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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

SOCIOLOGY

GCE Advanced Level and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

<p>Paper 9699/01</p>

<p>Essay</p>

General comments

Each of the six questions elicited a good range of responses. **Questions 1 and 3** were the most popular. Most of the candidates demonstrated at least some relevant knowledge and understanding in the questions that they attempted. In weaker scripts, the knowledge was partial and contained inaccuracies. In better scripts, the sociological references used were more detailed and often linked to relevant issues and empirical evidence. The best answers also provided analysis and evaluation at an appropriate level.

To raise the standard still higher, candidates may benefit from including more references to relevant studies in their answers, and by understanding more fully the links between theories and substantive issues – for example, this was a key requirement in writing good answers to the **Section C** questions this session. It is pleasing to see that the candidates increasingly are making use of references to post-modernist arguments and concepts. This too is a useful way of adding depth to answers for this paper.

There were no rubric errors and the candidates appeared to have no trouble completing the stipulated two answers in the time allocated. The CIE endorsed textbook for the syllabus is now available from the publishers and Centres may find it helpful to make use of this source in preparing candidates for the examination. 'AS and A Level Sociology', by A. Barnard, T. Burgess, and M. Kirby, is published by Cambridge University Press (ISBN 0 521 53214 0).

Comments on specific questions

Section A

The Sociological Perspective

Question 1

Some answers provided a solid descriptive account of the functionalist theory of socialisation, but failed to go further. Better answers outlined the functionalist theory accurately and developed an assessment of it. At a basic level, the assessment was made through the juxtaposition of the functionalist theory with one or more other theories of socialisation. Some candidates, however, were able to offer a more developed assessment through an explicit critique of the functionalist perspective and/or a well-informed attempt to reach a reasoned and balanced conclusion about the usefulness of its theory of socialisation.

Question 2

Some candidates wrongly interpreted the question as an invitation to write about the nature versus nurture debate. Answers of this type tended to include a lot of general material about socialisation that was only tangentially relevant to the issues raised by the question. Better answers were focused directly on the idea that childhood specifically is a social construct. The historical studies of childhood by Philip Aries provided a useful foundation for many of the answers. Some candidates also made good use of cross-cultural studies to illustrate the many variations in the experience of childhood. To achieve high marks, the answers also needed to include an assessment of the idea that childhood is a social construct.

Section B*Sociological Methods***Question 3**

A few candidates misunderstood the question and wrote about the advantages and limitations of primary research methods, such as interviews and questionnaires. A number of answers were restricted to considering only official statistics as a source of secondary data. While this type of response, well done, achieved marks in the middle of the range, it was too limited in scope to go higher. Better answers assessed the advantages and disadvantages of a range of sources of secondary data, considering both practical and theoretical issues.

Question 4

A few candidates confused longitudinal studies with research based on participant observation. It is important to emphasise that the two types of study are different. An average type of answer to this question provided a basic account of the strengths and limitations of longitudinal studies without directly addressing the issues raised by the question. Better answers offered more illustration of what is involved in carrying out longitudinal studies. They also made a concerted attempt to unpack the question by contrasting the practical difficulties of longitudinal research with the putative benefits of this type of study.

Section C*Social Differentiation and Stratification***Question 5**

Weak answers were based on a few commonsense observations about the nature of class divisions today. Better answers were supported by references to appropriate sociological evidence and concepts. Some responses were rather general, however, often being confined to a descriptive account of the Marxist and Weberian theories of social class. The higher marks were awarded to candidates who demonstrated a good awareness of relevant debates about the nature of class boundaries today. In this context, some useful references were made to the proletarianisation and embourgeoisement theories. Candidates who were able to bring the debates fully up to date by referring, for example, to feminist and post-modernist contributions particularly impressed the Examiners.

Question 6

A lot of the answers to this question were rather descriptive. They concentrated on outlining the nature and extent of ethnic inequality, without examining the possible causes of the unfairness. Better answers combined appropriate descriptive material with an attempt to assess how far ethnic inequality can be explained in terms of racial discrimination. In some cases, the analysis was focused on unpacking the differences between the concepts of ethnicity and race. More often, the candidates compared structural and cultural explanations, with good references to studies of ethnic inequality inspired by Marxist or Weberian perspectives.

