbourn & Youdell, Wright were applied.

This question lends itself less to a theoretical debate, and so an approach which focused on issues, such as institutional racism, labelling, material or cultural deprivation, and then supported each of these with evidence was taken by some candidates. This tended to produce more in-depth answers than those who took a study-led approach. This is worth noting for teachers when preparing candidates for questions on differential educational achievement.

In terms of evaluation, similar to Question 3 above, merely presenting competing explanations did not attract significant evaluation marks. Evaluation needs to be explicit, discussing specific limitations of each explanation presented. Some candidates penalised themselves by not doing this.

The most often cited names were: Sewell, Mac an Ghaill, Connolly, Gillbourn & Youdell, Wright, Coard, Strand.

Common concepts included: institutional racism, ethnocentric curriculum, myth of return, labelling, anti-school subcultures, cultural and material deprivation, cultural capital, role models.

Question No.6

This question was the least popular of the education questions. Positively, fewer candidates gave lengthy sections on the tripartite system or historical policies, possibly due to the specific date reference in the question, though there were still some who did, which attracted little or no credit.

The question did cause problems for some candidates because of the 'have not' wording, which some candidates ignored or did not spot. Many candidates started by arguing how policies have improved standards then 'evaluated' this, whereas actually the view that they *haven't* improved standards was the creditable Knowledge and Understanding. However, stronger candidates were really focused and engaged with this and tried hard to show the policies they knew in this light, often very successfully. Stronger candidates made use of writers such as Ball & Gerwitz on 'choosers', or Marxist critiques of vocational education policies, though there seemed to be fewer references to theoretical views than in previous sessions. There was a wide-ranging knowledge of relevant policies however, and some very recent evidence/ policies were successfully used by some candidates, such as the 'Trojan Horse' scandal in relation to free schools, or proposed changes to A Levels and GCSEs by the current Government.

Weaker responses were assertive with unsubstantiated claims that this or that policy had or had not improved standards but with no supporting evidence. Some candidates ignored the issue of standards and wrote about diversity and choice or equality of opportunities, which again suggests they had a pre-prepared response for a 'policy' question which they reproduced regardless.

Evaluation in this question was often done before knowledge, as previously mentioned, and rarely well developed or focused because of this. Stronger candidates engaged in a specific discussion of how each policy under discussion actually has raised standards.

Most often cited names/ policies/ concepts: ERA, parentocracy, skilled choosers, SATs, league tables, Academies, Sure Start, New Deal, EMA, specialist schools, Free Schools, tuition fees, Ball, Gerwitz, Tomlinson.

MASS MEDIA:

Overall, a much less popular option, with a wide variance in the standard of responses.

Question No.7

This was quite a popular question within this topic. Most candidates were able to maintain focus on the view that media representations of females continue to be based on traditional stereotypes, often using feminists, or specific strands of feminism such as Radical and Marxist Feminists, to support the view. Marxists were also used. However, it was more common for candidates to take a wholly empirical approach to this question, citing studies and examples rather than engaging with theory. Weaker responses were based on contemporary examples only, becoming largely 'common-sense'. Candidates who used theory and supported it with empirical evidence tended to score most highly.

In evaluation, those taking a theoretical approach used Pluralists and Postmodernists to challenge the view in the question and some candidates argued that Liberal Feminists would partially disagree, recognising improvements. Studies such as those by Gauntlett were also used in evaluation, but also commonly, contemporary examples were successfully used to challenge the view in the question, such as Friends and Ugly Betty. Some candidates used effects theories to argue that representations have no effect on the audience and so are irrelevant. All such evaluation was creditable.

The most often cited names were: McRobbie, Ferguson, Tunstall, Tuchman, Mulvey, Kilbourne, Wolf, Gauntlett.

Common concepts included: the male gaze, labelling, beauty myth, symbolic annihilation, cultural lag.

Question No.8

Most candidates approached this question from a Neo-Marxist perspective and presented arguments about the influence of media professionals and hegemony to support the question. Many did not recognise that the question did not actually state a 'view' and just referred to the role of media professionals. Thus those who used the Pluralist or traditional Marxist view purely as evaluation of the 'view' that media professionals construct the news were not fully recognising the range of the question. Many candidates did successfully apply all three theories, using concepts such as agenda-setting, news values and gatekeepers effectively.

There was a disappointing lack of supporting evidence, with many responses being solely theoretical. The GUMG were most commonly used, but often lacked any depth. Some candidates interpreted 'media professionals' as meaning owners, and thus misapplied material on traditional Marxism. Weaker candidates also lost focus on the news and wrote generalised answers about the ownership and control of media content.

The most often cited names were: GUMG, Philo, Galtung and Ruge, Hall, Bagdikian, Thussu, Whale, Davies.

Common concepts included: gate-keepers, agenda setting, news values, ideology, hegemony, churnalism.

Question No.9

This was, perhaps surprisingly, the least popular question in this option, though some candidates who had clearly prepared for option 1 did also answer this question, often with some success. Candidates were able to make reference to a range of moral panics, commonly using hoodies, mods & rockers and black muggers, although a few of the panics were not contextualised within the media representation of crime and deviance. Stronger candidates were able to differentiate between the Interactionist and Neo-Marxist accounts and their different views on the source of the panic. This enabled greater opportunities for evaluation. Weaker responses did not address the issue of whether the media representation creates the panic, and merely listed several examples. Some candidates relied heavily on contemporary examples, mentioning ecstasy, gun crime and Islamophobia, but with no supporting sociological evidence.

Many candidates took a media effects approach, discussing whether it is possible to create a panic through representation in the media if the media effects on the audience are not strong, and this allowed for a good range of evaluation. Postmodernism and ideas from McRobbie and Thornton were also successfully used as evaluation.

The most often cited names were: S.Cohen, Hall, Fawbert, Young, Wilkins, Redhead, Goode and Ben-Yehuda, Thornton, McRobbie.

Common concepts included: moral panics, moral entrepreneurs, moral crusade, deviance amplification, labelling, folk devils, stereotypes, ideology.

POWER AND POLITICS:

This topic area seemed even less popular in this session, with very few responses.

Question No.10

Candidates were able to address the question, but some did not stay focused on Marxist explanations, and moved on too quickly to other explanations after a very brief consideration of Marxist and/ or Neo-Marxist views. Others did not really engage with the idea of 'global' social movements, and wrote more generally. Many discussed the Postmodern views on the emergence of global social movements as search for identity in much more depth, although some did not differentiate this from the Marxist anti-capitalist views. The majority hinted at neo-Marxist notions of alienation in the modern world, and Klein was used quite successfully.

There were examples of excellent evaluation from a Postmodern perspective, criticising the whole tenure of the Marxist view with its acceptance that we live in a class based society, though explicit evaluation was less common than in previous sessions with weaker candidates tending to juxtapose ideas.

The most often cited names were: Klein, Marcuse, Touraine, Giddens.

Common concepts included: global social movements, anti-capitalism, OSM, NSM, identity, resistance.

Question No.11

Candidates seemed well prepared and could clearly contextualise the debate between those who believe direct political action is replacing traditional party politics and those who do not. The differentiator was those who focused the debate on disadvantaged groups within society and those who discussed direct action more generally. Stronger candidates took the opportunity to enhance their answer with interesting contemporary examples such as Occupy and the 2011 riots. Some weaker candidates did not engage with the idea of direct action, and just discussed whether disadvantaged groups are disillusioned with party politics, sometimes discussing NSMs as an alternative. It is important to encourage candidates to fully read the question and ensure they engage with all aspects of it.

The most often cited names were: Klein, Marcuse, Touraine, Melucci, Habermas.

Common concepts included: globalisation, anti-capitalism, direct action, identity, alienation, riots.

Question No.12

Stronger answers were informative and focused on postmodern views usually with Foucault as the key writer, though there was an issue with range and depth, and often comments on the view in the question were very brief. The views of the postmodern writers and pluralists were sometimes merged.

There was a tendency in this question to juxtapose different views of power and for the postmodern views to move out of focus. Some candidates spent most of the essay discussing other, perhaps more well-studied, views of power, particularly elite theory, with only a fleeting reference to postmodern views.

The most often cited names were: Foucault, Miliband, Gramsci, Lukes, Mosca, Pareto.

Common concepts included: discourse, power, ideology. false consciousness, elites, lions & foxes.

G674 Exploring Social Inequality and Difference

General Comments

The paper is designed to test candidates' knowledge and understanding of social inequality and difference, as well as sociological theory and methodology. The paper is synoptic and linked to the core themes of power, social inequality, socialisation, culture and identity. In addition the paper tests candidates' ability to interpret and evaluate sociological theory, research and evidence, especially through the analysis of a research case study.

There were approximately 4100 candidates entered for the GCE A2 Unit 'Exploring Social Inequality and Difference in June 2014. This was similar to June 2013.

