



General Certificate of Education

Sociology 2191

**SCLY3 Beliefs in Society;
Global Development;
Mass Media;
Power and Politics**

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - January series

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SCLY3

General

The first paper for the new specification seems to have been well received by candidates. None appeared thrown by the new structure and most seemed to have allocated their time sensibly to take advantage of the new distribution of marks. However, with the (a) questions there were still many candidates who failed adequately to explain the points they had identified. Too often their explanation was in fact a consequence or an expansion of the point identified. A second fairly common failing was to ignore the time context of the question. Many of the questions on this paper had a contemporary feel. Many candidates did not give due attention to this and provided timeless descriptions of theories or arguments.

Section A: Beliefs in Society

Question 1

- (a) Most candidates tackled this question reasonably well. Answers that were most common centred on the growth of New Religious Movements (NRMs), spiritual shopping, privatisation, teachings becoming dated and out of touch and the search for something new and postmodern. Some candidates failed to score with explanations that were either too brief to adequately explain or a re-statement of their identification.

Centres should stress again to their candidates the need for chronological awareness. Answers about Durkheim and Weber were clearly not going to score when the question gave a timescale of 30 years or so. Some answers were original and perceptive for example the social networking use of Facebook as opposed to the social network of the church.

- (b) There were many interesting and very competent answers to this question. Many candidates saw it as an opportunity to explore postmodernist views on changes in religious belief and practice. In this context, privatisation, adapting beliefs to suit individual tastes and styles, creating an identity, spiritual shopping and the growth of NRMs featured in responses. Works by Heelas, Davie, Bruce and Lyotard were the most often referred to.

It was good to see a strong conceptual base from the most successful candidates with vicarious religion or religious surrogacy being used well. However some candidates clearly did not think about their use of NRMs, for example, that made high demands on the members but also were all about the private and the personal.

Timing is critical in the examination and candidates often lost marks with over-lengthy introductions to the (b) question, for example a semantic discussion about the meaning of religion that was isolated from the demands of the question. There was a much better awareness of the need for AO2 marks than in previous years; candidates who scored well dedicated a good proportion of their answer to challenging the question and suggesting that religion did indeed still encompass a corporate element.

Question 2

This question provided the opportunity for many candidates to write all they knew about functionalist views on religion. Unfortunately many such responses were heavily descriptive and lacked focus, listing many functions but rarely addressing the main theme of the question, which was on social stability.

More successful candidates addressed the question more directly. This was usually done in a comparison of perspectives, with functionalism contrasted with Marxist, feminist, neo-Marxist, Weberian and/or postmodernist views. Of those taking this approach the better answers came from those who developed their analyses of the perspectives more finely, particularly with regard to Marxist and feminist approaches, to show how their arguments related to the maintenance of social stability. Weaker answers used Marxist and feminist views as a slightly off-target critique of functionalism, arguing that they brought about conflict, not stability. Others stated that religion was a conservative force, but rarely analysed this conclusion.

Contemporary examples were used by some candidates but they tended to be those only from the textbooks. Candidates who operated from a good political general knowledge were rewarded by eg use of Hamas. Some evaluation remains at a simplistic level.

A disturbing number of candidates saw fundamentalism as a new sociological perspective. Similarly, many designated all fundamentalists as terrorists. Worryingly, some had the same view of all Muslims.

Question 3

A variety of questions on this topic area have been asked in papers for the previous specification, so it was surprising to find some candidates misunderstanding the focus of this question and writing solely on typologies of religious organisations. While this might have some limited relevance, such an approach could score only a small fraction of the total marks available.

Most candidates focused on providing a range of groups, usually differentiating by age, gender, ethnicity and social class, and exploring the sociological material available to illustrate their religious belief and practice. Such answers were often well done, with thorough analyses, sound use of evidence and explicit evaluation.

Many answers were more generalised, or wrote mostly in a descriptive fashion about the elderly. However more successful candidates presented answers that showed more depth of analysis, for instance displaying an understanding of the varieties of feminism, and no longer treated it as one single cohesive approach. The most successful candidates tackled both aspects of the question – beliefs and practice but sadly for most this was merged into the term “religion” and limited their AO2 mark. Candidates with much better awareness of concepts made connections with the debate about ethnic minorities eg cultural defence, cultural amnesia etc.

At the other end of the spectrum this question revealed a serious empirical issue in the use of examples from world religions showing a high lack of knowledge. For example, candidates asserted that Hinduism is the largest religion preached in Islam and that Sharia Law is based on the Bible. Centres need to deliver a solid empirical base with a strong contemporary feel.

Section B: Global Development

Question 4

- (a) Reasons most often cited related to Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) being nearer to the people, having less bureaucratic structures, being more honest, small scale and focused. Many candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of the nature and role of NGOs. There seems to be a confidence and depth of understanding shown by the candidates from many centres taking this topic.
- (b) Some candidates saw this as another opportunity to run through the arguments of modernisation theory versus dependency theory. While this might have been part of an answer it could not be the whole answer. More successful candidates considered different kinds of aid and the nature of the donor/recipient relationship. Economic, social and political factors were considered in the best answers.

