



General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011

Sociology

SCLY1

(Specification 1191)

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

Report on the Examination

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SCLY1

General

While the great majority of candidates followed the rubric, there was a slight increase in rubric errors with some candidates attempting all sections of the paper. Most candidates were able to manage their time appropriately and leave enough time for the final essay, although there seems to be an increase in the number of candidates writing unnecessarily long answers to short answer questions (especially Question 03 and Question 08). There is still a tendency for candidates to ignore the actual wording of the question, which inevitably limits the mark they can score. Many of these candidates demonstrate a range of knowledge and understanding of sociology, but fail to apply their knowledge to the question asked (for example Question 09 and Question 10).

Section A – Culture and Identity

Question 01

Most candidates were able to score both marks by giving a satisfactory explanation, usually with reference to the acquisition of society's norms and values.

Question 02

Candidates suggested a range of appropriate reasons. Common responses identified different levels of physical abilities, different levels of income, and age-related legislation. Answers that failed to score suggested reasons linked to social expectations, which was not allowed by the question, or simply stated the kinds of activities that different age groups tend to choose without giving any reasons why these choices may differ across different age groups.

Question 03

Many candidates wrote quite lengthy answers that had long and unnecessary accounts of the interactionist perspective. Successful candidates tended to identify looking-glass self, labelling, stigmatisation, impression management and master status as suitable concepts. Many weaker candidates seemed unfamiliar with interactionism.

Question 04

Many candidates struggled to deal with the issues raised by this question. Weaker responses tended to list differences between minority ethnic groups in terms of food or music or religion with limited reference to the question. Better answers were able to make use of studies (for example Modood, Sewell, Ghumann, Johal) and make reference to concepts such as hybrid identities, white mask, racism and discrimination. Some candidates discussed ethnicity and life chances with little focus on social identity. The most successful answers were those that focused clearly on the link between ethnicity and social identity. They often differentiated between the experiences of various ethnic groups and covered a range of ways in which different ethnicities have their social identities shaped. These candidates were often able to evaluate the importance of ethnicity as a factor in comparison with other factors, usually social class.

Question 05

Most candidates were able to offer material on Marxist and functionalist views, using the material from the Item as a springboard. These answers were generally accurate, but weaker candidates failed to link the material explicitly to the issue of the role of culture in society and instead gave general accounts of functionalist/Marxist/feminist views of society. In general, Marxist accounts of the role of culture were more successful and coherent than other accounts with some excellent discussions of the Frankfurt School and the role of culture in society. Some centres had clearly taught postmodernist views on the role of culture very effectively and their candidates were able to demonstrate a firm grasp of relevant issues. Some candidates gave list-like accounts of different definitions/types of culture and were less successful in developing these accounts into coherent answers to the question.

Section B – Families and Households

By far the majority of candidates attempted this section.

Question 06

In general, candidates found this concept difficult to explain. Some candidates described socialisation and therefore did not score any marks. Others had difficulty explaining the concept but were helped by giving an example, such as that childhood varies from culture to culture, which scored one mark. Weaker answers simply re-worked the wording in the question and failed to score.

Question 07

A significant minority of candidates suggested ways already mentioned in the Item and therefore failed to score. More successful responses made reference to a wide range of possible ways, such as age-related legislation, child protection, and the impact of divorce legislation. Some answers were too broad and failed to score full marks. For example, they identified health policies but without linking them to children.

Question 08

Most candidates were able to identify appropriate reasons, such as more available contraception, declining infant mortality rates, increasing expense of children, and changes in women's priorities. Many candidates did not clearly identify a change since 1900 and so failed to gain the higher marks. Quite a few candidates suggested that the infant mortality rate had increased and many candidates' grasp of social changes since 1900 was very hazy.

Question 09

Many candidates showed a good awareness of a number of factors influencing divorce rates, but some lacked any real depth or detail. For example, the Divorce Reform Act (1969) was often mentioned but only a minority could provide any detail about it beyond the fact that 'it made divorce easier'. Indeed a number of candidates thought that divorce was either prohibited before 1969 or only available to men. Weaker answers tended to be simply lists of reasons, while more able candidates were able to explain how the reasons suggested could impact on divorce rates, and also to discuss the relative importance of various factors. Many candidates included a lot of tangential material that deflected from their answer. This was often material on the effects of divorce or material on reasons for cohabitation. Candidates must read the question carefully and address it explicitly in their answer.

Question 10

Very few candidates focused on the demands of the question ie by addressing the issue of the feminist contribution, but most candidates demonstrated some potentially relevant knowledge of concepts, theory and studies. This suggests that family roles and relationships and feminism are covered reasonably well in most centres.

Better candidates produced complex critiques of the different strands of feminist theory, or a critique of feminism using functionalism/New Right theory, or were able to discuss effectively the debates about the extent of changes in roles and where this left feminist analysis. Many candidates recycled the Item with the occasional reference to a potentially relevant study, eg on same-sex relationships, but these points were usually not applied effectively. The issue of the impact of diversity on roles and relationships was consequently very rarely addressed adequately.

Concepts were widely used but with varying degrees of accuracy. There was far more focus on roles than on relationships. Many studies used were very dated (eg Oakley; Willmott and Young) with little reference to more recent information that is readily available, such as the British Social Attitudes Survey. Accounts of relationships focused almost entirely on domestic violence. Some candidates attempted to consider power relationships through discussion of financial decision-making, but such responses were often confused or not applied well to the question. Many candidates' answers were knowledge-driven and lacked explicit focus on the demands of the question.

Section C – Wealth, Poverty and Welfare

Very few candidates attempted this section.

Question 11

Most candidates were able to define income, although fewer were able to explain how it differs from wealth. These candidates tended merely to give examples or types of wealth.

Question 12

A significant minority of candidates gave a definition of universal benefits rather than suggesting their advantages. Others were able to suggest one advantage, such as lack of stigma or that they are less bureaucratic to obtain or administer, but were not able to suggest a second advantage.

Question 13

Most candidates were able to suggest two advantages of welfare provision by voluntary groups, although others were confused about what a voluntary group is, which limited their responses. The most common answers suggested that voluntary groups offered a more flexible service as well as saving the government money. Some answers made reference to the benefit to volunteers of a sense of contributing to society.

Question 14

Many candidates failed to distinguish between income and wealth and tended to discuss reasons for income differences. Discussions on regressive taxation, privatisation and globalisation often failed to focus adequately on wealth. More successful answers were able to give various theoretical explanations for inequality of wealth, especially Marxist views. However these answers tended to ignore the question's emphasis on increasing inequality. Good candidates were able to consider, for example, the impact of tax and benefit changes as well as the growth of the financial services industry and clearly link these to their impact on wealth inequalities.

Question 15

Some candidates had a good knowledge of the culture of poverty and were able to discuss explicitly both the attitudes and the behaviour of the poor and to explain how these might cause or perpetuate poverty. Candidates were able to make reference to Lewis and to the ideas of Murray and the concept of the underclass. These were contrasted with structural approaches (usually Marxist) and also often a situational approach to the culture of poverty. Good answers set up the debate and evaluated the strengths and claims of each side. Weaker answers failed to discuss alternative explanations for poverty or simply juxtaposed alternative views with little connection between them or reference to the question.

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