As last year, standards attained were very good; candidates and centres are once again to be congratulated on their achievements.

In Section A candidates were expected to show knowledge and understanding of different sociological perspectives or theories of research, for example positivist, interpretive, realist and feminist approaches, as well as research design and methods. This is achieved through the analysis and evaluation of a research strategy within a case study outlined in source material.

In this session the source material was based upon a study of change in the workplace reported in the journal 'Sociology', published in 2011. The study adopted a mixed methods approach and used content analysis of documentary evidence and interviews with employees from three banks as the main methods of research.

In Section A, in order to evaluate the research strategy within the case study, candidates are expected to use a range of methodological concepts and perspectives. It is therefore essential that candidates are familiar with and able to apply some of the key sociological methodological concepts, including validity, reliability, representative, generalisable and replicable. Candidates should know these key concepts and have had opportunity to apply them in the evaluation of research case studies during their courses. Understanding positivist, interpretive, realist and feminist approaches to methodology is also important. Candidates should encounter a range of research studies and have the opportunity to critically evaluate their methodology during the course.

In Section B candidates are expected to show knowledge and understanding of substantive topics in Social Inequality and Difference and evaluate different theoretical explanations of inequality, notably Functionalist, Marxist, neo-Marxist, Weberian, Post Modern and Feminist.

In June 2014 candidates' choice of questions in Section B revealed a preference for the question on age as opposed to changes in class structure.

From the evidence of candidate responses, the source material and questions were easily understood and accessible to candidates of all abilities. The vast majority of candidates were able to respond to the questions appropriately and demonstrate positive achievement. The paper also differentiated successfully.

In general, the compulsory questions on sociological research were answered very well and there were some excellent responses that demonstrated a good knowledge and understanding of the role of secondary data and case studies in research. It was pleasing to see how many candidates were aware of the uses of different methods and could evaluate case studies in context, based on the purpose of the research, the source material and different theoretical perspectives. Application to the specific case study was often sensitive and thoughtful, especially in relation to the potential sensitivities of the context of redundancy at work. Awareness of the different methodological perspectives is continuing to improve.

The questions on both age and the changing class structure were also answered very well. Candidates demonstrated very good levels of knowledge and understanding of age inequality and presented a range of evidence about inequality in different aspects of social life. Similarly many candidates were able to describe a range of evidence in some detail about privilege in the class structure in the contemporary UK.

Many candidates had a good grasp of different sociological approaches to or explanations of age inequality; however many responses tended to be descriptive rather than to evaluate the significance of the different contributions or explanations to a sociological understanding of age inequality. The question on the changing class structure was generally answered well, with many candidates demonstrating a good knowledge and understanding of different theoretical explanations of the changing class structure. Some candidates simply described and evaluated different sociological perspectives on class inequality rather than evaluating different approaches *to change in the class structure.*

In general, candidates seemed to benefit from careful preparation for this examination by centres. They had clearly undertaken stimulating, well designed courses that were effective in developing the skills to be tested. In addition, examination technique was generally very good. As in previous years, to improve performance further candidates should be encouraged to:

- answer the question set and refer back to the question regularly; this especially helps candidates to demonstrate the skill of interpretation and application
- use a variety of different forms of sociological evidence, which may be empirical studies, data, concepts, theory and contemporary examples
- refer to sociological concepts, studies and theory wherever relevant
- evaluate theories and research strategies by referring to both strengths and weaknesses
- avoid simple assertion, opinion and anecdotal evidence.

Candidates seemed to have sufficient time for the tasks. The vast majority completed all of the questions within the time allocated. There were hardly any rubric errors.

Comments on Individual Questions

Question 1

The majority of candidates answered this question reasonably well, revealing good knowledge and understanding of secondary data within sociological research, drawing upon the information in the source material and their own background knowledge from across the Specification to illustrate their responses.

Most candidates understood that secondary data is the use of data that was collected by someone else for some other purpose; and that secondary may be official, organisational and personal. Secondary data research therefore involves the use of quantitative and qualitative data, such as statistics, texts and documents: government publications, newspapers, media material, certificates, census publications, novels, film and video, paintings, personal photographs, diaries, content of social media, and other written, visual and pictorial sources in paper, electronic, or other `hard copy' form.

At the higher levels of response candidates were aware that the analysis of the secondary data could be either quantitative or qualitative analysis (or both) - it depends on how the material is used. Analysis usually involves some form of categorization, interpretation and content analysis of the materials gathered. Secondary data may be associated with both positivist and interpretive approaches.

