AQA

**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

Sociology   **SCLY3**

(Specification 2191)

**Unit 3: Beliefs in Society;
Global Development;
Mass media;
Power and Politics**

Report on the Examination

SCLY3

General comment from Chief Examiner

Evidence from some of the responses to this paper appears to indicate that some centres are neglecting to teach certain topics. In particular, a significant minority of candidates had little or no relevant knowledge of the characteristics of fundamentalism (Question 01, worth 9 marks out of 60), which is an important part of an adequate understanding of beliefs in society today. Clearly, the consequence of neglecting important aspects of the specification in this way is to place candidates' performance and results in serious jeopardy.

Section A – Beliefs in Society

Question 01

It was surprising how many candidates showed little or no knowledge of the concept of fundamentalism. Some wrote about new religious movements, while others simply left their answer to this question blank. Many candidates failed to score. However, others had an excellent and well-read grasp the concept, using Almond's idea of "strong religion", for example.

Of those who did understand the concept of fundamentalism, the most common responses focused on a return to traditional ways, the literal meaning of texts, fundamentalists believing that their view was the absolute truth, a rejection of modernity, hostility to other religions and an avoidance of interaction or debate with others. These points were usually well explained, often with examples.

Question 02

Most candidates produced answers that ran through the issues from a variety of perspectives. These usually included Marxist, functionalist, feminist, postmodernist, Weberian and neo-Marxist views. What distinguished the better answers was the depth of analysis of the various views, the use of relevant empirical examples, and a focus given to the question. It was disappointing to see a significant number of candidates completely ignoring the issue of social change. Also disappointing was the lack of recent empirical examples. For many, the most contemporary issue mentioned was the American civil rights movement. Similarly, feminism is still being treated in a simplistic way, for example, "all feminists believe". Candidates who have studied this Unit should be able to recognise, even if not describe in detail, that there are Christian feminists, Islamic feminists etc.

Many weaker answers simply described Marxist and functionalist views of religion. Another major flaw in the answers was the inability of candidates to resist the urge to describe Calvinism in detail; even some very good candidates submitted to this urge.

Question 03

Many candidates produced a range of arguments and evidence about secularisation, but only a minority explored the global aspects of the question. Those who did made reference to the growth of fundamentalism in the United States, Hindu religion in India and the spread of Muslim religion throughout the world. They also cited the growth of NRMs and changes in belief patterns, including believing but not belonging, as reasons why the secularisation thesis was not proven. The use of existential security theory was also a notable addition in many answers.

Candidates who focused mainly on Europe scored reasonably well, but the highest marks could not be obtained without including a global dimension in the answer.

Question 04

This question elicited three main types of response. The first was from those who wrote all they knew about new religious movements. This usually included typologies, examples and a general summing up that NRMs were on the increase. Little was said in these answers about the two groups mentioned in the question.

The second type of answer was from those who focused on the dimensions of age and ethnicity and ran through a variety of reasons why different age groups or ethnic groups might or might not join new religious movements. In such answers ethnic minorities were usually treated as a single entity. However, there was more focus and relevance shown here than in the first type of answer.

The third answer type was from a minority of candidates who both addressed the groups in the question and differentiated between different groups. Thus their analyses were more precise and their explanations fuller and more focused on the question set. Some candidates also considered why certain groups did not join new religious movements.

Section B – Global Development

Question 05

This question was well answered by many candidates. The most common responses referred to the improvement education made to the labour force, increased earning power for individuals, instilling the values of competition and achievement, helping the individual to avoid exploitation and aiding social mobility. Explanations were often full and many contained relevant examples.

Question 06

Understanding of what might be a western model of education varied considerably from candidate to candidate, with some taking it to be quite literally a carbon copy of the United Kingdom system, including the same curriculum. Most set their answer in the theoretical debate between modernisation and dependency theories. Points for and against were then listed, often quite briefly. Few took the view that western models had very much to offer developing countries.

Question 07

This was a popular question, and often well done. The majority of candidates focused more on NGOs than international agencies, and many produced quite comprehensive analyses. Some answers slipped into debates on the role of transnational corporations, while some others focused almost exclusively on the benefits and drawbacks of aid, completely ignoring wider and organisational issues. However, most answers showed a good or very good understanding of the material.

Question 08

This was the less popular of the two 33-mark questions on global development. However, those who attempted it usually did well. The theoretical debates surrounding the process of development seem well understood. Issues raised included neo-colonialism, cultural imperialism, meritocracy, environmentalism, structural adjustment and the role of western values in development.

Weaker answers came from candidates who wanted to offer a simple juxtaposition between modernisation and dependency theories.