Question 5

Many candidates reconfigured this question to focus exclusively on the harm being done around the world by transnational corporations. This, were it true, could be only part of an answer. It was also disappointing to see so much concentration on the negatives here, with some candidates finding nothing positive to say about globalisation at all. More successful candidates looked at the three dimensions raised by the question and considered them in turn, providing theoretical and empirical insights to explain aspects of change, both positive and negative. There was plenty of evidence that centres were familiar with many empirical examples in exploring this topic. Theoretical underpinning and discussion of economic aspects was usually via discussion of Marxist and various opposing positions. The political aspects were covered a little more cursorily, though one or two really good answers were able to discuss the impact of attempts to introduce western-style democracy in, for example, the Middle East and Africa.

Question 6

This question gave an opportunity for candidates to explore the theoretical debates surrounding the processes of development. Unfortunately some candidates did not go beyond simplistic juxtapositions of modernisation and dependency theories, with Rostow and Frank the only sources. More successful candidates ranged more widely, covering a range of perspectives and including good knowledge and understanding of empirical material used to support theoretical arguments.

Section C: Mass Media

Question 7

- (a) This question was well answered by many candidates. Answers featured most often included the creation of moral panics, gate-keeping, agenda setting and the process of applying news values. Some candidates failed to score with all three identifications because there was too much overlap between the points offered, for example citing several different news values.
- (b) Many answers to this question showed good insight and significant knowledge of material on the media. Basic answers went little further than discussing the influence of America and Coca-Cola. More successful answers considered a range of influences on culture, including film, news, music and corporate advertising. Some candidates considered the influence of Eastern cultures on those of Britain and Europe and raised interesting questions about the nature, direction and scope of cultural imperialism. There was some very good analysis here.

Question 8

The most popular response to this question was to provide descriptions of various media models, such as the hypodermic syringe, two-step flow and uses and gratifications. Clearly these models are well known and understood. Some candidates displayed good familiarity with recent research, but a small number were still heavily reliant on quite dated material or restricted their answers to discussions on the effects of advertising.

Most candidates provided answers that took a generic view on the mass media. Few attempted to relate different theories or evidence to different media outlets, and consider the relative power of such outlets.

More successful candidates also tended to push the argument wider to include the debates about both violence and pornography in the media – looking at desensitisation and catharsis as other issues. Quite a few made good use of the New Right as arguing that media influence created moral degeneracy. E. Newsom was also often quoted as a source of argument – though this was rarely evaluated.

Question 9

There were some good answers to this question, with processes considered alongside descriptions of various stereotypes. Most answers tended to focus more on ethnicity than age. Such responses used a variety of sources and tended to be pessimistic. Rarely was any counter argument or evidence explored in order to challenge the assertion in the quotation. On age, the focus tended to be on teenagers and the old. Weaker answers became very generalised and commonsensical, often focusing on female newsreaders or similar anecdotal examples.

Although a few candidates did know, and apply, studies on this area, there were some poorer, descriptive answers that asserted the question's view was true by simply listing examples of those stereotypes found in the media. These answers often used quite dated examples. The great majority of all answers here just ignored the 'still' in the title – when change was addressed it centred on assertions (sometimes using examples) that there are more ethnic minorities portrayed in the media now.

Section D: Power and Politics

Question 10

- (a) Answers most often cited age, gender, ethnicity, social class, socialisation and the influence of peer groups. These were mostly explained competently. Some candidates struggled with the concepts of social and cultural, wrongly providing answers from categories such as location.
- (b) Many candidates showed good familiarity with material on voting behaviour. However, fewer were able to use this material effectively to address the question set. It was disappointing to see so few candidates able to discuss events of the last thirty years. Many candidates preferred instead to summarise voting behaviour from the 1960s onwards. Better answers discussed concepts such as floating voters, dealignment, voter apathy and consumerism as relevant to the period concerned.

Question 11

Disappointingly, many candidates saw this as an opportunity to merely run through a variety of perspectives on the nature and distribution of power in a fairly timeless vacuum. More successful answers came from those candidates who focused more on the contemporary aspects of the question and were able to apply elite, pluralist and other perspectives to a discussion of society today. Such answers also considered the nature of elites and economic, political, celebrity and other elite groups.

Question 12

Answers to this question fell mainly into two categories. In the first category candidates provided adequate, if somewhat timeless, descriptions of a range of perspectives on the nature and distribution of power. Those candidates scoring higher marks provided a greater analysis of each perspective. The second category consisted of those candidates who considered society today and used the theories of power to provide an up-to-date analysis of power in society today. Such answers scored more highly than the first category. Many candidates completely ignored the contemporary dimension to the question, but as was seen elsewhere on this paper candidates who attempted the question set, rather than simply listing descriptive perspectives, gained greater reward.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.