Candidates tended to discuss the following uses of secondary data:

- to understand the background or context of the research
- to increase the amount, breadth and depth of evidence available
- to get access to evidence gathered by researchers with relevant expertise
- in case studies
- to make the research more manageable/practical
- to reduce cost and effort
- to reduce the time involved
- to ensure that the research is valid
- to provide evidence to generalise to the wider population.

In responding to the question, candidates tended to refer to concepts such as:

- collection and recording of data
- data analysis and interpretation
- quantitative and qualitative approaches to evidence and data
- validity
- reliability
- practicality
- representative (sample of the wider population)
- generalise
- population.

The best responses related their responses clearly and systematically to the source material, using the research by McCabe to illustrate their answers. Some candidates did not use the Source and inevitably restricted the marks that could be gained. Centres should stress the need to use both the Source and their own knowledge and understanding.

Unfortunately, a few candidates did not focus on *secondary data* but discussed the uses, or strengths and weaknesses, of the specific methods in the case study. Similarly, whilst the question asked candidates to outline and explain the importance of secondary data, some evaluated the research method in the Source. The question is designed to test Knowledge and Understanding (AO1) and Interpretation and Application (AO2a), so material presented by candidates on evaluation cannot be credited.

Some candidates did not understand the term and described some aspects of research in general introducing material that was tangential to the question.

Question 2

The majority of candidates answered this question very well, revealing a very good knowledge and understanding of case studies in sociological research, and related methodological issues, drawing upon the information in the source material and their own background knowledge to illustrate their responses.

Most candidates understood that case studies are generally regarded as a detailed examination of, or research into, a specific example of a social phenomenon or group, often using a range of methods. The aim is usually to describe, understand and explain the nature and characteristics of the particular 'case' to emphasize and relate its relevance to the social phenomenon, group as a whole or more general issues.

Many candidates discussed the implications of the sample for the case study usually being small and regarded as 'typical'. Detailed focus on the selected sample using a range of methods is generally regarded as providing high validity. Triangulation and checking of data and interpretations through different or the use of multiple methods may contribute to higher validity.

Similarly candidates were generally aware that case studies are generally regarded as a qualitative approach within sociological research, which gathers data and evidence that is in-depth, detailed and descriptive, rather than numerical or quantitative data in a statistical form. These methods usually focus on gathering information about the experience of social life from the point of view of the subjects/actors. Sociologists using this approach are often interested in the meaning and subjective understanding of those being researched. The research is usually small scale and at a micro-level. These methods tend to be high in validity and low in reliability. They are favoured by interpretive and action theorists rather than positivist and structuralist approaches to research.

Candidates were expected to discuss the use of *case studies* for this research problem – that of employee responses to change at work. Most candidates were aware that the case study in the source drew mainly upon interpretive approaches. Most candidates also demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the key methodological concepts of validity, reliability, generalisability and representativeness.

Most candidates clearly discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the view that case studies provided the best way to study the attitudes of employees to change in the workplace. In evaluation, candidates generally referred to methodological issues and concepts such as:

- the influence of method/ researcher on quality of data gathered and subsequent uses
- advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative data
- positivist, interpretive, feminist and realist approaches
- objectivity and subjectivity
- sample size effects
- representativeness
- meanings and experiences
- empathy
- rapport
- reflexivity
- generalise
- validity
- reliability
- subject and researcher biases
- fitness for purpose
- access
- replicable.

Ethical issues were sometimes raised, for example of confidentiality and the potential impact on the lives of those studied, including raising sensitive issues and ensuring absence of harm. Many demonstrated an understanding of the issues facing sociologists gaining access to personal data.

Many candidates also contrasted positivism to interpretive, critical, feminist or post-modern approaches to social research, showing skills of evaluation and analysis through this discussion.

The best responses related their responses clearly and systematically to the source material, using the research to illustrate their answers. Some candidates failed to use the source and inevitably restricted the marks that could be gained. Centres should stress the need to use both the source and their own knowledge and understanding.

Unfortunately a few candidates discussed other methods beyond the case study in the Source Material or contrasted case studies with many other research methods in their answers. The question was focussed specifically on case studies and so much of the material presented in this type of response, unless clearly related back to the central issue of the *'fitness for purpose'* of the target method tended not to be relevant and could not be credited.

Question 3

(a) Candidates generally used their knowledge and understanding of the evidence for age inequality from different units within the Specification, as well as the G674 unit itself. Most candidates correctly focused upon the relative inequality of young people. Some, however, tended simply to describe age differences rather than focus on providing evidence.

