



General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)
June 2011

Sociology **41901**

(Specification 4192)

**Unit 1: Studying Society;
Education;
Families**

Report on the Examination

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41901

General

This was the third examination series for this paper of the new specification, with a larger entry than the last two series and a wide range of candidate responses. Many excellent scripts were seen, confirming that much fine sociology teaching and learning is taking place in centres. It was pleasing to see that the majority of candidates had learnt key sociological terms and were familiar with important sociological concepts and perspectives. Unfortunately, some candidates did not relate this knowledge to the examination questions. The more successful candidates were those who demonstrated the ability to apply their knowledge and understanding in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts whilst also demonstrating the ability to analyse and evaluate. Less successful candidates were on occasion able to show their sociological knowledge and understanding of social structures, processes and issues, but often failed to demonstrate the ability to analyse or evaluate.

There were a number of incomplete scripts, although fewer than in the previous series. Some candidates who failed to complete appeared to lack knowledge of certain aspects of the Short Course specification, whilst others suffered the consequences of poor time management. A significant minority of candidates spent much too long on questions requiring only brief answers. Candidates from a few centres were not adequately prepared for the paper. The Quality of Written Communication varied enormously, with a lack of planning at times clearly evident when candidates attempted the 'mini-essay' questions. Centres are encouraged to highlight the importance of constructing extended answers that are focused on the question.

The following are some areas for improvement that may be useful to centres when giving advice to candidates:

- Candidates would benefit from ensuring that the information presented to the examiner is of relevance and clearly addresses the specific question. Certain responses to Questions 16 and 24 contained far too much erroneous material.
- Candidates need to be aware of the theme running through the Studying Society questions; they should be encouraged to make greater use of the source items. A significant amount of students did not adequately address the issue of truancy.
- Candidates often failed to maximise their marks by not fully answering the question set. For example, failing to address the 'how far' aspect of the twelve mark questions. This was particularly noticeable for responses to Question 17.
- In some answers sociological perspectives, particularly Marxism, were inappropriately applied to a question, indicating that candidates really did not understand the perspective.
- Weaker candidates continue to provide anecdotal comments which lacked any reference to actual sociological evidence and failed to make use of sociological concepts.
- A few rubric infringements were witnessed on this paper, although less than in previous series. A minority of candidates chose to ignore the instructions before Questions 16 and 24 which clearly state that candidates should only attempt one of the two extended writing questions for Topics 2 and 3. In all but the most exceptional of cases, this resulted in candidates offering weak answers to these questions in the time available.
- Although less prevalent, some candidates ran into time management issues in their last topic. Typically these candidates wrote at excessive length in response to questions worth relatively few marks, occasionally compounding the issue by copying out the questions, or including irrelevant information.

- Centres should ensure that their students are aware of the introductory part of the specification, Section 3.1. In this series, a significant number of candidates were unable to clearly explain how a sociological approach differs from a psychological approach when studying aspects of human behaviour.
- As was the case in the last series, a significant amount of candidates appeared to lack knowledge and understanding of certain parts of the Studying Society content of the specification. Questions 07-09 were often poorly answered, with candidates displaying a general lack of knowledge of research issues and/or failing to focus on the research topic they had been asked to consider. Centres are encouraged to cover all aspects of the Topic 1 subject content of the short course specification, as well as involving their candidates in small scale sociological research investigations, thereby ensuring that students develop their understanding of the practical difficulties faced by the sociologist working in the field.

Topic 1 – Studying Society

Question 01

The vast majority of candidates answered correctly, although a few put the incorrect percentage or gave an amount.

Question 02

Most candidates were able to identify questionnaires as the research method used by the sociologist, however, a notable minority were unable to extract the answer from the Item, instead citing a sampling method.

Question 03

Many good answers were witnessed, with candidates giving both an appropriate advantage and disadvantage of their identified method, although some students 'hedged their bets' and contradicted their arguments (ie it is quick and cheap, yet it will take a long time to collect in all questionnaires). Other candidates mixed up validity and reliability of the research method.

Question 04

Few candidates scored full marks for this question, partly because they were not able to give a psychologist's approach but also because answers did not relate to truancy. Many students only achieved marks for explaining the sociological approach to truancy.

Question 05

Not many candidates reached top marks for this question, with a significant amount ignoring the key factor of not having as much as others in society. When deprivation was identified, many candidates just made basic statements about being deprived without developing their answers. However, some answers did show an awareness of relativity and were awarded accordingly. It was somewhat disappointing that many failed to make the connection with poverty, with weaker candidates referencing it to being in social isolation, not being socialised or not socialising. Just by reading the extract carefully would have clued them into the term, since it was strongly hinted at in Item C.

Question 06

This question was generally well answered, with the majority of candidates managing to link the way sociological research may uncover the reasons why some students truant, thus providing information for educational authorities to then introduce various policies to reduce truancy, although many responses were vague on the details.

Question 07

The majority of candidates were able to give a definition of official statistics as numeric data from the government. Some then went further and explained their use in being able to plot trends and patterns, or how they could compare these with their own findings. A few candidates questioned their use, commenting on how they don't provide depth and help to explain why some pupils truant. Overall, most responses were not well related to the issue under investigation.

