

GCE 2001

January Series



Report on the Examination

Sociology

- Unit SCY1 Families and Households; Health; Mass Media
- Unit SCY2 Education; Wealth, Poverty and Welfare; Work and Leisure

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Kathleen Tattersall, Director General

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Sociology

General

On part (a), some candidates slipped into giving examples without clear defining or explaining of the term or phrase. While examples gained some credit, and no doubt helped some candidates to clarify an idea, it would be preferable if they were first to present the meaning in a clear and alternative form of words and then, if they wished, to add an illustration.

There was a tendency among many candidates to write a great deal for some of the shorter parts of their chosen question (notably parts (c) and (d)) - often as much, or almost as much, as they wrote for the longer parts (e) and (f) and despite the great discrepancy in the marks available for these different parts. Many of these answers to (c), and especially to (d), were very poorly structured. In (d) answers, for instance, it was often hard for examiners to see clearly what the two separate points were that the candidate was seeking to identify. Similarly, some candidates wrote long, ill-focused, poorly-organised passages, a page or more in length and containing a range of theories, studies, criticisms etc, but they still failed ever to describe or explain clearly (or concisely) the points identified. Candidates are strongly advised to make clear the separate points identified, for example by starting each on a separate line and introducing each with a phrase such as 'the first reason/factor is...' and then to expand on this in separate sentences which clearly explain or describe the point identified.

A small minority of candidates appeared to run out of time. Sometimes these were candidates who had devoted excessive time to answering the shorter parts of the question. A few presented plans or outlines for the last part of their answer that suggested an awareness of relevant material, but inevitably gained much less credit for this than they would have done for a fully developed answer. By contrast, a very small number of candidates found time to answer all the questions on the paper, disregarding the rubric.

It was pleasing to see that at least some candidates were making a plan before writing, (especially in answer to parts (e) and (f)), though many others would have benefited from doing so.

On part (e), there was some tendency among weaker responses to write rather generic answers without selecting and interpreting material so as to fit the needs of the question. This may owe something to a lack of planning and forethought as well as to an inadequate understanding of the material learnt.

In part (f) of their chosen question, candidates differed in the extent to which they made use of the Items (as directed by the question). The Items are to assist candidates and credit is gained for their appropriate use. Some candidates would therefore be well advised to study the relevant Item with care and to seek to apply material from it to the set question.

Although a small number of candidates appeared not to be acquainted with any sociology (perhaps notably on the Mass Media question), the majority were able to offer some relevant material in response to the questions.

Unit 1

Section A – Families and Households

- (a) Most candidates coped satisfactorily with this part by conveying ideas of independence from or of not being obligated to wider kin, but some interpreted it to mean geographical separation.
- (b) The main problem experienced here was not to convey the idea of ‘rate’ but rather of sheer numbers being born or dying.
- (c) Most candidates dealt reasonably well with this part. Reasons offered for the fall in the birth rate included the idea that children had become a cost or liability (as a result of compulsory schooling, child labour laws etc), that women preferred to pursue careers as an alternative to motherhood, the availability or reliability of contraception, later age of marriage, and the fall in infant mortality.
- (d) Most candidates were able to identify two laws or policies. These included the Child Support Agency, ‘equality’ legislation, education policies, divorce laws, taxes and/or benefits etc. However, some had difficulty in describing the effects on family roles or relationships and sometimes tended merely to describe the law or policy itself without following through on the effects. Others drifted into lengthy and unrestrained accounts of (for example) reasons for the increase in divorce etc without relating this to the question. Candidates should be discouraged from writing such ‘all I know about x’ answers: unless they answer the set question, they gain no credit and, the more they write, the more time they waste.
- (e) In general, candidates showed a reasonable knowledge and understanding of some relevant or potentially relevant material in their answers to this part of the question. Some described different feminist studies of aspects of family life. Perhaps inevitably, Oakley was the most often-cited source, but a number of others appeared, such as Dobash and Dobash, Finch, Pahl, Benston, Ansley etc (and some also interpreted the term ‘feminist’ loosely enough to include Bott and Willmott and Young). Other candidates outlined radical, liberal and Marxist feminist views. There was a tendency to concentrate, sometimes exclusively, on issues of domestic labour, but many went beyond this to consider feminist views on power and decision-making, domestic violence, the impact of gender inequalities in the labour market on family life, gender role socialisation etc.
- (f) Most candidates were aware of some of the relevant material on industrialisation and family structure, such as Parsons, Willmott and Young, Goode, Laslett, Anderson etc. Many made use of the Item and were able to build on it appropriately, although weaker candidates tended to paraphrase and recycle it without adding much of substance of their own. Candidates who showed a better understanding of the significance of contributions such as those referred to above were generally able to organise a coherent and well-structured answer and to reach an appropriate conclusion. These candidates generally also offered some relevant evaluation of the different views presented. Among less well-organised responses, a common failing was to switch from discussion of changes in family structure to an account of changes in conjugal roles within the nuclear family, usually in the context of a description of Willmott and Young's ‘stages’, while others were unable to distinguish clearly between Anderson and Laslett or to recognise the contribution of each to the debate. Some answers contained material on functions, universality, contemporary diversity etc which had at best only implicit relevance and which was not organised to contribute effectively to the answer.