Aspects of age inequality that were identified and discussed by many candidates tended to be:

- education and training
- employment and unemployment
- promotion and career opportunities
- income and wealth
- health and welfare
- power and control at work
- patterns of crime and deviance
- family position and relationships
- politics.

The following concepts were often identified and discussed:

- age structure
- transition
- economic, social and cultural capital
- status
- access to labour markets
- access to power and political representation
- income
- life course
- image and consumer culture
- social exclusion
- marginalisation
- age identity and culture.

Theoretical explanations for age inequality were often identified and discussed, mainly including postmodern, feminist, Marxist, neo-Marxist, functionalist and Weberian.

The sociological writers most often cited were:

- Pilcher
- Parsons
- Hockey and James
- Bond et al
- Townsend
- Vincent
- Oakley
- Gannon

- Prout and James
- Featherstone and Hepworth
- Blaikie.

Candidates were most likely to outline some theoretical evidence and make reference to empirical studies. Some introduced relevant data and contemporary examples. The most effective responses made appropriate use of all these types of sociological evidence. Candidates gaining marks at the highest levels of response tended to describe the evidence for age inequality of young people; often comparing different age groups, supported by several different types of evidence, including empirical studies, data, concepts, theory and contemporary examples.

Candidates at the higher levels of response revealed an excellent ability to interpret sociological knowledge and understanding; the material was clearly, explicitly and consistently related back to the question.

Some candidates made very good use of contemporary examples, which tended to include:

- increasing gap between young, middle aged and elderly in the distribution of wealth
- recent patterns/changes in benefits provision
- unemployment and work experience in the economic recession/crisis by age group
- patterns of poverty and material deprivation affecting young people
- impact of increased taxation and withdrawal of benefits, eg EMA.

(b) Candidates were expected to outline and assess different explanations of age inequality. The following concepts were often identified and discussed:

- political economy of age
- socio-economic differences
- subcultures
- identity
- social roles
- independence
- transition
- disengagement
- social action
- culture and identity
- life chances
- interests
- status
- power
- class
- exploitation.

Candidates tended to refer to writers such as:

- Weber
- Runciman
- Crompton
- Parry
- McDonald
- Giddens
- Fielding

- Goldthorpe
- Savage
- Devine
- Newby.

Age differences in different aspects of social life were often used to illustrate answers, such as in education, employment, income and wealth, health and welfare, housing, political power, and patterns of crime and deviance. Alternative theoretical explanations of age inequality were usually explored and/or juxtaposed, for example Marxist, neo-Marxist, Weberian, feminist and postmodern. The impact on age differences of ethnicity, class and gender were sometimes compared or contrasted with age, as well as the intersection/interrelationship of these dimensions.

Comparison of alternative theoretical explanations was usually undertaken in evaluation. Some candidates simply described and juxtaposed different theoretical approaches. More effective responses used alternative approaches to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each explanation and also evaluated in a sustained and explicit way. The best responses also tended to conclude with a specific and clear assessment of which explanation(s) were most effective.

Candidates tended to refer to the following issues in evaluation of the different explanations:

- some emphasise consensus based on common identity and culture
- others see social change as a process of conflict over status and power related to age
- some theories may be applied to many societies
- differential emphasis on importance of class, status and power
- review of concepts like transition, disengagement, reserve army of labour, patriarchy and globalisation
- differential emphasis on structural or social action in society
- relative acknowledgement of the way other aspects of inequality may reinforce each other, e.g. class ethnicity and gender
- relative acknowledgement of the changing nature, fluidity and eclectic nature of culture and age inequality in postmodern society.

Candidates at the higher levels of response revealed an excellent ability to interpret sociological knowledge and understanding and apply it to an assessment of different approaches to age inequality. The material was clearly, explicitly and consistently related to the question.

Question 4

(a) The majority of candidates answered this question well. Candidates generally used their knowledge and understanding of patterns of class inequality and privilege from different units within the specification, as well as the G674 unit itself. Most candidates correctly presented evidence about privilege amongst different class groups. The best responses tended to present a range of recent evidence about privilege with some contemporary examples and focus.

Aspects of social life in which social class privilege was most often identified and discussed included:

- education
- employment
- income and wealth
- health and welfare

- housing
- political power
- patterns of crime and deviance
- portrayal within the media
- legislation.