Paper 9699/02

Data Response

General comments

The candidates for this paper once again produced a good standard of work overall. Knowledge of concepts and research processes in sociology was well demonstrated in relation to the shorter **(a)** and **(b)** questions, where a high percentage of the answers merited full marks. The longer **(c)** and **(d)** questions proved better discriminators, with a key division evident between candidates who were able to produce only very short and partial answers and those who demonstrated considerable knowledge and understanding of the relevant issues.

Candidates who took particular care to unpack the wording of each question, and who remained focused on addressing the specific issues raised by the question throughout their each answer, produced the best scripts. While this observation may seem obvious, it continues to be the case that a significant number of candidates provide only indirect answers to many of the questions despite the fact that they clearly possess a great deal of relevant sociological knowledge. Well-directed application of knowledge to the precise requirements of each question is therefore a skill that candidates would be well advised to focus on in developing their examination technique.

Candidates should also take care not to spend too long answering the shorter **(a)** and **(b)** questions. It was evident that some candidates had answered these questions in more detail than necessary and consequently struggled to complete their answers to the **(c)** and **(d)** questions within the time allocated.

The candidates seemed well prepared for the questions in terms of knowledge, although this was less so in relation to **Question 1 (a)** where there was often little evidence that the candidates had a clear understanding of the purposes of sociological research. There were no rubric errors.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a)** Some answers failed to achieve any marks because they were essentially tautological; for example, a typical response was the statement that 'value judgements are the judgements that sociologists make about values'. Answers that merited marks defined the term 'value-judgements' accurately and/or related it to the Weberian context in which it is most usually associated in sociology.
- (b)** Most of the candidates were able to identify two relevant factors, such as funding, career considerations, social relevance, time available, etc.
- (c)** Weaker answers were confined to a few basic points about the influence of values on the research process. There were many better answers though that described a full range of influences, often supported with references to relevant studies.
- (d)** Although this proved a difficult question for the candidates, there were some very good efforts to grapple with the issues it raised. Basic answers were limited to a few observations about different sociological theories and how they approach the study of society. Better answers addressed the question directly by considering different views about the appropriate aims of sociological research. At the highest level, candidates questioned the idea of making supposed improvements in society and whose interests it might serve. The relationship between sociological research and social policy was also explored in some of the best answers to this question.

Question 2

- (a)** Many candidates were able to define the term accurately. Some gained one mark for providing an appropriate example of how researcher bias might arise, but the lack of a formal definition prevented this approach from achieving both marks.
- (b)** This question was very well answered, with clear and well explained reasons why sociologists should take care in the way questions are worded in an interview.
- (c)** Weaker answers offered only one or two basic points about why researcher bias may be difficult to avoid when carrying out interviews. Better answers covered a wider range of relevant points and these were often supported with well-chosen examples from sociological studies.
- (d)** Some candidates achieved only modest marks for this question because their answers were focused on interviews in general. Better answers concentrated on the strengths and limitations of structured interviews specifically. Candidates who drew appropriate links between the different types of interviews and the debate between positivists and interpretivists particularly impressed the Examiners. Good use of examples from studies was another feature of high quality responses.

Question 3

- (a) The term was accurately defined by the majority of candidates. A few confused social mobility with geographical mobility.
- (b) The majority of candidates gained full marks by describing two appropriate reasons why women earn less than men.
- (c) Weaker answers identified a few relevant points, but with little development and/or theoretical grasp. Better answers considered a range of possible explanations and demonstrated awareness of the contribution to the debate of different theoretical perspectives. The best answers also maintained a focus throughout on the issue of access to top jobs in industry, rather than providing only a general account of why sexual inequality exists.
- (d) Answers that situated the question in the context of Marxist explanations of sexual inequality gained particular credit. An appropriate theoretical structure of this kind was required to answer the question well. Weaker answers were often confined to a few isolated points about who might benefit from sexual inequality in employment. Better answers had more sociological grounding and used contrasting theories to assess the claim that the ruling class benefit from sexual inequality in employment.