Question 08

Unfortunately disappointing responses to this question were seen from many candidates. This is despite clear reference to ethical issues in the specification and comments made in the previous examination report. Some candidates are still confusing ethical issues with ethnic issues and consequently failing to achieve marks. Certain candidates though were able to provide a thoughtful, appropriate response and showed good knowledge and understanding of ethical issues, with better responses linking it with investigating truancy amongst secondary school pupils.

Question 09

Compared to other examination series', it is pleasing to note more candidates are aware of the different sampling methods that can be used by a sociologist, with more successful candidates being able to compare two sampling techniques in terms of obtaining a representative sample. Nevertheless, a substantial minority of students unfortunately decided to compare two primary research methods (eg interview vs questionnaire) instead of sampling methods, and thus failed to achieve any marks.

Topic 2 – Education**Question 10**

This question was predominately correctly answered, although a few candidates incorrectly put 44%.

Question 11

This question posed few problems for candidates, with virtually all identifying health care.

Question 12

The majority of candidates were able to give one clear advantage and one concise disadvantage of the publication of school league tables.

Question 13

Considerable centre variation existed for this particular question. A few centres had almost all candidates guessing what vocationalism in education is, with answers suggesting it was to do with voicing your opinion in class. Some students referred to the work related learning courses presented in the item or various NVQs available in schools and colleges, with a few stating how these courses were preparation for specific trades.

Question 14

Some good answers to this question were seen, with candidates highlighting Citizenship lessons, the teaching of British History, as well as reference to the hidden curriculum. Better responses developed their descriptions and then went on to tie in their description to how it may improve social cohesion.

Question 15

The majority of answers to this question focused on the Educational Maintenance Allowance, with some candidates describing how EMA was targeted at students from poorer socio-economic backgrounds. Explanations were less developed, although many of the candidates using EMA as their example seemed more able to offer a clear explanation how it may/may not have increased educational opportunities.

Question 16

The majority of candidates opted for this question. Given the stimulus material, it was surprising to see so many candidates dismissing any detailed discussion of ethnicity, and were instead concerned to explain several other reasons for differences. Some discussed ethnicity in very general terms. Few candidates mentioned different cultural values, 'ethnocentric curriculum' and racism in schools as being significant factors. Nonetheless, some excellent responses were seen which compared and contrasted different ethnic groups as well as discussing a variety of other factors such as social class and gender. Some candidates made effective use of sociological terms and/or studies.

Question 17

This question was less popular and generally poorly answered. Generally candidates stated sociologists would agree, with the majority of answers just providing basic statements about how peers influenced each other and the pressure to do the same subjects as their friends. Better responses attempted to address the 'how far' element of the question, for example by mentioning parental pressure and/or teacher influences on choice of subjects undertaken by a student. Some touched on gender socialisation, though this was surprisingly rare despite the focus of the source material.

Topic 3 – Families**Question 18**

The majority correctly answered, although a sizable minority misread and put 80.

Question 19

Almost all candidates were able to correctly identify Asian as the ethnic group which has the lowest percentage of dependent children living in a lone parent family, although a few mistakenly put Black.

Question 20

A high percentage of candidates were able to give two good reasons why there has been an increase in the percentage of children living in lone parent families, with the majority citing increasing divorces and it being more socially accepted.

Question 21

Many candidates were able to provide detailed and accurate responses as to what makes a reconstituted family, although certain answers lacked sufficient clarity as to it how this family type is distinctive from other family forms.

Question 22

Most candidates showed a good understanding of the way in which relations have become closer, with the development of a more child centred society, or offering reference to how relations are more democratic in light of further rights for children and the decline in parental authority. Some candidates wasted time and effort describing more than one way in which relations between parents and children have changed despite being asked to provide just one way, and failed to explain why, thus not gaining any further marks. Weaker candidates gave superficial responses regarding why the relationship may have changed rather than clearly describing how they have changed.

Question 23

Many very good answers were presented which showed a good understanding of different sociological approaches to the family, suggesting that this part of the specification has been covered and taught well in most centres, although some candidates did not attempt this question. Some candidates provided a detailed description of how feminists viewed the family, but failed to access further marks by either neglecting to state an alternative approach, or by not explicitly contrasting the two approaches.

Question 24

Of the two mark questions available, this was the overwhelming favourite, with many comprehensive answers evident. The majority of candidates were able to explain the division of labour and segregated roles within the household. However, too often candidates focused on work, voting and rights for women and did not link them to the question. Sociological concepts relating to gender equality in the home were often referred to, as were feminist sociologists such as Oakley. Few candidates went beyond the domestic division of labour debate and onto discussing issues to do with power and control between male and female partners.

Question 25

Of those that attempted this question, few were able to provide a sophisticated, detailed response. Some candidates were able to push their basic statements about geographical mobility to the lower middle band by outlining that families still remain in contact via the use of email, Skype, etc. Only a handful described the usefulness of wider kinship networks for support, such as contact with grandparents for babysitting, with many stating that the wider extended family is no longer important. Few referred to the importance of the extended family for certain ethnic groups, such as the Asian community.

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

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