Section B – Health

- (a) Most candidates recognised the term as meaning sickness or similar.
- (b) Most candidates had no difficulty in suggesting two reasons (such as class differences in working conditions, smoking, drinking, exercise etc) but some had difficulty following the question's requirement to suggest reasons other than those mentioned in Item A, and so failed to score for poor housing, poor diet or health care.
- (c) Most candidates were able to suggest appropriate reasons, such as improvements in diet, sanitation, drinking water quality, better hygiene practices, a lower birth rate etc.
- (d) A minority of candidates identified reasons for class differences in health rather than in health care, or identified reasons for gender rather than class differences in care. Among those who identified reasons relevant to the question, points such as access to private health care, the availability of better care in middle-class areas, cultural capital of middle-class patients featured. Some, having identified appropriate reasons, struggled to explain them clearly.
- (e) A few weaker candidates had little or no idea as to the meaning of the term 'social constructs' and quickly moved into an account of prepared material on class inequalities in health or similar. (Some of these took 'socially constructed' to mean 'socially caused' and proceeded to show how social conditions cause illness.) Most candidates, however, had an awareness of the meaning of the term and were able to demonstrate a knowledge of some potentially relevant sociological material. This ranged from accounts of the bio-medical model to cross-cultural material on definitions and explanations of disease (eg witchcraft, spirit possession etc), while others described mainly interactionist/labelling theory or radical psychiatry studies and explanations of illness, especially mental illness. Better answers were able firstly to present a range of such material and secondly to consider not just illness, but also health and disability as constructs.
- (f) Candidates generally made some use of the Item, mainly in terms of morbidity, mortality and consultation differences between men and women. However, some slipped quickly into an account of gender differences in health care rather than health chances, without making any distinction between the two ideas. Some were therefore reduced in effect to presenting the view that differences in men's and women's health were the result of how they were treated when ill. Others were better focused and dealt with a range of relevant issues, such as the impact of gender roles upon health (eg housewives and stress, breadwinners and industrial accidents/diseases, Bernard on marriage, masculinity and risk-taking), cultural expectations about gender, illness and care, the significance of biological differences for health chances etc. Theoretical explanation was usually limited to a cursory account of feminism, but some linked feminist concepts well to the empirical material. Some developed evaluation through discussion of the problems of measuring illness or by contrasting sociological and biological explanations.

Section C – Mass Media

- (a) Most candidates were able to explain the term, conveying an idea that the news is not simply ‘found’ but is the result of social processes or human activities or purposes.
- (b) Most commonly suggested here were the need for entertainment and for information. Some failed to score for what amounted to saying that consumers had a need for media output, or a choice of such output (rather than for the need which this output went on to satisfy).
- (c) A common failing here was to disregard the fact that the question asked, specifically and in bold type, for *behavioural* effects. Many thus failed to score for suggestions amounting to how the media might make audiences think, feel or see things (eg stereotyping other groups). By contrast, those who suggested (for example) copycat violence, influence on voting behaviour or consumer purchasing patterns, picked up the available marks. However, among some of these there was a tendency to write essays on the subject, with accounts of Bandura's methodology, criticisms of the hypodermic approach, the Jamie Bulger case etc all making an appearance. Much more concise answers, directed squarely at the question and which resisted the obvious temptation to unload large quantities of information, gained as many marks as these weighty contributions.
- (d) Some succumbed to a similar temptation here, writing excessively lengthy accounts of sociological material that they had learnt. More focused answers identified factors such as various news values, economic interests (such as the need to sell newspapers), the role of gatekeepers, etc. Some candidates clearly had little sociological knowledge of relevant issues, but some of these succeeded in gaining a limited number of marks, usually for identifying factors connected with the nature of the story (eg whether it was about a celebrity).
- (e) Answers here ranged from the commonsensical and over-generalised assertions of those who lacked any knowledge of appropriate sociological material, to well-informed accounts of a range of relevant empirical and theoretical contributions. The weakest answers were often little more than a collection of references to various television programmes or advertisements together with some homespun generalisations about the group or category in question. More successful were candidates who presented a satisfactory account of one or two relevant studies, though among many of these answers there was a tendency to drift away from the issue of representations into speculation about the effects of such representations upon audiences (especially in the case of gender). The most successful answers combined a good range of empirical studies with some theoretical context, such as feminism, Marxism or pluralism, to give some explanation of the patterns of representation identified in the studies described.
- (f) Some weak candidates, lacking any knowledge of pluralism, fell back on recycling the Item, but better responses showed an awareness of the pluralist contribution to one or more relevant debates or areas of study. Most often, this concerned the question of control over media output and the role of the audience. Some candidates, while showing a reasonably good knowledge of pluralism, only developed a very limited analysis or evaluation of this approach. However, others developed a more effective discussion by introducing Marxist or other approaches, applying concepts such as ideology to the question.

