



## **General Certificate of Education**

*Sociology 6191*

**SC5W Theory and Methods**

# **Report on the Examination**

*2008 examination - January series*

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

## SC5W – Theory and Methods

### Section A

#### Question 1

- (a) A high proportion of candidates answered this question correctly. The most common response was to write about ‘big stories’ or overarching theories explaining society. Many gave examples such as Marxism, functionalism and religion.
- (b) The majority of candidates answered this question well. The most common disadvantages cited concerned the lack of validity, problems of depth and meaning, inflexibility and constructing a reality. However, some candidates failed to explain the disadvantage identified. For example, it is common for candidates to elaborate or show a consequence of the disadvantage, as with “so there will be a lack of validity.” This does not constitute an explanation. Some candidates incorrectly gave advantages of quantitative methods and thus scored no points.
- (c) Candidates found this question accessible and generally answered it well. Common responses included clarity and understanding, avoiding leading questions, being aware of sensitivities, ethical correctness and gender issues.
- (d) Some candidates had significant problems with this question. They had little understanding of the concepts of modernity or post-modernity and so scored very few marks. Other candidates had more to offer and discussed post-modernist ideas such as the impact of globalisation, the role of the media, hyper-reality, consumerism, image and reality and spiritual shopping. Many gave good, brief and accurate summaries of the relevant works of Giddens, Lyotard, Baudrillard and/or Bauman.

### Section B

#### Question 2

This question was less popular than Question 3. Most candidates placed their answers in the context of a positivist versus anti-positivist debate or arguments about sociology as a science. Some candidates found it difficult to maintain a clear focus on the question set. More successful answers were provided by those who addressed the relevant issues and explored if sociology could be objective and value-free and whether it should be.

Some candidates divided their responses into sections considering value-free sociology, value-laden sociology and committed sociology. Such a device gave clarity to their argument but did tend to stereotype the sociologists under consideration.

There was clearly still some confusion among candidates about the theoretical positions of feminists and Marxists in this debate. Candidates seemed about equally split as to whether sociologists from these perspectives were, or were not, promoting value-freedom. Some candidates are also still using the concepts of validity and reliability interchangeably.

### **Question 3**

This question was very popular and well answered by many candidates. However, it was surprising how many candidates did not know the difference between overt and covert. Some candidates confused these terms with participant and non-participant.

The most common approach was to consider the sub-divisions of observation in turn and to explore a range of practical and theoretical issues, such as getting in and out, consent and deceit, asking questions, note-taking, maintaining cover, time, cost, danger and illegality. The usual examples of “The Tea Room Trade” and the research of Patrick, Whyte and Barker featured prominently. The better answers came from candidates who used their knowledge and understanding clearly to address the question rather than simply to describe a long list of research studies.

A common failing was to ignore the theoretical aspects of this question and to focus exclusively on practical issues.

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

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