

GCE Examiners' Report

Sociology

GCE

Summer 2025

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Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each unit.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For unitted specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitted specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)

¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.wjec.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page.
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Executive Summary

The assessment across Units 1 to 4 revealed a varied performance among candidates, with strengths in knowledge recall and question engagement, but persistent challenges in evaluation and application of sociological evidence.

Unit 1: Acquiring Culture.

This unit assesses AO1, AO2, and AO3, with Section A focusing on sociological methods and Section B offering a choice of questions on social inequalities. While some candidates demonstrated broad and deep understanding, many responses remained descriptive rather than evaluative. Stronger candidates engaged in well-supported debate, but evaluative skills were generally underdeveloped. The spread of responses was consistent with previous series, indicating ongoing variability in candidate performance.

Unit 2: Understanding Society and Methods of Sociological Enquiry

Most candidates attempted all questions, though rubric errors were noted, with some answering across different sections. AO1 was generally stronger than AO3, and many candidates successfully referenced the item when required. Evaluation was more accurately applied, with fewer instances of unnecessary evaluative content. However, AO3 remains the area where most marks are lost. Candidates often listed arguments rather than using sociological evidence to support debates. The data question continues to be problematic, with frequent misinterpretation of graphs and tables.

Unit 3: Power and Control

Performance was similar to the previous year, with few rubric errors and most candidates attempting all questions. Option 1 (Crime and Deviance) was overwhelmingly preferred. The 40-mark essays were generally better answered than lower tariff questions, though AO3 remains a challenge. The question on masculinity and crime was poorly answered, with many candidates discussing gender more broadly and failing to address masculinity directly. Effective use of contextual material is essential for higher band marks. Anecdotal evidence was common, especially in lower tariff responses, and references to biological and psychological theories were more frequent, possibly due to crossover with studying Criminology. Time management was mostly appropriate, though some short responses and overly long essays with irrelevant content were noted. A recurring administrative issue is the failure to complete the front of the answer booklet.

Unit 4: Social Inequality and Applied Methods of Sociological Enquiry

Candidates are expected to apply their understanding of research methods to a task and analyse a research synopsis. Many relied on pre-rehearsed research designs, which lacked contextualisation and failed to score highly. Evaluation skills were generally weak. Some candidates structured their responses effectively (e.g. outlining design followed by problems), but justification and contextualisation were often lacking. The best essays used evidence to enhance evaluative commentary, and the strongest research designs were consistently contextualised. Marks were lost when candidates used multiple methods despite instructions to use only one.

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UNIT 1 – ACQUIRING CULTURE

Overview of the Unit

- AO1, AO2 and AO3 are assessed in this unit.
- This unit assesses the ability of candidates to apply their knowledge and understanding of methods of sociological enquiry in compulsory section A.
- In section B, candidates have a choice of two questions, both of which focus on social inequalities.
- Some centres/candidates demonstrated wide ranging knowledge and understanding. Some candidates were able to engage in well supported debate. However, many candidates continue to produce descriptive rather than evaluative accounts of sociological ideas.
- There was a spread of responses as in previous series.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A – Compulsory Question

- Q.1 (a) It was a surprise to find that some students struggled to offer a concise, accurate definition of this term. Those who failed to score full marks either failed to offer a clear definition of the term, did not use the item, or both. Merely copying a section of the item does not constitute using it to show understanding. Because the item did not contain an answer there were ample opportunities to demonstrate their understanding by developing any of the themes in the item. Sadly, many failed to do so.
- (b) Most candidates were able to identify two agents of socialisation and most focused on the process as the task required. These candidates were, therefore, able to access band 4 marks. Once again, most candidates wrote about family, peer groups or education. Good answers included processes such as canalisation, manipulation, verbal appellations, imitation, sanctions, role modelling and peer pressure, showing a clear understanding of how these agents of socialisation help to pass on norms and values. However, a significant minority failed to explain how agents do so. Many candidates conflated education and peer group.

Many presented rehearsed answers that made no link, via examples, with the specifics of the question which were norms and values. Instead, they offered, at best, generalised accounts of socialisation. Candidates who talked in general terms about what socialisation is rather than how it happens were precluded from obtaining any more than 3 marks for AO1.

