



## **General Certificate of Education**

*Sociology 6191*

**SC5C Coursework**

# **Report on the Examination**

*2008 examination - June series*

Further copies of this Report are available to download from the AQA Website: [www.aqa.org.uk](http://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.

## **SC5C – Coursework**

### **General**

SC5C continues to be a popular choice for many centres. Most candidates recognise that A2 study requires the demonstration of a much broader and deeper understanding than at AS. This year, as previously, most candidates were able to operate at a level that would at the very least generate a reasonable standard of coursework, although it was clear that weaker ones still found it difficult to demonstrate the higher order skills required for A2. Many of these candidates also identified 'my first context' and 'first concept'; this was indicative of a lack of insight into the specification requirements.

The great majority of centres seem to have followed the word length message from previous reports, with most studies being around 3,500 to 4,500 words. However, there were still examples of coursework that exceeded 20,000 words (including appendices).

A wider range of topic choice was increasingly evident, although the field was still dominated by mainstream issues such as division of labour in the family, gender differences in educational achievement, the secularisation debate and gender stereotyping in the media. There were some innovative and highly imaginative pieces of research, and the intellectual quality of the highest-scoring studies was good enough to reach the top band in all AO1 and AO2 sections of the assessment criteria.

However, some centres were still highly prescriptive about choice, and studies in such institutions were often very formulaic and lacking any originality.

On the whole, moderators reported that coursework was over-rewarded, substantially in some cases, even where the standard was very good. Centres would benefit from taking note of the comments from this report and previous examiner reports, teacher support meetings and AQA exemplar material. This will be invaluable in helping centres to interpret the mark scheme more accurately.

There was less evidence of coursework that seriously breached ethical guidelines, but all centres are encouraged to revisit the statements of ethical practice. As in previous years, the advice for centres where candidates want to research a sensitive topic is that they should only attempt it through familiarising themselves with the British Sociological Association's statement of ethical practice and the AQA Sociology Teachers' Guide, and ask their Coursework Adviser for guidance whenever there is any doubt about the ethics of a piece of coursework research.

### **Administration**

The quality of administration by some centres continued to present problems. A minority of centres sent the coursework by courier service where delivery only takes place in office hours; consequently the moderator is forced to collect the coursework from the depot, increasing the time taken to conduct the moderation. In addition, coursework was not always sent as required to the moderator by the requested date and many of the Candidate Record Forms did not have authentication by candidate or teacher. It is a QCA Code of Practice requirement that all coursework must be authenticated. When administration is not completed correctly the workload of the moderator is significantly increased. It is essential that centres regularly check the AQA website for copies of the relevant documentation and liaise regularly with their Exams

Officer or AQA Coursework Adviser on how to complete it. The following key administrative points should be followed for the next series in January 2009.

- Attach a Candidate Record Form (CRF) to each candidate's work with the correct candidate name, number and signatures of authentication by both candidate and teacher. Also, ensure that the CRF is for the 2009 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.

## **Assessment Criteria**

### **Context**

This section was generally done reasonably well. Sadly, there were still a number of candidates who relied on dated sources and were rarely able to offer any theoretical background with their context.

The context section should aim to include contemporary and relevant sources and concepts and is best presented in essay form rather than with subtitles. While it is recognised that some candidates will be restricted to sources in available textbooks, there should be some attempt to use recent sources or material, or at least identify that this may be a significant weakness with their study.

A minority of candidates (often poorly advised, as this is very much a centre issue) still relied on an expanded AS approach, with a list-like, descriptive presentation of three or four contexts and concepts, the latter usually discussed in a freestanding fashion at the end.

As has been noted in previous series, higher scoring candidates were able to offer a wide range of succinct, chronologically accurate and contemporary sources taken from a wide range of research studies in textbooks, review magazines, newspaper articles, historical sources and internet sites, all analysed within a sociological and theoretical framework. The conceptual understanding was also clear and embedded within the text. All the source material was well used and explicitly linked to the aims of the research and met the top band criteria of 'understanding the broader sociological context'.

