



General Certificate of Education

Sociology 5191

SC3C Coursework

Report on the Examination

2007 examination - June series

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Dr Michael Cresswell, Director General.

SC3C – Coursework

General

The entry for AS coursework continues to be a popular alternative to the written paper in this summer series. As in previous years, the quality of work varied considerably and some of the proposals submitted were well beyond the capability of a 16/17 year-old.

The entry remained firmly divided into those centres that read the rubric, pay attention to Principal Moderator Reports, attend autumn teacher support meetings when invited to do so, and listen to their coursework adviser, and those who don't! The former group presented proposals with a clear structure, clear progression of aim or hypothesis through each section and adhered closely to mandatory word limits. The other group invariably ignored requirements set out in the specification and the assessment criteria. Many proposals of high sociological value required an adjustment to their marks because centres allowed candidates to breach the rubric and then awarded them marks in the top band for sections which were frequently 15-20% over the word limit.

It was noticeable this year that a small number of centres allowed candidates to use more than one method and rewarded both methods, rather than only one. It should be noted that triangulation is not a method, but rather involves two or more methods, only *one* of which can be rewarded.

It is the responsibility of centres to prepare their candidates in an appropriate manner and continue to take advantage of the opportunities for teacher support offered by the AQA subject office. Centres whose marks are adjusted this summer should take advantage of all the opportunities available to help their candidates meet the required standard.

The majority of coursework continued to be well presented in word-processed format and with a sensible font, but please avoid it being annotated with teacher comments and placed in plastic folders, or all centre pieces stapled together. The use of treasury tags to secure the work will suffice. Thank you.

Length of Coursework

As stated above, not all proposals were sufficiently close to the mandatory length of 1200 words. Centres should pay careful attention to the meaning of the words 'concise', 'precise' and 'succinct' that feature in the assessment criteria. Candidates must not exceed the section word totals of, respectively, 100, 400, 400 and 300 if they are to meet the top band requirements – candidates are being assessed on their ability to present material in a concise and succinct way.

Ethical issues

On the whole, the majority of candidates continued to demonstrate sensitivity to ethical concerns within their proposals. Centres must take care to ensure candidates do not plagiarise a small section from a standard textbook or a well known study in their context and concepts section. Candidates should offer this information in their *own* words and ensure it is related to their *own* aim or hypothesis.

There were also instances of a number of candidates within a centre selecting the same topic and context pieces. In such circumstances, centres must take particular responsibility for carefully monitoring the progress of these candidates to ensure no collaboration is taking place between them.

Centres should also pay particular attention to candidate proposals on the topic of crime and deviance. These are totally acceptable at AS but, when actually researched at A2 level, they may well break ethical guidelines in terms of issues of sensitivity or legality.

Administration

As in previous years, the quality of administration varied considerably across centres and added significantly to the workload of the moderator if it was not completed correctly. For example, coursework was not sent, as required, to the moderator by the requested date and many of the Candidate Record Forms were not authenticated by candidate or teacher. It is a QCA Code of Practice that all coursework must be authenticated. It is essential that centres regularly check the AQA website for copies of the relevant documentation and liaise directly with their Examinations Officer on how to complete it. The following key administrative points are to be noted for the next series in January 2008: many are essential to comply with the requirements of the QCA Code of Practice.

- A Candidate Record Form (CRF) must be attached to each candidate's work with the correct candidate name, number and signature of authentication by both student and teacher. Please 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 Form (CMF).
- Staff should write detailed comments on the reverse of the CRF indicating how the marks were rewarded; please do not make annotations on the work itself. These comments will help the moderator to give appropriate feedback on your marking.
- Please submit a Centre Declaration Sheet (CDS) with each sample, signed by all the teachers involved in the moderation process and the Head of Centre.
- Second and third copies (pink and yellow sheets) of the Centre Mark Form (CMF) should always be sent with the sample.

Assessment Criteria

Hypothesis or Aim

Many centres continued to follow sensible practice by encouraging candidates to select their aim or hypothesis from an area already studied. As in previous years, education and family themed studies represented the most popular choice, although there was a trend to offer more media-based proposals. However, it was clear that most students who chose to complete a media proposal and to use content analysis as their method were not able to write about it in any real depth.