Section B

Option 1: Families and Households

- Q.2 (a) (i) Responses to this question were mixed. Some candidates were able to offer a definition, two other facts and an example to show their understanding whilst others floundered. Answers also varied from centre to centre making it obvious where candidates had not studied this aspect of demography despite it being clearly stated in the specification.
- (ii) This question should have enabled rich, detailed responses. Indeed, some responses demonstrated detailed AO1. However, others presented generic, anecdotal reasons, unsupported with evidence or examples. The ongoing problem with these questions is the effective use of evidence to support the reasons offered, followed by an explanation of how the evidence supports the reason. Often, evidence to support the suggestion that the changing role and independence of women could be a reason were supported with reference to Sue Sharpe's study conducted in the early 1990s. So, to access the highest mark bands candidates need to provide two accurate and relevant reasons that are supported with contemporary evidence and this evidence should be explained. The use of the word 'change' in the question gave candidates the opportunity to talk about increase, decrease or both.
- (b + c) Both essay choices were popular. However, 2b required a clear understanding of a range of explanations of the notion that the nuclear family is outdated. Most candidates chose to approach this from a theoretical point of view which was acceptable. However, many were unable to effectively argue against the view. Looking at the ongoing preference for traditional and non-traditional nuclear family types could have provided a framework for an insightful and relevant discussion. Most responses were juxtaposed descriptions of different theoretical views at best. Many candidates were able to apply their knowledge and understanding but few were able to evaluate the views described.

The essay asking candidates to evaluate the view that families are bad for women was answered relatively well by many candidates. However, opportunities to apply evidence to the debate were not utilized, and what was evident in this year's responses was the preponderance of very dated material. Research dating back to the 1970s in essays asking about contemporary society lacked academic rigor and clear engagement with Sociology. Whilst it is acknowledged that most textbooks are dated, there are resources available on the WJEC website and journals citing up-to-date research that offer fascinating opportunities to engage students in contemporary sociological issues and debates. Coaching candidates to construct well supported lines of debate is a way to enhance outcomes as well as supported argument with commentary is more likely to give access to higher marks for AO3. Candidates were not penalised for utilising dated material, but teachers and lecturers should at least be aware that society has changed considerably since many of the older studies were conducted, making their findings somewhat irrelevant to contemporary discussions.

Option 2: Youth Cultures

- Q.3 (a) (i) Most candidates could offer a definition of laddette though not all were able to access full marks. Adding detail to the definition by identifying features and examples of laddette culture allowed candidates to score higher marks. Some responses were confused.
- (ii) This question was answered quite well. Most candidates were able to identify two reasons for the apparent lack of involvement of females in youth cultures, with at least one reason supported with evidence. Studies used tended to be those by McRobbie and Garber. Inevitably, many responses referred to the focus on male youth subcultures of the past and the fact that females were often ignored because they tended to play a smaller role in these subcultures, so they were of less interest to researchers. Most responses to this question offered bedroom culture and being ignored as the main reasons for the apparent absence of females. Where candidates failed to access the highest marks, it was often because of a lack of supporting evidence and or lack of explanation.
- (b) + (c) Both essay options were popular. 3b required an examination of the validity of postmodern views of youth subcultures which most were able to identify, though not necessarily engage in effectively. Candidates were able to demonstrate some knowledge of the functionalist view that youth cultures can be a right of passage for young people. Most were able to offer alternative views on the role of youth cultures, but many lost the focus of the debate and presented juxtaposed descriptive accounts of different ideas. However, in both essays the weaknesses observed in the Families and Households option were also evident in this option. Weak evaluation skills and lack of commentary linked to the focus of the debate were typical issues preventing access to the highest marks for AO2 and AO3.

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UNIT 2 – UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY AND METHODS OF SOCIOLOGICAL ENQUIRY

