



## **General Certificate of Education**

*Sociology 6191*

**SC5W      Theory and Methods**

# **Report on the Examination**

*2007 examination - June series*

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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*Dr Michael Cresswell*, Director General.

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## SC5W – Theory and Methods

### Section A

#### Question 1

- (a) It was surprising that, despite the numbers who use Kuhn's arguments about sociology when writing about sociology as a science, only a minority of candidates answered this question correctly. Many confused a paradigm with a theory. Others developed answers on methods or simply ignored the question altogether. Acceptable answers included a set of key facts, assumptions, problems, methods or solutions. Those who provided examples, such as 'earth flat, earth round', rarely developed their answer to explain what the example showed, and thus scored only for a partially correct response.
- (b) Candidates had more problems than anticipated with this question. For many the difficulty seemed to be not in their knowledge and understanding of the issues, but in their ability to express points in the terms required by the question. Many did not clearly identify a reason and then go on clearly to explain it. For many the explanation was in fact a development or elaboration of the reason. Others gave a consequence rather than an explanation or had trouble understanding what a reason might be. For instance, some argued that sociology should be seen as a science 'because positivists say so'. This statement was put down as their identification and was then followed by a statement (as explanation) such as 'because sociology uses scientific methods'. If candidates are to score highly on Q 1 (b) and 1 (c) then they must come to terms with the skills required to present their answers appropriately for the question asked.
- (c) Candidates seemed to find this aspect of the science debate easier to answer than the pro-science aspect. The most common responses covered sociologists' inability to remain objective or value-free, the nature of researching on people rather than rocks or fossils, avoiding the taint of science as people now distrust scientists, the inability to control variables and, for feminists, the desire not to be associated with 'malestream' research.
- (d) This question was reasonably well answered by many candidates. Most distinguished between the two forms of data and then gave two or three advantages or disadvantages associated with using each type. Better answers came from those who were more sceptical about such advantages and disadvantages and who questioned the uses of data in a range of contexts. The more disappointing answers came from those who simply assumed that primary data was good and that secondary data was less good and who tried to justify this position. A minority of candidates confused data with methods and wrote answers to explain why some methods were better than others.

### Section B

#### Question 2

This was a very popular question. Most candidates placed their answers in the context of a positivist versus anti-positivist debate and then went on to consider quantitative and qualitative methods. Answers were differentiated by the ability of the candidate to explore the theoretical debate beyond a simple juxtaposition, for instance including a consideration of feminist research, and by their ability to discuss a range of methods backed by reference to examples from contemporary or recent research. The link between feminist perspectives and

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methodology, when considered, was usually well done. There were some excellent responses to this question.

### **Question 3**

This question was less popular than Question 2, and was answered by only a minority of those who attempted it. Most candidates managed to provide a reasonable summary of functionalist theories. These would usually include consideration of Durkheim, Parsons, Malinowski and Merton (though quite a few saw Merton as a Marxist). Better candidates gave fuller, more detailed summaries. Consideration of the New Right proved more problematic. Weaker candidates ignored it altogether. The rest adopted positions varying from one that identified it as something to do with Mrs Thatcher and the Welfare State to a fuller, more complete understanding of the ideology and views expressed from the likes of Marsland, Murray and Friedman.

Few candidates managed to express much that showed an understanding of how either of these perspectives might help us to understand society today. There were some statements about meritocracies and a few points made by some candidates about the role of education or religion.

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

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