Many candidates still had difficulty in distinguishing an aim from a hypothesis and subsequently gave both. Many also offered two aims but did not recognise this, although the problem could have been resolved by simple rephrasing.

Candidates' handling of this section was generally stronger this year, characterised by a tighter focus and a hypothesis or aim which was precise and progressed throughout the study. A continued recommendation for this section is that candidates seek clarity and simplicity when selecting an aim or hypothesis. Reasons for selecting the research proposal are more successful and explicit when one is of a 'personal' nature and the second of a more 'sociological' nature.

Those candidates whose work was placed in the 6–8 band were able to offer a relevant sociological focus and hypothesis or aim within the 100 word limit. They revisited their hypothesis or aim through each of the sections and showed progression by remaining focused to it.

Context and Concepts

Centres should note that, in this section, candidates are only required to offer two appropriate contextual sources and two concepts that are explicitly identified, defined and elaborated upon within the contextual sources selected.

There has been a huge increase in the use of internet-derived contexts, many of which were presented in a fairly unselective fashion, and there seemed to be a trend in some centres to require candidates to write to such a rigid template that they all used the same two sources, even if their aims differed slightly. A few candidates also presented general background, unattributed newspaper sources or generic theory as contexts. A further, continuing feature was for candidates to provide an accompanying table or appendix of sources as an addition to their proposals. Neither is required.

Higher scoring candidates were able to select two context sources that provided sufficient detail to draw from, and allowed them to show the skill of selectivity by summarising the material in a concise way, relevant to the proposed research hypothesis or aim. Suitable sources could be drawn from research studies, historical documents, statistics, films, newspaper articles and the internet.

Fewer candidates were as confident with their selection of two concepts, and there was an increasing tendency to illustrate them rather than to provide a definition. Candidates continued to offer extremely broad concepts such as age, gender and social class, which usually totally disappeared thereafter. However, there were examples of centres enabling their candidates to think creatively in their conceptual search – for example the use of 'gender symmetry' used in the traditional conjugal role debate.

As stated in previous reports, centres must offer clear guidance to their candidates on what is an appropriate concept, how it can be defined and how it may be applied in an explicit and relevant way to the proposal.

Main Research Method and Reasons

The majority of candidates now follow the requirements to use only one method. However, there are still some centres who permit their candidates to write an intelligent piece of work, but with the use of multiple methods.

This section allows candidates to discuss a range of issues in relation to their proposal. The most common flaw was that candidates tended to discuss the method in general terms but

without the methodological detail. Most centres used the practical, ethical, theoretical (PET) formula, but there is a risk of thinking it is enough to have mentioned these. For example, candidates mentioned the pilot study but showed no understanding of its purpose, or candidates realised they needed to discuss ethical issues, but interpreted this as meaning they only need to say they would obtain informed consent. When discussing the implementation of their method, candidates should state their population, sampling frame and sampling method, and how access to this sample will take place.

Candidates continued to advocate methods that would present major access or ethical issues, with a disturbing minority of the media and violence studies advocating experiments on people! An increasing number of candidates also used the terms 'quantitative', 'qualitative', 'reliability' and 'validity' as words which could be used interchangeably.

Higher scoring candidates were able to locate their method in a theoretical framework and could discuss practical issues in a confident manner. These candidates also demonstrated sensitivity and applied their chosen method explicitly to their proposed study. They were also strong in operationalising their concepts to the proposed research.

Potential Problems

This section was generally handled much better than the other sections, though there was a tendency to interpret the PET formula narrowly and to discuss problems in generalised terms. Many students who wrote to excessive length elsewhere did the opposite here, offering substantially fewer words with usually little evidence of depth.

Lower scoring candidates tended to be over-reliant on a textbook, and produced a list-like range of problems on piloting, ethics and researcher bias with little or no link to their hypothesis or aim. They also focused on how the problems should be solved, which is not a requirement within this specification.

Highest scoring candidates were able to present problems which linked specifically to their own research, and therefore were able to reflect with insight on issues of a practical, ethical and theoretical nature.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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