Unit 2

Section A – Education

- (a) Most candidates had little difficulty in explaining the meaning of the term, but a minority either did not know its meaning or were only able to give an example rather than an explanation or definition. These latter candidates gained one of the available marks.
- (b) The reforms most often identified were the introduction of comprehensives, compensatory education, and the 1944 Act (enabling more working-class pupils to go to grammar schools). A very few candidates did not know what the term ‘reforms’ meant.
- (c) Most candidates were able to score on this part of the question, with reasons such as girls’ changed aspirations, the introduction of coursework (at which girls do better), various equal opportunities initiatives etc. Common pitfalls were to explain instead boys’ alleged under-achievement (which even if occurring does not explain girls’ improved achievement) or to focus on factors which could not be shown to have changed (such as girls’ better or earlier development of language skills) and which could not thus explain improved examination performance. A few candidates offered mini-essays on Sharpe and other contributions.
- (d) Most candidates were able to identify relevant factors, often in terms of material and cultural deprivation, although a few did not follow through clearly to describe the educational effect of the factors identified. Again, some were tempted into over-long mini-essays - sometimes without clearly identifying the two factors or clearly describing their effects. A few failed to obey the question’s injunction not to use factors from the Item, choosing instead to write about language/speech codes.
- (e) A few very weak answers made little headway with the idea of education’s contribution to the economy and lapsed into ‘under-achievement’ responses instead. Most candidates were able to draw on knowledge of some appropriate material, however. Typically this came from functionalist and/or Marxist contributions, although other views such as Illich occasionally made an appearance. One pitfall was to give a rather generalised account of the functions/role of education (eg as promoting solidarity) without keeping the focus on the economy/workforce. Others showed a somewhat limited knowledge of relevant studies (such as Bowles and Gintis, Davis and Moore etc) or were unaware of their theoretical position. Better answers were richer in concepts (such as meritocracy, the hidden curriculum, the correspondence principle, human capital etc), looked at different aspects of education (such as vocational education/training), and/or introduced a range of other views (eg New Right, New Labour).
- (f) Candidates in general performed reasonably well on this part of the question. Most made use of the Item, typically developing a description of labelling and the self-fulfilling prophecy. Better answers were characterised by the range of studies on which they were able to draw (such as Becker, Keddie, Hargreaves, Ball, Cicourel and Kitsuse, Rist, Cecile Wright, Gillborn, Spender, Stanworth etc) and on the range of ‘other processes’ with which they were able to deal. These included the hidden curriculum, streaming, pupil sub-cultures, school ethos, racism, sexism etc. The focus was mainly on social class differences, but some dealt with gender and/or ethnicity also. Evaluation was generally limited if present at all, frequently being confined to a brief account of Fuller to show that labels can be rejected. Other criticisms, such as those from a structural standpoint, or questions about the origins of labels, were rarely raised.