Overview of the Unit

Overall, most questions were attempted, however some candidates made rubric errors, with candidates answering questions from different sections. AO1 marks tended to be awarded higher than AO3 marks and it was pleasing to say how many candidates made successful references to the item when required. Candidates grasp the commands of the question well with fewer responses providing evaluation when not required. Centres should be advised that the AO3 scale is where most marks are lost and candidates should practise using social logical evidence to support debates, rather than listing the points for both sides of the debate. Attention is still needed in the data question, as many marks are lost for a lack of accurate interpretation of the data in the graph or tables provided.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1 (a) Many candidates struggled to define the term representative without repeating the word. A better answer referred to how a sample reflects the target population. Weaker answers mentioned how the sample must contain all social groups. Most responses relied on the item which prevented top marks being awarded. Centres should be advised to instruct candidates to learn explicit definitions of key terms for this question.
- (b) This question required two sociological explanations about why interviews should be used to collect qualitative data. Many candidates may not have read the question fully and included points referring to closed questions or quantitative data which were not creditworthy. Often two reasons were presented but they were repetitive of each other. Responses regarding ethics gained little credit as these would be applicable to all or most methods and the question was asking the candidates to focus on interviews under qualitative data. Where credit was given for ethical issues, it referred to sensitivity or protection from harm as qualitative data allows participants to explore sensitive topics and the researcher being present allows support to be offered. Links to the item were not always used and was simply quoted which gained minimal credit. Many responses mentioned other methods such as focus groups or questionnaires which is not required of this question. Better answers talked about gaining trust or a rapport with the participant and building a relationship which allowed for more validity. Candidates should be made aware that there are no marks for evaluation in this question.
- (c) This question required use of the item and social logical studies to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of questionnaires. This meant that the candidate could refer to open or closed questions or a variety of types of questionnaires. Candidates should be made aware that there is no credit available for describing the method or what it does and how it collects data. Similar to the previous question, ethical issues did not attract higher band credit. For example, consent however discussion of how questionnaires can lack sensitivity or follow up care for the participant where creditable.

Many responses listed strengths and weaknesses with juxtaposed evaluation which limited the marks to band 2. Credit was not given for issues of generalizability as this would depend on the characteristics of the sample. However, credit was given to explanations of how question is confused for a large sample and therefore are more likely to be representative. Better answers discussed a low response rate, social desirability bias and issues of reliability. Marks were lost where research studies were not used or simply quoted or named. Candidates should be made aware that sociological studies should be used to develop the evaluation point.

- Q.2 (a) (i) This question required the candidate to describe the trends and patterns from the data, rather than simply listing the information from the graph. Despite comments in previous years examiners reports, candidates are still losing marks for not making the distinction between percentage point differences and percentage differences. Better answers for this question compared trends between boys and girls over time, whereas limited credit was given for a comparison of how girls achievement had changed over time or how boys' achievement had changed over time. Credit was given for approximations in this question as the percentages were not explicitly clear from the graph. Candidates should be made aware that reasons to explain the trends in the data are not creditable in this question. Many candidates who list data and repeat the interpretation that girls do better than boys only received credits in band 2.
- (ii) This question required two social reasons for gender and achievement. Weaker answers focused on school experience rather than achievement, for example subject choice or masculinity. Some candidates did attempt to apply lack of role models, gender pay gap or educational policies to gender differences in achievement, but this was not always done successfully. Several answers were one sided, for example explanations as to why boys are failing without explanations as to why girls are achieving higher. Answers that were less relevant to contemporary society received a minimal credit, for example explanations as to why girls used to fail in education and outdated policies. Better answers referred to a lack of motivation from boys, with reference to the influence of peers and quoting the research by Paul Willis. Similarly, motivation in girls focused on improvements to pay and career options, as well as the increase in female role models with reference to the research by Sue Sharpe. Candidates should be advised for this type of question the focus of their response should be an achievement.
- (b) This essay question was the least popular from the education topic and it required a discussion of how inside factors influence achievement by ethnicity. Weaker answers contained no discussion and listed reasons or only focused on inside factors with no evaluation. Many candidates drifted into social class and gender in their responses and others were more anecdotal with a lack of social logical evidence. Many responses were stereotypical and were not supported by sociological evidence. For example, explaining how ethnic minority groups do not speak English or in elaborate code or how many live in poverty without support from evidence. Other weaker responses may have misunderstood the question and focused on external factors such as housing or culture.

Many responses did not focus on achievement. Better answers focused on institutional racism, stereotypes, the ethnocentric curriculum, with debates on how some children proved teachers wrong, the influence of outside factors, or a discussion of the diversity of ethnicity. Candidates should be reminded that this question does not require a discussion of achievement by minority ethnic groups and therefore reasons for differences in achievement among majority ethnic groups should also be included. For example, better answers discussed the interaction between ethnicity, gender and social class using supporting evidence from Madood, Sewell, Fuller and Mirza.