The following concepts were often identified and discussed:

- different social classes – ruling, upper, middle, working, lower, underclass
- occupational structure
- professionals
- economic, social and cultural capital
- class
- status
- power
- poverty
- income and wealth
- social exclusion
- marginalisation
- fragmentation
- dual labour markets
- situational constraints
- access to power and political representation
- differential academic achievement.

Candidates most frequently referred to writers such as:

- Marx
- Weber
- Parsons
- Westergaard and Resler
- Scott
- Lansley
- Saunders
- Ehrenreich
- Braverman
- Lockwood
- Goldthorpe
- Savage
- Wynne
- Devine
- Murray
- Giddens
- Gallie
- Bourdieu
- Charlesworth
- Skeggs
- Pakulski and Waters.

Theoretical explanations for social class differences most often identified and discussed included Marxist, neo-Marxist, functionalist, postmodern, Weberian and feminist. The impact on social class differences of gender, age and ethnicity was sometimes compared or contrasted with class, as well as the intersection/interrelationship of these dimensions.

Contemporary examples most often cited were:

- continuing importance of private education and health
- new benefit regimes hitting lower social groups and underclass
- greater emphasis on working class crime
- increasing gap between classes in the distribution of wealth
- unemployment and work experience in the economic recession/crisis by class
- recent patterns of educational achievement.

Candidates were most likely to outline theoretical evidence and make some reference to empirical studies. Some introduced relevant data and contemporary examples to good effect. The most effective responses made appropriate use of all these types of sociological evidence.

Candidates gaining marks at the highest levels of response tended to describe class privilege in a range of different areas of social life supported by several different types of evidence, including empirical studies, data, concepts, theory and contemporary examples.

Candidates at the higher levels of response revealed an excellent ability to interpret sociological knowledge and understanding and apply it to the issue. The material was clearly, explicitly and consistently related to the question.

Some candidates did not address the issue of privilege and simply described different forms of class inequality, which did not demonstrate a focussed interpretation of the question.

(b) The majority of candidates answered this question very well. Candidates were expected to outline and assess sociological explanations of the changing class structure.

Responses tended to describe and evaluate a range of sociological explanations, usually functionalist, Marxist, neo-Marxist, Weberian, feminist and postmodern.

Most candidates were able to describe a range of approaches at least simply with a few relevant concepts and studies. The best responses did so comprehensively in a wide ranging and detailed manner. Some weaker responses tended to describe class inequality in a generalised way or some theories, but neglected evaluation and assessment, which was the focus of the question.

The following concepts were often discussed:

- power
- class
- status
- means of production
- conflict
- consensus
- patriarchy
- polarisation
- revolution
- growth of bureaucracy
- growth of middle class
- evolution and adaptation
- underclass
- migration
- exploitation
- ideology
- resistance

- assimilation
- culture
- media and technological change
- globalisation
- death of class.

Candidates often referred to a very wide range of sociological writers from across a range of theoretical traditions. Writers most frequently referred to included:

- Marx
- Savage
- Weber
- Barron and Norris
- Durkheim
- Parsons
- Giddens
- Pakulski and Walters.

The impact on class inequality of gender, age and ethnicity was occasionally compared or contrasted with class and the changing class structure, as well as the intersection/interrelationship of these dimensions.

Changing class inequalities in different aspects of social life were often used to illustrate answers, such as education, employment, income and wealth, health and welfare, housing, political power, and patterns of crime and deviance.

As candidates were expected to evaluate a range of explanations of the changing class structure, the main contrasts of approach tended to include:

- understanding of different levels of society and social class change – macro vs micro; structure, action and cultural
- different explanations focus on the role of different classes in change e.g. Marx and the working class; Weber and the middle class
- discussion of the merits of the embourgeoisement and proletarian debates
- the importance of conflict and consensus in social class change to different degrees
- differences in approach to explaining social change and stability
- recognises economic, political and cultural dimensions to class change to different degrees
- different explanations offer different types/speed of change – revolutionary vs evolutionary
- discussion of the view that class inequality is no longer significant
- different explanations may underemphasise impact of ethnicity, gender and age on change to the class structure.

Comparison of alternative theoretical explanations was usually undertaken. Some candidates simply described and juxtaposed different theoretical approaches. More effective responses used alternative approaches to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of different explanations, and evaluated in a sustained and explicit manner throughout. The best responses also tended to conclude the answer with a specific, clear assessment or comparison of different explanations.

Candidates at the higher levels of response revealed an excellent ability to interpret sociological knowledge and understanding and apply it to an assessment of different explanations of gender inequalities. The material was clearly, explicitly and consistently related to the question.

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