### **Methodology**

Methodology sections were generally handled well. Questionnaires were the overwhelmingly popular method of choice, although some candidates still seemed to have trouble deciding whether they were quantitative, qualitative, or both. Many candidates stated they were going to use both closed and open questions to deliver both reliability and validity, and then actually used only closed questions. Those doing interviews often seemed to suffer similar confusion as to how structured their approach actually was.

---

As in previous years, the least well-addressed area was sampling, and many candidates seemed confused about exactly what type they were using. Most discussed ethics, though often seeing this as unproblematic, and there were a significant number of studies (usually within individual centres) that used ethically dubious approaches, such as self-report studies on crime with under-16s.

Most candidates were aware of the need to consider the operationalisation of concepts and to discuss specific implementation issues. More candidates were able to give a clearer justification for the questions they intended to ask and how they related directly to their rationale. However, these often appeared in the Evidence section rather than in this section and, as a consequence, centres sometimes failed to reward candidates appropriately. Piloting was more prevalent than previously, but very few candidates provided any specific evidence of how the final version to be used was arrived at. Piloting was limited to questionnaires and structured interviews and not deemed to be significant when using observation or content analysis.

### **Evidence (Application, Presentation, Interpretation and Analysis (APIA))**

As in previous years, this section was rather variable in quality, and was the area where moderators disagreed the most with centres on marks awarded. Candidates by and large have grasped the idea that relating the outcomes of their research to their context pieces is a 'good thing', but sometimes this was done at the expense of selectivity, with a contextual reference or assertion in nearly every paragraph. The increase in the number of candidates using fairly simplistic, closed question questionnaires has led to a corresponding tendency towards lightweight, descriptive, analysis, often relying on tenuous links to the context, and with conclusions that depended on assertion.

Those candidates who have scored more highly in this section ensured that the focus was tight, with many opting for an aim-by-aim approach to ensure this. Such candidates adopted an analytical style by employing a questioning approach to their findings and discussing the possible meanings behind them. They may have drawn on previous contextual evidence to show similarities or contradictions between their sources of evidence. This frequently generated qualities required for the higher mark bands, eg sensitivity in interpretation and analysis and a high level of sociological insight. In summary, high scoring candidates were more systematic and selective and used the evidence to enhance their understanding beyond description. Analysis also included explicit but selective reference to the rationale, theory, context and concepts.

As highlighted in the previous series, a minority of candidates again fell foul of the two-method issue, principally because of the introduction of extra contextual data not previously referred to in the context section, but in some cases because they actually used two separate methods. This problem tended to be a centre-specific issue rather than a candidate-specific one and must be picked up by the supervising teacher in early discussion with their candidates.

### **Rationale, Evaluation and Conclusions**

By and large, candidates limited their aims to the achievable, but there were still some candidates who made things difficult for themselves by choosing aims that were woolly, difficult to progress or measure, or were modified as the study unfolded. The rationale provided by the highest scoring candidates had a succinct and relevant focus characterised by a clear aim or hypothesis and one or two linked objectives/aims. They outlined clearly the reasons for their

choice and offered a relevant sociological context for the study. A strong point with such candidates' work was the way they then systematically tracked and developed these through each section of their research.

Evaluation sections were again of variable quality. Many centres adopted a section-by-section approach, which meant the actual process of research was dealt with fairly cursorily, and 'further research' was correspondingly lightweight. Too few candidates (even those who had written in depth elsewhere) seemed to feel the need to be sociologically rigorous about their research process, and most relied on generalities about things 'going well'. The highest scoring candidates were able to look at their research in a self-critical, objective and constructive fashion and derived further research proposals and recommendations that were not just an afterthought. They identified what they had been able to learn from their mistakes and how they could be rectified in the future, presented as practicable, insightful and achievable recommendations. Sociological conclusions were also related to the hypothesis or aim and objective(s) identified in the rationale and drew from relevant material referred to in previous sections.

## **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](http://www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html) page of the AQA Website: <http://www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html>