- (c) This was the more popular question from the education section and required candidates to assess the view that education prepares young people for the workplace. Weaker responses presented a general theory aside discussing the role of education without applying it to preparation for the workplace. For example, how school is a bridge and how it is meritocratic, how it is an agent of socialisation, an ideological state apparatus or how it is patriarchal, without reference to the workplace. Better answers referred to the correspondence principle and role allocation, with good explanations of how inequality in education prepares young people for inequality in the workplace, referencing gender ethnicity and social class. Candidates should be made aware that social logical evidence is needed in this uncertain to strengthen the debate, as many responses relied on anecdotes and use of examples. Better responses used data and policies to support their argument along with sociological evidence from Baynard, Sharpe and Willis. Many candidates still presented debates in juxtaposition and lacked a conclusion, but a better response referred to postmodernist theories of how the workplace has changed and therefore the theories are now out of date. Other strong responses discussed how education prepares some children for the workplace, for example white middle class, but not all, with reference to social groups.

- Q.3 (a) (i) This question required a description and interpretation of the data from the graph and as the percentages were given for each bar, accuracy was essential. Many candidates simply listed the data for each age group without any interpretation and like similar questions in previous years, candidates incorrectly discussed percentage change rather than percentage point change, losing marks. Candidates should be reminded that reasons for the data in the graph are not creditable.
- (ii) This question required two sociological reasons for the relationship between age and the use of social media sites and apps, and many candidates relied on anecdotal points such as older people being less adept at using the Internet or not understanding social media. Very little reference was made to apps despite it being in the question. Weaker answers refer to the media in general, rather than social media and better answers made reference to socialisation or Marxist views of target audiences and consumerism. They were pleasing responses to identity and to the changes in social media as a way to communicate.

- (b) This essay question required a discussion of the models of media effects on the audience such as the hypodermic syringe model, two-step flow model or cultural effects model. Better answers debated using pluralists and postmodernist theories, explaining how audiences are no longer passive or how media is created by people rather than the ruling class. Weaker responses but general theory essays with a little reference to models, for example, a discussion of moral panics, focus on consumption, all focus on ownership. Many answers relied on examples from the media rather than social logical evidence. Evaluation was weak for many candidates who relied on juxtaposition to gain basic AO3 marks.
- (c) This question required the candidates to assess the view that media representations of social class are based on stereotypes, with better responses focusing on Marxist theory and debated with interactionism. Weaker answers drifted into gender or listed prints that agreed with the statement with no assessment or evaluation. Many responses focused on working class despite the question saying social class and marks were lost when the focus was on ownership of the media without a discussion of how the class of the owner might contribute to the misrepresentation of the working class. Evaluation was weak for many candidates who relied on juxtaposition to gain basic AO3 marks.
- Q.4 (a) (i) This question required description and interpretation of the table to summarise the changes among people who chose the category other religions in the census. Weaker responses simply listed the information from the table with little interpretation and gained very few marks. Better answers interpreted which religions had changed in comparison to each other.
- (ii) This question required two social reasons for people identifying with smaller new religious movements. Better responses included how traditional religions no longer provide the functions they once did and made reference to social changes. Weaker candidates focused on reasons for securitisation rather than for joining NRMs, or confused NRMs with new age groups or spirituality in general. Stronger answers explained how NRM's appeal to different social groups or how changing patterns in the workplace and family life may leave no time for traditional religious practises, with some strong answers focusing on individualism.
- (b) Of the two religious questions this one was more popular. Many candidates gave a debate between functionalist theory of religion, including Durkheim, Malinowski and Parsons with evaluation from feminism and Marxism. Some answers included a debate between religion as a conservative force and religion as a force for social change, which were credit worthy when applied to the theories behind these concepts. Candidates lost marks for poor evaluation or juxtaposed ideas. Stronger candidates provided a conclusion with evaluation about how religion has changed and therefore the traditional theories are no longer relevant, Or the functions are provided from other agents of socialisation.

- (c) This question was less popular and required a discussion of the view that the UK is no longer a religious society. Stronger answers focused on a debate between religiosity and securitisation with the focus on changes in practise beliefs and functions of religion. Weaker responses relied on anecdotal evidence such as church attendance and changes in religious rituals. Candidates lost marks on evaluation as many debates were juxtaposed. However, stronger answers provided a conclusion with discussion around a growth in NRMs and NAGs or a revival of religions apart from Christianity. Strong answers focused on the role of science in contemporary society to provide many of the functions of traditional religion. Some candidates focused on how religion means different things to different social groups. For example, the decline in religion among men put the rise among women, the increase in attendance and function of religion for certain ethnic groups anti religion is used by different social classes.

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UNIT 3 – POWER AND CONTROL

Overview of the Unit

- Unit 3 responses were similar in standard to last year with some examples of outstanding answers utilising a broad range of sociology.
- Also similar to last year, very few students failed to attempt questions and there were very few rubric errors.
- With the exception of a few candidates, again, option 1 – Crime and Deviance was the option chosen by the vast majority of candidates.
- In this series, the 40-mark essays tended to be answered more effectively than the lower tariff questions, though it continues to be the case that accessing the AO3 marks in these questions provides candidates with the most difficulty.
- The relationship between masculinity and crime was the least well answered question with many students failing to address masculinity explicitly, choosing rather to discuss gender and crime more generally. Using material that relates to the context of the question is integral to accessing marks in all bands, but particularly for bands 3 and 4.
- Large numbers of students use anecdotal rather than sociological evidence, particularly in the lower tariff questions. This was particularly evident when explaining the meaning of the hidden figure of crime.
- References to biological and psychological examples were also more prevalent, perhaps reflecting the increasing numbers of students who also study criminology.
- Time allocation seems largely appropriate, though it is a persisting issue that a) responses are too short and the 40-mark essays can turn into pages of tangential or irrelevant material.
- A continued issue regarding administration is that the majority of students do not fill in the front of their booklets to indicate questions answered.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1 (a) (i) This question is assessed on AO1 – knowledge and understanding (4), and AO2 – application of knowledge (6). Nearly all students attempted this question, but as with previous series answers tended to be too short and top band answers remain in the minority. As ever, the best prepared candidates understood the importance of providing a clear definition of the term/concept and referred to directly relevant sociology. It was the case that nearly all students had something of an understanding of the meaning of the hidden figure of crime and as such most candidates were able to offer at least a hint of a definition, though these differed greatly in both clarity and detail. Many were able to provide relevant examples such as unreported sex offences and middle-class crime, however, the majority of examples were anecdotal with minimal, if any, relevant sociology. Concepts such as white-collar and corporate crime and chivalry thesis and corresponding sociologists such as Sutherland and Pollak (still not a feminist!) were used effectively by some candidates, but for most, relevant writers were lacking. A significant minority of candidates referenced institutional racism and the over-policing of ethnic minorities but failed to make this relevant to the question.

Use of different forms of crime data collection was effective for some candidates, but turned into non-creditworthy evaluation for others.

This question is often left by candidates until last which can lead to timing issues with answers lacking development and detail, even when it was clear that they had knowledge and understanding of the term. As such, candidates are well advised to spend more time on this question, developing their points/examples fully and to make an effort to include (at least one) relevant sociologist.

- (ii) This question is assessed on AO1 – knowledge and understanding (12), and AO2 – application of knowledge (8).

The majority of students struggled with the focus of this question as it required knowledge, evidence and examples relating specifically to masculinity and crime rather than gender per se. This resulted in a poorer performance on this question than has been noted in previous series'. The majority of candidates simply wrote about gender and crime and this often included lengthy descriptions of Heidensohn's control theory, Carlen's class and gender deals and of course Pollak's (never a feminist!) chivalry thesis, largely focusing on female crime and therefore for the most part, not relevant. Also, very prevalent in these answers was reference to Lombroso's physiological theory of crime, taught in criminology, but not relevant sociologically. Many candidates wrote about education and anti-school subcultures rather than crime. More relevant answers utilised Parson's sex-role theory and older subcultural theories such as those of Miller and Cohen and were able to gain some credit. However, reference to the most relevant sociologist writers who focus explicitly on masculinity and crime such as Messerschmidt, Winlow, Hobbs, Young, Collier, etc, were in a minority. 'Toxic masculinity' as a concept with Andrew Tate as an example, appeared relatively frequently but largely anecdotally. Use of relevant statistics, when accurate, is always good to see but not essential for this question. It is evident that the majority of students are able to structure this question well, providing a range of sociological theories, concepts and evidence to support the discussion, separating out their points into different paragraphs and not wasting time evaluating, however, lack of explicit sociological knowledge on masculinity and crime resulted in underperformance this year.

