



General Certificate of Education

Sociology 5191

SC3C Coursework

Report on the Examination

2008 examination - January series

Further copies of this Report are available to download from the AQA Website: www.aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2008 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

COPYRIGHT

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

SC3C

General

The entry for AS coursework in January remained small, with a large number of centres limiting their entry to a very small number of candidates. It was pleasing to note that that administration was much better and more efficient this January than last summer. The majority of coursework was well presented in word-processed format, using a sensible font, but once again it is requested that the coursework itself should not be annotated with teacher comments and/or placed in plastic folders.

Topics chosen still focused almost exclusively on education, the family and the media. The only variation to this appeared to come from centres that entered students in their second year of A Level as opposed to their first year of study.

The overall impression of this January's cohort was that the standard of work and marking has improved and it was apparent that those centres who accurately followed the specification and mark scheme provided their candidates with the best advice. It was pleasing to see that the majority of centres now understand that the words 'precise', 'concise' and 'succinct' refer specifically to the mandatory section word count, an essential criterion to meet the top mark band.

Typically, the best pieces were both concise and incisive throughout and, crucially, were able to maintain a high standard in all four sections. However, it was noted that many centres still use a formulaic approach, which did not allow the more creative candidates to penetrate the top bands.

Centres who have had their marks adjusted should take full advantage of their Coursework Adviser for advice and guidance prior to candidates making changes and resubmitting work for the summer series.

Length of coursework

Unfortunately, not all proposals were close to the mandatory length of 1200 words. Centres are again reminded that a candidate must not exceed the section totals of 100, 400, 400 and 300 words if they are to meet the top band requirements. Many candidates routinely exceeded the word limit in one or more sections.

Ethical issues

As stated in the previous series, the majority of candidates continued to demonstrate sensitivity to ethical concerns. However, where candidates use very similar contextual or conceptual material – or use the same research method – centres must take care to ensure that they do not collaborate when writing it up. Common advice given to centres by Coursework Advisers is that they should schedule regular meetings with candidates to review and monitor their progress through each stage of their proposal. It was also noted in many proposals that candidates still assumed ethical issues relate solely to informed consent and confidentiality, whilst access is invariably unproblematic.

Administration

Despite the improvement in the quality of administration highlighted above, some centres still did not follow the necessary requirements. For example, coursework was not always sent to the moderator by the requested date and many of the Candidate Record Forms were not authenticated by candidate or teacher. Centres should note that It is a QCA Code of Practice requirement that all coursework must be authenticated. When administration is not completed correctly, the moderator's workload increases significantly. It is essential that centres regularly check the AQA website for copies of the relevant documentation and liaise regularly with their Exams Officer on how to complete it. The following key administrative points should be followed for the next series in summer 2008:

- attach a Candidate Record Form (CRF) to each candidate's work with the correct candidate name, number and signatures of authentication by both student and teacher. Also, ensure that the CRF is for the 2008 series of exams (downloaded from the AQA website)
- ensure the mark given on the Candidate Record Form (CRF) matches the mark given on the Centre Mark Sheet (CMS)
- write detailed comments on the reverse of the CRF indicating how the marks were rewarded; the Research Proposal itself should not be annotated. These comments will help the moderator to give appropriate feedback on your marking
- submit a Centre Declaration Sheet (CDS) for each sample of work, signed by the teachers involved in the moderation process and by the Head of Centre
- send second and third copies (pink and yellow sheets) of the Centre Mark Sheet (CMS) to the moderator, together with the sample
- secure the coursework with treasury tags only - do not place it in plastic wallets
- ensure the candidates marks arrive at AQA and work is sent to the moderator no later than 15th May in the summer series.

Assessment Criteria

Hypothesis or Aim

Most candidates completed this section reasonably well, but a minority persisted in giving sub-aims by way of trying to unpick their own aim or hypothesis. Such candidates then found that the focus became an issue. Some candidates tended not to offer reasons of any depth, and relied on a combination of anecdote and generality about an area's importance in sociology. Reasons for the selection of the research proposal should be made explicitly, with a personal and sociological reason offered.

The marking of this section by centres was variable, with many candidates still being given top band marks solely on the basis of what was written in this section. A clear progression of this aim or hypothesis through each of the sections is essential for candidates to be rewarded with a mark in the 6 – 8 band. This progression was often demonstrated successfully in the Context and Concepts section but less so in the last two sections. Those candidates who chose clarity and simplicity when formulating their hypothesis or aim were able to revisit it explicitly through each section and thus show progression.

Context and Concepts

This section was still over marked by many centres. However, moderators indicated that this section was generally the best of the sections seen in this series, although a large majority were well beyond the 400 word count. There were still many candidates who had only a hazy understanding of what a sociological concept is. Candidates must also be reminded to include only two concepts. Many candidates provided more than two concepts, which were either complex or not explicitly identified, defined or developed. There was also still a tendency to use generalised theory as a concept, or to present non-sociological terms such as 'happiness'. Some candidates followed a template approach, which mainly led to their concepts being 'bolted on' at the end.

Contextually, there was still an over-reliance on dated sources and many candidates used terms such as 'triple shift', 'dual burden', 'dual career household', as totally interchangeable. Conversely, candidates also made increasing use of internet-derived sources, often successfully applying them to a classical sociological debate, but on occasions simply just 'dropping in' such sources.

Candidates who reached the top band were able to integrate the two concepts and two context sources successfully, offered appropriate development and depth in a concise manner, and provided a clear context for the proposed hypothesis or aim.

Main Research Method and Reasons

This section still tends to be grossly over-marked by some centres. On the whole, centres continued to follow advice offered in previous reports to select one method only. However, this method was often carried through in a very formulaic way. Most candidates were aware of the need to move beyond a 'what I'm doing' approach, but for others the pendulum appears to have swung too far towards an abstract discussion of theoretical, ethical and practical issues.

An understanding of sampling remained a problem for many candidates and many clearly considered that the concepts of reliability and validity were the same thing. Piloting tended to be mentioned almost in passing. There was also an increasing tendency to assume that open-ended questions axiomatically make the work qualitative and interpretivist.

It was pleasing to see that higher scoring candidates were able to be more systematic and rigorous in the detail of how the research was to be implemented. They considered the significant practical, ethical and theoretical issues as they influenced and impacted on their own research.

Potential Problems

This section was uniformly the least well done. Many of the weaker candidates tended to return to a textbook, list-like, generic range of methodological problems with little or no link to their own hypothesis or aim. Most relied on a discussion of practicalities, with passing reference to theory and ethics, usually via a mention of confidentiality or informed consent.

Candidates were more likely to be successful when they linked the problems identified back to their methods section, but not through a 'solutions'-based approach, which cannot be rewarded through this specification.

As has been experienced in previous exam series, higher scoring candidates were able to present problems with specific links to their own research, and were therefore able to develop a critical framework that raised issues of a practical, ethical and theoretical nature. This was at its best when problems related back to material discussed in the context and concepts section.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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