AQA

General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012

Sociology **SCLY1**

(Specification 1191)

Unit 1: Culture and Identity;
Families and Households;
Wealth, Poverty and Welfare

Report on the Examination

Further copies of this Report on the Examination are available from: aqa.org.uk

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

SCLY1

General

There were very few rubric errors and generally students seemed to be very familiar with the demands of the exam. Although most students seemed able to manage their time appropriately and leave enough time for the final essay, there is still a tendency for some students to write too much for the six-mark question, when a more concise answer might achieve the full marks. Conversely, some students go to the other extreme and write one word answers which are rarely enough to trigger the award of two marks. There was a trend in a minority of centres to answer the essays first and do the short answer questions at the end. While in theory this is fine as an approach, in practice this proved to be a problem for many students as they mismanaged their time and appeared to have insufficient time for the short answer questions.

Section A – Culture and Identity

Question 01

Successful students were able to explain the term with reference to dominant characteristics. Partial answers were usually about only the concept of status and were therefore rewarded with one mark. Many students seemed unfamiliar with the term and struggled to explain it appropriately.

Question 02

Many students could only suggest financial considerations as one way in which an individual's leisure choices may be affected by their social class. A second way, if identified, was usually some notion of social or cultural expectations. Alternatively, students offered just some comparative example about the leisure choices of different social classes and therefore scored one mark as a partial answer.

Question 03

This question was generally answered well with students suggesting a wide range of possible ways in which disability may shape an individual's experience in society. The most common responses referred to issues such as physical access, ability to take part in leisure activities, access to work, being seen as dependent and the effects of discrimination.

Question 04

Most students were able to present a range of material on gender and society. Better answers were able to relate this clearly to social identity and discussed both male and female identity. These answers made reference to concepts such as, the crisis in masculinity, male unemployment, new man, conjugal roles, ladettes and the beauty myth. Some students were able to discuss more traditional notions of gender with postmodern ideas of choice and diversity of gender identities. Less successful answers tended to focus on females only and often discussed the socialisation process or life chances rather than focusing specifically on identity.

Question 05

Many students were able to employ Item B as the basis of a Marxist account of socialisation. Effective responses applied Marxism to specific social institutions (family, education, religion, etc) and provided a conceptual framework for such discussion (eg ideological state apparatus, false needs, hegemony). Strong responses were also able to evaluate Marxism in terms of its structuralist nature, or by contrasting it with other views on the role of socialisation. Unfortunately, much sound knowledge on functionalism and feminism was merely juxtaposed rather than used critically. Less successful answers tended to rely very heavily on the Item and showed flawed understanding, or drifted away from the question of socialisation and wrote in very general terms about sociological views of society.

Section B – Families and Households

The majority of students answered this section. A number of recent questions in this section have mentioned some sort of historical time constraint as part of the question (eg Question 07 and Question 09). Many students ignored this instruction and/or had an extremely haphazard idea of the past (for example, industrialisation happening in the 1960s). Centres might be advised to spend time putting social and economic changes into some sort of historical context and also reminding students to pay attention to the constraints set out in the question.

Question 06

Only about one third of students were able to adequately explain 'matrifocal family' as one headed by a woman. This success was not determined by centre and many able students seemed to be able to work it out from clues in Item 2A. Many guesses failed to hit the mark – 'a couple focused on making a marriage work', was a popular inaccurate response. Many students gained partial reward for an appropriate example (eg lone motherhood).

Question 07

Most students managed to suggest at least one valid reason for the decline in the number of first marriages over the past 40 years or so. Most students achieved at least some credit by citing secularisation, the increased popularity of cohabitation and the rising cost of weddings as being reasons for the decline in the number of first marriages. Some students ignored the 'first marriage' dimension of the question and addressed factors such as divorce, without appropriate modelling to the question. Others made valid points (eg 'weddings are expensive') in a manner that failed to convey change over time. The words 'increasingly', 'more', etc. could have often turned one mark into two. A few students ignored the instructions in the question and repeated the example given in Item 2A.

Question 08

This question provoked a wide range of responses. Most students were able to suggest at least some effects of an ageing population. Most responses focussed on macro effects such as an increasing dependency ratio, changes to the demand for health services, and policy responses such as the raising of the state pension age. It was also valid to focus on impacts on families, both in terms of structure (eg the rise of beanpole families) and role (eg the elderly being cared for by their own children). It was encouraging to note that some students recognised possible benefits of an ageing population, such as increasingly active grandparenting. A small minority of students failed to score because they offered causes rather than effects.