- (b)+(c) These essay questions are marked on all three skills: AO1 – knowledge (13), AO2 – application (13) and AO3 – evaluation (14). AO3 continues to be the weakest skill. Well prepared candidates demonstrated they understood the importance of using relevant sociological writers, concepts and evidence which was analysed and evaluated appropriately.

- (b) This essay was by far the more popular choice with candidates this series and largely was approached by candidates in two main ways. The first was to treat it as a straightforward evaluation of functionalism essay, the second was to write about as many theories as possible in relation to their views on whether or not they believe crime and deviance were functional for society. Those candidates who took the first approach tended to write better answers as they were more explicitly focused on functionality. Those who took the second route were more likely to lose focus on the question with essays becoming discussions of seemingly everything revised but with little relevance to the question. As such, the best essays assessed the theories of Durkheim, Davis, Polsky, Clinard, Merton, Hirschi and used other theories such as Marxism and feminism to evaluate crime as non-functional for society. The majority of answers focused on Durkheim and Merton's theories with varying degrees of accuracy and depth. Many students wrote about Merton's adaptations in great detail but not necessarily linked explicitly to the question. Confusion was often apparent when discussing the links between Merton, Cohen and Cloward and Ohlin. Functionalist essay templates were evident in many centres.

A number of candidates are increasingly making use of sustained evaluation and judgements and in some of the most effective instances, are using evaluation to link paragraphs, greatly improving structure. However, this is still not the case for the majority of candidates, with many weaker responses simply moving through a series of juxtaposed theories, often with no link to the question or each other, making clipped, basic, if any judgements. It therefore continues to be the case that candidates from most centres would benefit from working on AO3 skills in particular, and writing the question that has been asked, rather than the one they hoped for.

- (c) Far fewer candidates opted to write the essay on the influence of labelling, however, the variation in both approach and quality was greater than for 1b). Many candidates opted for an interactionist approach, largely focusing on the work of Becker, Lemert, Cicourel and Stan Cohen. Others looked at areas of the criminal justice system that are affected by labelling, exploring issues such as institutional racism, sexism and chivalry. Some of the very best answers combined the two areas, remembering to home in on the influence of labelling throughout. Weaker essays contained fewer relevant sociologists and concepts, muddled key theorists and lacked focus on the question. A large minority also wrote about labelling in education rather than crime. On a positive note, only a very small minority of candidates failed to include any relevant sociology whatsoever, with most able to use concepts such as 'master status' and 'self-fulfilling prophecy' confidently and accurately. Additionally, perhaps a more helpful element of criminology was evident in some detailed discussions of Braithwaite's reintegrative vs disintegrative shaming. AO3 in 'discuss' questions often comes from making judgements and mini conclusions as well as specific strengths and weaknesses of theories/studies and there were a few exceptional examples of this. On the whole, however, AO3 was particularly lacking in many of these essays, regularly failing to access bands 3 and 4.

Q.2 + Q.3 As questions 2 and 3 were only answered by such a small number of students it is not possible to highlight any areas for these questions.

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UNIT 4 – SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND APPLIED METHODS OF SOCIOLOGICAL ENQUIRY

Overview of the Unit

This unit tests candidates' ability to apply what they have learned about methods of research to a research task. And to understand a research synopsis to be able to offer reasons why the researchers used specific research methods or sampling techniques in their research. The unit also tests candidates' understanding of social inequalities, both in terms of patterns and theoretical explanations. All AOs are assessed.

General trends and patterns:

- Application of understanding of methods of research demonstrated too many pre-rehearsed research designs.
- Weak evaluation skills.

Different ways of approaching questions/tasks:

- Some candidates outlined their research design as [i] followed by problems [ii] This is fine but still required candidates to demonstrate clear and contextualised justification of choices and clear and contextualised problems and their impact.

What worked well:

- The best essays demonstrated appropriate use of evidence to enhance evaluative commentary. The best research designs were those which were contextualised throughout.