Section C – Mass Media

Question 09

This question produced a wide range of answers. Many of the more exotic responses, such as bribery, were impossible to prove and could only be allegations, rather than clear, evidenced ways in which governments work. More common responses cited doing deals with journalists, passing laws or regulations, using 'spin doctors', censorship, making ownership of computer or broadcasting hardware illegal, and licensing broadcasters. A minority offered a theoretical answer to the set question, usually based on a Marxist position, and identifying and explaining key concepts such as agenda-setting, gate-keeping and hegemony, though in the explanations these were not always well linked to government influence or control.

Two of the three marks available for each 'way' are for the explanations. However, many explanations were very brief, to the point where it became impossible to award the marks available. It may be that the candidates felt that the identification was self-evident. However, even in such cases a candidate must provide an explanation, or an example, if they are to score more than the one mark for identification.

Question 10

This question was well answered by many candidates. The debate on the social construction of the news seemed well understood and candidates introduced a range of relevant concepts, such as gate-keeping, agenda-setting, moral panics, news values, 'churnalism', allocative control, hegemony and ideology.

However, few candidates mentioned the practical issues involved. Time and money were rarely taken into consideration in the selection of the news. Similarly, little attention was paid to the changes brought about by the new media or to the presentation aspect of the question. Many answers seemed to be stuck in the past.

A few candidates, perhaps knowing the material on news selection very well, wrote over-long answers to this question and left themselves too little time fully to address the 33-mark question. This was not a sensible division of the time available.

Question 11

This was the more popular of the two 33-mark questions in this Section. The most common approach to the question was offer a comparison between media models, including hypodermic syringe, cultural effects, two-step flow, uses and gratifications, etc. Most focused on whether the media made people violent, but the other aspect of the question was often not addressed so the mark gained could not be from the highest range of the mark scheme.

Those who tackled the whole question often showed considerable understanding of the material and dealt in a sophisticated manner with concepts such as sensitisation, polysemic, selective exposure, perception and disinhibition. The theoretical aspects were usually well understood, with many using feminist material to good advantage.

Sadly once again there was very little attention paid to the innovations of technology, including the rise of video-gaming, the impact of the internet, and the spread of mobile phones with internet capability and, for example, the effect that such innovations have on issues such as control.

Question 12

The process of stereotyping by the media seemed well understood. However, many candidates could not take their analyses for this question much beyond a revisit to that material. This resulted in a plethora of quite short and restricted answers that scored only modest marks. The level of detail was disappointing and lacked the complexity of argument which this question potentially demanded. Of those who did attempt more, many treated ethnic minority groups as a single entity and did not differentiate between groups.

Better answers were wider-ranging and included discussion of such issues as moral panics, demonisation, Islamophobia, stigmatisation, ghettoisation, tokenism and symbolic annihilation.

Section D – Power and Politics

Question 13

This question was well answered by many candidates. However, a number of candidates produced answers on voting behaviour rather than party membership, and thus failed to score well.

The most common explanations offered included the growth of alternative or minor parties, politics and politicians seeming to be out of touch, the growth of new social movements as an alternative to party membership, direct action as more effective to produce change and entering an era when joining organisations was less popular.

Question 14

There have been many items in the news over the past year to provide ample material for answers to this question. Many candidates made use of such material and responded well to the question. Issues such as the role of supra-national bodies such as the IMF, the World Bank and the European Union were major components of such answers. Similarly, wars, 9/11, global terrorism, piracy, drug smuggling and the global economic crisis featured in many answers. The role of the media was often a key element in analyses.

Weaker answers tended to focus on power and politics using theoretical and/or empirical evidence, but ignoring the global aspect of the question.

Question 15

The response to this question was disappointing. Many candidates ignored the question and simply wrote on typologies of pressure groups. Such material seemed tired and dated. Others produced very descriptive answers outlining the role of pressure groups but not tackling decline, importance or influence.

Some better candidates did tackle the question set more fully and considered how, for example, global politics, the rise of new social movements, changes in the nature, role and power of the state and the role of the mass media had affected the role, importance and influence of pressure and interest groups.

Question 16

Candidates seemed reasonably well prepared for this question. Perhaps as a consequence this was the more popular 33-mark question in this Section. The strength of many answers here was a very good understanding of the state and its role. Better candidates located the quotation in its neo-pluralist theoretical context and produced good theoretical debates, using Marxist, neo-Marxist, feminist and elitist material to compare and contrast views. Others took more empirical routes to their answer. These gave, for example, analyses of changes to the role and power of the state of the United Kingdom over the past fifty years or so. Such analyses included the rise of Thatcherism and the Blairite Third Way.

Weaker answers gave a more descriptive account of functions of the state in a fairly timeless context. Although there was evidence of some explicit criticisms, evaluation was, more often than not, in the form of detailed juxtaposition of the different perspectives.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

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