Section B – Wealth, Poverty and Welfare

- (a) Most were able to convey a grasp of the concept, often through the idea of ‘using’ or ‘taking advantage of’ someone. Some were able only to illustrate the idea but not explain it explicitly, for example through ideas of low pay.
- (b) Few had problems with absolute poverty, explaining it in terms of basic needs, but some explained relative poverty as a lack of luxuries rather than as a lack of the norm or of that which the majority take for granted, and thus failed to score on the second term in the question.
- (c) Most were able to identify at least one reason, but some had difficulty in distinguishing three separate reasons, duplicating (or triplicating) the same point - usually about skills or qualifications. Other reasons included: to motivate the workforce; to reward talent; as a result of discrimination; as a result of ownership/non-ownership of capital.
- (d) Most identified problems of definition, but some of these ended up repeating the point rather than identifying a second problem. Some pointed to the political nature of measurements, to the difficulties of gathering data (eg respondents lying about their incomes), to regional variations in the cost of living making a single poverty line unworkable etc. As on other part (d) questions, some wrote excessively long answers about different studies and, in the better cases, their methods.
- (e) Most candidates were able to assemble a range of reasons, such as low/unequal pay, lower participation in paid work (especially for older generations of women), differential pension rights, lack of available child care (especially in connection with lone parents), working part-time. Answers differed, however, in the quality and detail of the account of such reasons, and in the extent to which candidates were able to locate these reasons within sociological contributions. Better answers offered a number of studies, concepts or theories with which to make sociological sense of the patterns described. Concepts such as patriarchy, women’s oppression or the feminisation of poverty appeared, though often only in passing and with little real application to the points raised. More use of notions such as power, dual labour markets, reserve army of labour etc. would have given greater sociological edge to some of these answers.
- (f) Most candidates made use of the Item. As on other questions, for weaker candidates this meant a rather ineffectual recycling of the material without adding much of their own knowledge or understanding to it, but better answers were able to build on one or more points taken from it. Some reasonably good answers were rather one-sided, dealing well with causes but with little on solutions, or vice versa. In general, evaluation remained limited, but some were able to analyse the different concepts and components of the New Right view of poverty. These included notions of the underclass, the culture of dependency, attitudes towards single parents and the unemployed, different types of benefits and their role in encouraging or discouraging dependency, and so on. Few contributions other than Marsland or Murray appeared. Marxist or social democratic views (eg Jordan, Titmuss, Townsend) could have been used as a standpoint from which to evaluate the New Right perspective on poverty.

Section C - Work and Leisure

- (a) Candidates generally were able to show an understanding of the concept, often in terms of the idea of pursuing leisure separately from workmates.
- (b) Some put these the wrong way round or gave vague or unclear accounts (eg intrinsic satisfaction as being satisfied 'within yourself'). Other had no difficulty with the terms.
- (c) Most commonly suggested were pay, security/threat of unemployment, the technology used by the worker, and one's position in the hierarchy at work.
- (d) Many identified the role of the internet, television, motor cars etc, but some did not spell out very clearly how the technology might affect leisure. Others went to some lengths to describe the effects, often with theoretical context provided; some became mini-essays in the process.
- (e) Some weaker answers relied heavily on notions of discrimination and prejudice, as well as on the language difficulties faced by some members of some ethnic minorities as barriers to employment. Better answers considered a number of different groups, including men and women, different ethnic groups and age-groups, those in different regions, or the unskilled/unqualified. Some tended merely to list reasons, but better answers developed some discussion of the reasons they offered. Issues such as economic change, industrial decline, inequalities in educational and training opportunities, the culture of dependency, benefit regulations, family responsibilities and gender roles were considered by a minority of candidates.
- (f) Some answers offered a number of reasons for conflict at work but failed to offer any sociological context. Rather better were those candidates who could show a knowledge of, for example, the Marxist view of the basis of class conflict. Most candidates took 'conflict' to mean 'strikes', but some considered other forms such as sabotage, work to rule, lock-outs etc. Better answers showed familiarity with a range of different sociological contributions and explanations: the work of Gouldner, Hyman, Taylor and Walton, Kerr and Siegel, Goldthorpe and Lockwood, or Daniel and Millward appeared in different answers. Evaluation was rather limited in most answers, usually to juxtaposing two or more different explanations of conflict but without generating any debate among them. A few made use of the Item, for example to give some political or historical context to the discussion, but most tended to ignore it in favour of presenting accounts of prepared material.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Unit SCY1 Families and Households; Health; Mass Media

Grade	A	B	C	D	E
UMS	84	74	63	53	42
Boundary Mark (Scaled)	41	36	32	28	24

Component	Maximum Mark (Raw)	Maximum Mark (Scaled)	Mean Mark (Scaled)	Standard Deviation (Scaled)
Unit 1 (SCY1)	60	60	30.8	8.9

Unit SCY2 Education; Wealth, Poverty and Welfare; Work and leisure

Grade	A	B	C	D	E
UMS	84	74	63	53	42
Boundary Mark (Scaled)	43	38	34	29	25

Component	Maximum Mark (Raw)	Maximum Mark (Scaled)	Mean Mark (Scaled)	Standard Deviation (Scaled)
Unit 2 (SCY2)	60	60	32.7	9.1

Definitions

Boundary Mark: the minimum (scaled) mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade.

Mean Mark: the sum of all candidates' marks divided by the number of candidates. The mean (or average) mark measures a central tendency of a mark distribution (provided that the distribution is not skewed).

Standard Deviation: a measure of how widely candidates' marks are spread about the mean mark. When expressed as a percentage of the Maximum mark (scaled), small standard deviations indicate that the marks are "bunched" and large standard deviations indicate a wide spread of marks. In general, the marks of approximately two-thirds of all candidates lie in a range of plus or minus one standard deviation about the mean mark.