What didn't and what could be improved:

- Pre-rehearsed "one size fits all" research designs inevitably failed to score high marks. Some candidates decided to use more than one method despite the task specifically stating one method should be used. This inevitably affected the mark awarded.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

- Q.1 (a) This task requires candidates to demonstrate their ability to read and understand the research synopsis in the item. The question asked them to explain why the researcher decided to use semi structured interviews in the research. The best answers offered two acceptable reasons which were explained, contextualised, and linked to methodological concepts. Candidates who merely offered two generic strengths of semi structured interviews without clear, contextualised explanation were not rewarded with high AO2 marks. It was acceptable to suggest that the researcher may have used semi structured interviews because they allow flexibility. They would then need to explain what this is and why that would have been useful in this particular research. Identifying the aims of the research is a good way of focussing on the context. Many candidates offered two acceptable reasons but fell short on their explanation. At this level higher order skills carry more marks, so the explanation is crucial.

- (b) This task required candidates to demonstrate their ability to apply their knowledge and understanding of research methods to a specified brief, and in this case, an investigation to collect data on career aspirations of a sample of young people.

Markers expect to see a formulaic approach in as much as candidates are usually coached to outline different stages of the research design such as operationalising concepts, sampling, choice of methods, ethical issues. This is fine; however, it can lead to generic designs. The choices at each stage must be unique to the design brief in the task. Many candidates mentioned sampling but failed to explain and justify the specific sampling technique that they proposed to use. Instead, they often chose the default position “as I am an A Level student, I will use students in my sixth form/school” consequently the sampling section of their design very often lacked context and reasonable justification even though in this brief, using their school/college would have been appropriate.

The type of data was not specified in the brief which allowed candidates the freedom to use whatever data collection method they felt suited the task best. Some chose a qualitative method, and some chose a quantitative method. The brief clearly stated that they were to use one research method. However, a worrying number chose to use both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect both types of data. This was followed by descriptions of how this would enable them to collect quantifiable, representative, and generalisable data, often with a very small sample. They often claimed that qualitative methods would allow them to collect deep, detailed, valid data because they would automatically establish a rapport with the respondents. This demonstrated a significant lack of understanding and a failure to engage with the brief.

Many candidates failed to address the potential problems associated with their design and the impact that such problems could have on the data collected. This negatively impacted their AO3 mark. Sampling was frequently the weakest section of the research design and often demonstrated a lack of understanding of sampling techniques.

Some answers continually referred to the exact wording of the brief in an attempt to be contextualised.

Section B

Q.2 (a) + Q.3 (a)

Candidates are required to select and outline evidence that demonstrates a dimension of social inequality from two areas of life. Some candidates thought that area meant class, gender, or ethnicity but the vast majority were able to describe evidence of inequality from two areas of life. Education, family, crime and work and pay were the most popular areas cited. Sometimes, certain areas are better for specific dimensions of inequality. For example, it is often easier to cite evidence of ethnic inequalities in crime and education than it is to cite evidence of class inequalities in crime. Class inequalities are most evident in education and health. Candidates would be wise to take care when selecting the areas of life that best demonstrate the specific dimension of inequality demanded by the question.

Q.2. (b) + Q.3. (b)

Both essay options were popular this year. Those who chose to answer 2b were required to consider whether social class is the most important source of social inequality. Some did this very well, offering detailed accounts of Marxist ideas countered by theories and evidence suggesting that other dimensions such as gender, ethnicity and age are also significant factors in social inequality. Once again, opportunities for high level interrogation of ideas were explored by the few rather than the many. Those candidates who were able to offer well supported criticisms of theoretical ideas were rewarded.

Candidates who chose 3b (an evaluation of the view that social inequalities are functional and inevitable) were required to critically examine functionalist and New Right ideas. But there were opportunities for candidates to explore inevitability and functionality as separate issues. For example, Marxists would argue that social inequalities are inevitable as long as capitalism exists but of course this is only functional for the rich. Similarly, feminists who focus on patriarchy as the source of social inequalities would argue that this is functional for men but not for women. To interrogate functionalist ideas, it is necessary to examine alternative theories. Some candidates did this well, but many presented juxtaposed descriptions of alternative ideas which limited their AO3 mark.

Markers commented that in some centres it was clear that candidates had learned sample answers to past paper questions and reproduced those in this examination. This was clear because every candidate from the centres concerned wrote almost the same essays. Whilst evaluation of key sociological theories is a useful teaching and learning tool, it does not enable candidates to respond to the uniqueness of the question on the paper. This strategy inevitably shows up weaknesses in understanding of concepts and theoretical ideas.

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