Question 09

This question asked students to examine sociological views on the changes in the experience of childhood in the past 50 years or so. This proved to be quite difficult for a number of students, often because of a failure to read or understand the question; these students therefore failed to properly interpret the question. Many students wrote extensively about changes in childhood since the Middle Ages and struggled to apply this material successfully to the question. Many students have very hazy ideas about what might fall into the category of the last 50 years or so, with often long discussions of industrialisation and child labour as well as the introduction of compulsory schooling. Again, these responses found it difficult to apply their discussion to the specifics of the question. Most students had some concept of childhood as a social construction. There were some good answers covering a range of different sociological views of how childhood has changed recently, the best often set within an analytic framework, for example, views for and against the view that childhood had improved in the last 50 years. Most students were able to outline a competent account of the rise of child-centredness; this was often contrasted with claims that childhood is becoming increasingly controlled. Effective responses were able to focus most of their answer on more recent changes and discussion of the extension of compulsory education, the impact of television and the Internet, and the rise of 'toxic childhood', was often done well. Such responses were also able to make more effective use of the same material as those less successful responses; eg linking age patriarchy to controls on children's movement as a result of 'stranger danger'. More sophisticated answers highlighted the range and variety of experiences between social classes, ethnicities and genders, and debated the kinds of changes that different groups have experienced.

Question 10

Most responses had some knowledge of the increase in family diversity and the majority of students could identify at least a few reasons for different types of diversity, which meant that there were relatively few very weak answers. Many of these responses did little more than rehearse generic theoretical views of the nuclear family with, for example, Murdock's and Parsons' views of functions of the nuclear family described in great detail, or New Right views of the undesirability of diversity recycled from Item 2B. Relatively few answers contained any accurate statistical evidence or could fully develop the concept of life-course analysis. Most students were able to recognise various examples of family diversity (eg reconstituted and same-sex families) and were, with varying degrees of depth and sophistication, able to explain the rise of such family types. Theoretical material from functionalism, the New Right, feminism and postmodernism appeared frequently, but this was often in terms of a discussion of 'is diversity desirable?' rather than assessing the extent of changes. More effective responses were characterised by the development of a debate around whether diversity really does signify the decline of the nuclear family and such responses often built upon Item 2B's reference to life-cycles to recognise that cohabitation and reconstitution may be essentially nuclear and that single-person households may often occur before and after nuclear families, rather than being a conscious rejection of them.

Section C – Wealth, Poverty and Welfare

Few students answered this section. For many of these, there was a surprising lack of knowledge and/or application to contemporary issues and debates.

Question 11

Some students seemed to be familiar with this concept and were able to explain it appropriately. However, many students seemed to confuse subjective poverty with relative poverty and failed to score.

Question 12

Most students suggested at least one reason why older people are more likely to experience poverty. The most common responses were about lack of access to the labour market and inadequate pensions.

Question 13

This was not answered well. Many students seemed to have a very hazy idea of what a government policy might be and consequently struggled to suggest policies that might be used to reduce differences in living standards between rich and poor. Successful answers made reference to policies such as changes to the tax system, raising benefits for the poor, and raising the minimum wage. Many students failed to come up with three policies, or suggested three examples of very similar policies, such as examples of cash benefits, and so scored only part of the marks available.

Question 14

This question was answered well overall. Most students seemed aware of the voluntary sector and of private provision and most also mentioned help from friends and family. Surprisingly, quite a few ignored state provision in their answer, though this did not necessarily affect the quality of their responses. Most managed to consider some aspects of the different types of provision and the more effective answers compared them with each other. Relatively few answers placed the discussion within a theoretical framework which could have helped with analysis and evaluation. There were also very few mentions of contemporary policy issues such as 'the Big Society'.

Question 15

Many students were more comfortable outlining and discussing individual and cultural explanations of poverty as opposed to discussing the class structure. This meant that many answers were at the very least imbalanced or at worst failed to address the question of class structure at all. More successful answers were able to use Item 3B as a basis for discussing the impact of the class structure, usually with reference to capitalism and the operation of the labour market. Less successful answers tended to juxtapose different views on poverty while better answers were able to integrate these different approaches into a discussion that made effective comparisons between perspectives.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion