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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

SOCIOLOGY

GCE Advanced Level and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Paper 9699/01

Essay

General comments

The overall standard of scripts was pleasingly high and most candidates demonstrated at least a sound knowledge and understanding of the appropriate sociological concepts and ideas. Candidates who were able to combine a detailed and accurate understanding of the relevant subject matter with incisive analysis and well-drawn conclusions wrote the best scripts.

A few candidates from particular Centres disappointed by attempting to answer the questions on the basis of common sense rather than informed sociological reasoning. Answers of this kind cannot hope to achieve the requisite standard for AS Level. It is imperative that prospective candidates for this examination have access to an appropriate textbook for the syllabus and study the relevant sections in that book thoroughly. The latest edition of *Sociology Explained*, which will become the recommended textbook for the syllabus, is to be published by Cambridge University Press in April 2003.

There were no rubric errors and candidates appeared to have no difficulty in answering the required two questions in the time available to them.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This was the least popular of the questions and attracted some poor answers. A basic response was to make a few loosely informed comments about the functionalist and Marxist theories of power. A better answer provided more detail about these theories and assessed their relative strengths and limitations. Some candidates also made useful references to pluralist and elite theories of power.

Question 2

This was the most widely answered question. Weaker responses tended to provide just a simple account of what socialisation involves, often limited to the functionalist perspective. Better answers focused on the reference to 'evidence' in the question and fulfilled the Examiners expectations by discussing some of the arguments and examples that sociologists use to demonstrate the importance of social forces in shaping human behaviour. Particular credit was given for considering such evidence as the cases of children raised with little or no human contact and studies that demonstrate cross-cultural differences in behaviour patterns. Some candidates made good use of Durkheim's study of suicide to illustrate the supposed impact of social forces on human behaviour. At the highest level, a range of appropriate evidence was described *and* assessed.

Question 3

This question was well answered overall. A few candidates disappointed by offering only a basic account of the strengths and limitations of participant observation. Better answers focused on the issue of objectivity and the specific difficulties it raises for studies based on participant observation. References to appropriate studies was helpful in supporting key points and some candidates also made good use of the distinction between covert and overt participant observation to show that problems of objectivity differ to some extent depending on the type of observation undertaken. Some candidates also impressed by offering strong conclusions, such as the argument that the inherent subjectivity of participant observation studies may be considered a strength rather than a weakness of the method.

Question 4

A basic response was to note some practical strengths and limitations of questionnaires in a rather general fashion. Better answers focused on postal questionnaires specifically and also considered both theoretical and practical strengths and limitations of this research method. Candidates who applied the concepts of reliability and validity accurately in assessing the value of postal questionnaires received particular credit.

Question 5

A lot of the answers to this question relied on common sense rather than on sociological evidence and reasoning. There were a few highly creditable answers though that demonstrated a good understanding of both cultural and structural theories of poverty. Some candidates also impressed by noting that general theories of the causes of poverty may be deficient because the circumstances under which people become poor may vary considerably between different groups.

Question 6

A relatively weak response was to outline the nature of sexual inequality in modern industrial societies without relating the material to the specific wording of the question. Better answers identified reasons why women's role in the family may prevent them from achieving equality with men in employment. The Examiners were particularly impressed by candidates who adopted a critical perspective on the issues raised by the question; for example, by considering other factors that may account for sexual inequality in employment, or by questioning the extent to which women's role in the family is an obstacle to equality in employment today. A few candidates also rightly questioned the one-directional causality implied in the question by noting that women's role in the family may be influenced by their experience of employment.

Paper 9699/02

Data Response

General comments

The overall standard of performance in this Paper was similar to that in June 2002. While some candidates provided detailed and well-informed answers, others clearly experienced difficulty in adapting to the requirements of structured data response questions. Part of the problem is due to candidates writing over-long answers to the two and four mark questions, and thereby leaving themselves with insufficient time to compose detailed and well thought through answers to the more demanding eight and eleven mark questions. In general, it should be possible and indeed desirable for candidates to answer parts (a) and (b) of each question in no more than half a side of writing paper. Answers to parts (c) and (d) need to be longer, though candidates should also bear in mind the importance of focusing directly on the question so that a clear and concise response is delivered. Many of the candidates this year responded to the parts (c) and (d) questions only in a rather general fashion, and while this may demonstrate some lack of understanding of the subject matter, it also suggests that there is room for improvement in examination technique. The CIE Sociology discussion group web site is now available for Teachers who wish to exchange ideas or raise questions about issues such as examination technique and preparing candidates for AS Level Papers.

There were no rubric errors and most candidates appeared to have no difficulty in answering the required two questions in the time available.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) Some answers demonstrated a partial understanding of the concept and so gained one mark. Most answers though were sufficiently clear and accurate to gain full marks.
- (b) A common mistake was to identify two relevant examples, but without any development to show how in each case society shapes what individuals do. This type of response gained half marks only. Better answers addressed the 'how' part of the question by, for example, considering the use of particular sanctions or rewards to encourage conformity. Useful references were made in this respect to such processes as peer group pressure, ridicule, ostracism, legally prescribed punishments, and the internalisation of norms and values through socialisation.

- (c) Weaker answers outlined certain features of the nurture/nature debate without relating them specifically to the question. Better answers concentrated on explaining why sociologists believe that it is largely the social environment that shapes human behaviour. For example, useful references were made to the limitations of accounts of human behaviour that are based on references to biology. Studies that purport to demonstrate the impact of social forces on human behaviour (e.g. Durkheim's study of suicide and feminist studies of cross-cultural variations in gender roles) were also rightly cited as evidence in favour of the sociological perspective.
- (d) A lot of answers to this question went little further than to provide a summary of the functionalist concept of socialisation. Better answers demonstrated some awareness of the debates in sociology about determinism versus free will and structure versus action. This was often delivered within the context of a discussion about contrasts between the macro and micro perspectives. At the highest level, a few candidates impressed the Examiners by commenting on the limitations of both the determinist and the voluntarist positions. Useful references to the post-modernist perspective were also featured in some answers.

Question 2

- (a) A number of candidates merely stated that 'qualitative research is the collection of evidence based on participant observation'. This was sufficient to gain one mark, but for two marks it was necessary to define the term directly i.e. 'qualitative research is a form of data collection and analysis that relies on understanding the meanings that individuals attach to their behaviour'.
- (b) Good answers were based on examples that demonstrated sound knowledge of the concept of reliability. Weaker answers wrongly equated 'reliability' with the looser notion of 'accuracy' in the collection of research evidence and so the examples given were less convincing.
- (c) General descriptive accounts of the positivist position in sociology gained around half marks. To go higher, the discussion needed to focus directly on an accurate understanding of the concept of reliability and/or address the issue of why interactionists are critical of the research methods that are favoured by the positivists.
- (d) Weak answers were characterised by a few basic observations about the use of official statistics in sociology, with little or no reference to the concepts of validity and reliability. Better answers deployed these concepts effectively and, in some cases, also considered other criteria for assessing the value of official statistics as a source of research evidence e.g. cost, accessibility, scale, representativeness, etc.

Question 3

- (a) Most candidates who attempted this question were able to offer a clear and accurate definition of the term 'status'.
- (b) Most of the candidates were able to identify two relevant examples for which two marks were awarded. To gain the other two marks it was necessary to describe how each example may contribute to social inequality, and some candidates failed to do this.
- (c) The answers to this question were disappointing overall. Most were limited to identifying a few general links between good health and social inequality. Good answers would have referred to relevant research evidence, such as the Black report, and may also have considered the distinction between structural versus cultural approaches to explaining inequalities in health care and mortality rates. There were very few answers of this quality, however.
- (d) There were quite a few weak answers that relied solely on common sense observations about the purported causes of social inequality. Better answers demonstrated sound understanding of at least one recognised sociological explanation of why social inequality exists. Often this was delivered in terms of the contrast between functionalist and Marxist theories, though some candidates also impressed by making useful references to the Weberian and feminist perspectives. At the top of the band the assessment was sustained and well informed, with a clear attempt to reach a balanced and well-reasoned conclusion.

Paper 9699/03**Paper 3 - Social Change and Differentiation****General comments**

Most candidates appeared well prepared for this Paper this session and completed the correct number of answers appropriately. Those candidates who answered questions from the new sections of the syllabus largely did so from a basis of knowledge.

Most candidates appear to be following the rubric with accuracy although there are still some who are answering both questions within each section and therefore covering six questions in all with negative consequences for their result. It was a disappointment that some candidates chose to answer part **(a)** of the first question within a section and part **(b)** of the second thereby incurring a rubric error and losing marks.

Overall candidates are answering the questions well with descriptive answers to the first part of a question and more analytical answers to the second part, but they do need to divide the time spent on each part more appropriately, as indicated by the mark scheme. A more detailed answer should be given to the second part.

More candidates need to read both parts of the question before answering, as many include details in the first part that would be better included in the second. Centres can be confident that candidates will not be expected to repeat large sections of evidence within the same examination.

In order to be successful at this Paper, candidates should be focused on brief knowledge-driven answers in part **(a)** that may be supported by examples and more detailed analytical answers in part **(b)**.

Although levels of accuracy have improved over time, there remain a number of candidates who need to be more careful that they have read the questions carefully before they begin.

In order to improve performance, candidates need to refer to more sociological knowledge as well as maintain their focus on the requirements of the question.

Comments on specific questions**Section A****Question 1**

A very popular question that most candidates answered very well, applying knowledge with accuracy and some evaluation.

- (a)** The functions of the family were well understood and at the top end of the mark band the views of different theorists were introduced. Some answers were too long and candidates gained nothing from this. Many gave details of family structure and roles rather than talking about the functions of the family.
- (b)** In this part of the question many candidates did not answer the question that was set, which required an explanation of the way in which industrialisation has affected such processes as the economic function of the family. Rather, there were discussions of such processes relating to changing conjugal roles. At the top end, there were many good discussions of the way in which industrialisation may or may not change the functions of the family. Explicit evaluation was frequently missing and this is needed to access the higher bands.

Question 2

This question was not selected by as many candidates as the first. There was a tendency for the first part of the question to be better understood than the second.

- (a)** Candidates who did well at this question linked the way that family structures may have changed to industrialisation and did not get side tracked into describing either functions or roles. Many candidates limited themselves to the extended/nuclear debate.

- (b) The range of answers to this question was vast and there were some excellent evaluations of the way in which feminist theory has added to a sociological understanding of the family. At the extreme, there were answers that just described what women did or gave non-evaluative descriptions of different feminist theories. Few candidates were able to distinguish between the different feminist theories.

Section B

Question 3

Many candidates selected this question and the majority of them had been well prepared.

- (a) This question only asked about the effects of poverty on educational attainment and those candidates who focused on the material consequences of poverty did well. Some answers were further developed with reference being made to the way that these material drawbacks can have other consequences in the classroom. Poverty is not interchangeable with working class and those candidates who took that view tended not to do themselves credit. There were a wide range of responses to this question.
- (b) Few candidates did very well on this section, as there was a lack of clarity about the meaning of legitimisation. It was disappointing that many candidates took the opportunity to praise the gains to be had from an education, which was not the focus of the question.

Question 4

This question was selected by a fairly large number of candidates and, unlike many of the other questions, the second part tended to be answered to a higher standard.

- (a) Those candidates that understood the nature of pupil subcultures and used appropriate examples, such as that of Willis's lads, did well. It was apparent from the scripts that some candidates had no clear understanding of what subcultures are and used inappropriate examples such as ethnicity.
- (b) There were some very good answers to this question and although it was not exclusively about gender some candidates took that view and used appropriate material in an evaluative way. There was a disappointing lack of evaluation of the importance of internal factors.

Section C

Question 5

This question was selected by only a few candidates and they generally did not demonstrate a firm grasp of the subject matter.

- (a) Many candidates attempted to answer this question with a variety of definitions of the role of religion but did not show how religion can give legitimacy to the society in which it operates.
- (b) This part of the question received better answers, with the majority of candidates focusing on Marxist explanations. Those candidates that accessed the higher bands also looked at Functionalist and Weberian theories.

Question 6

A small number of students selected this question.

- (a) The best answers to this question not only gave detailed definitions of sects/cults but also pointed out the confusion that can arise between them. Candidates were not expected to sort out this confusion in order to do well.
- (b) There were a very few satisfactory answers to this question, as few students paid attention to the apparently secular in the question and confined themselves to explaining the existence of sects alone. There were some good descriptions of sociological explanations of the theories of religion.

Section D

Question 7

This was the most popular question and was well answered by the majority of candidates.

- (a) This question gained the majority of high band marks for the whole Paper. Most candidates identified two clearly different weaknesses in crime statistics (although many gave two examples of underreporting) and some supported these answers well to gain high marks. Answers that argued that the crime statistics may not be misleading were not convincing.
- (b) Many candidates tended to elaborate on their answer to the previous section and this did not gain them much credit. Arguing that the agencies of law enforcement give females lighter sentences due to chivalry is mistaken, as these lighter sentences still appear in the statistics. Female crime rates are changing, but there is still plenty of evidence to support the view that females are less involved in crime than males. Many good answers expressed this point of view.

Question 8

This question was not selected by many candidates.

- (a) Candidates who knew what anomie was and were able to give definitions of the concept that could included Durkheim and Merton did well. Those who confused the concept with alienation did not.
- (b) Few candidates gave convincing explanations as to their understanding of the meaning of the new criminology and without a clear explanation it was difficult to do well. Candidates do need to be clear in their understanding of the central concepts of the topic areas.

Section E

Question 9

This question was answered by virtually no candidates, but those who did answer the question were well prepared and did well.

Question 10

Few candidates answered this question, and those who did failed to convince the Examiners that they had been well prepared. Many mistakes were made, such as describing workforce deskilling as learning a skill.

Section F

Question 11

This question was answered by a small number of candidates.

- (a) Most candidates took the view that the influence of the press arises from the publicity that it generates, but little was written that was directly relevant to elections.
- (b) The candidates who selected this question tended to agree with the proposition and supported their argument from a broadly Marxist base. There was little or no evaluation of opposing views, for example the Functionalist or Pluralist approach.

Question 12

This question was selected by very few candidates.