Paper 9699/03

Social Change and Differentiation
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General comments

All the questions on the paper were addressed by some candidates, but very few attempted questions in **Section E**. The best answers were given by those candidates who paid heed to the mark allocation and give focused answers to (a) that were knowledge driven and more evaluative and developed answers to (b). Most candidates adhered to the rubric but there were a few who ran their answers into one leaving the Examiner to judge where (a) ended and (b) began. However, it is pleasing to report that more candidates are applying knowledge appropriately and gaining a mark in the Level 3 range on (a) answers. There were also fewer candidates who failed to submit a paper showing that there is a growing commitment by all candidates.

In order for Centres to improve the achievements of some candidates it is necessary to ensure that candidates have a clear understanding of sociological terminology and concepts. Although it is quite acceptable to use material based on the founding fathers candidates who are going to perform at the top of the range need to access up to date material as well. In a few cases candidates were using the theories of such key thinkers as Weber as if he is a contemporary writer.

Comments on specific questions**Section A****Question 1**

Although the family remains a popular topic this question was not selected by many candidates.

- (a) The key to success with this question was understanding the meaning of the family life cycle. Those candidates who understood this and described the changes that a family experiences before the next generation takes over and repeats the cycle did well. Unfortunately there were too many candidates who did not understand the term and instead described the life span of individuals.
- (b) This part of the question was more clearly understood and answers ranged from an adequate explanation of loss of function to exceptional candidates who described a whole variety of ways in which the state can influence families. Answers tended to rely on the use of practical examples rather than use theoretical approaches. A few candidates interpreted the state to mean capitalism. This covered policies to do with issues of patriarchy and welfare as well as the way in which the state can influence the ideology of the family. These candidates showed confusion between the meaning of state and society. However, the majority of candidates had a good understanding of the meaning of the state.

Question 2

This question was answered by the majority of the candidates who sat this paper and the second part of the question was more thoroughly understood than the first.

- (a) There were very many excellent descriptions of the nature of childhood and the way in which the child develops. Unfortunately many candidates wrote about role rather than status or the social position that a child experiences. Some candidates who understood the meaning of status wrote about the status of children in society rather than the status of children in the family. There were a lot of descriptions of pre and postindustrial families. To improve the attainment of candidates, Centres need to ensure that candidates have a firm grasp of the meaning of these terms and can support their answers with relevant examples that fit the criteria of the question.
- (b) This was a well answered question with candidates describing the changes that may have occurred between conjugal partners and then many showing the higher skill of evaluating those changes. A few candidates realised that 'between family members' enabled them to include other members of the family namely the elderly and the young as well as go beyond the domestic labour debate. Some also considered the position of sons and daughters within the family framework. Some candidates who showed clear understanding would have gained more marks by including a balanced conclusion.

Section B**Question 3**

A popular question that was universally well answered.

- (a) A well understood question. Candidates offered a range of inequalities that mostly concentrated on issues to do with gender, ethnicity and class but there were also some that looked at structures within schools and pupil hierarchies. The very best answers also made some assessment about the nature of inequalities.
- (b) Some candidates offered limited answers to this question in that they confined their response to descriptions of the factors outside of schools that have the effect of limiting pupils' achievements. Those that had a better understanding realised that the question required inclusion of the factors that also impact on pupils that are to be found within schools. Some candidates experienced difficulties in showing the difference between factors that influence pupils' attainment inside schools as well as those from outside schools and this is an area that performances could be improved upon. There was a tendency for candidates to repeat information from (a) in (b). Candidates should be aware that significant amounts of material should not appear in both sections of a question. The candidates who scored at a very high level then proceeded to address the evaluation in the title that required candidates to make some assessment of the relative importance of the two sets of factors and it is this higher skill level of answer that is the key to scoring in the higher mark bands.

Question 4

This question was answered by a limited number of candidates and many of them struggled to understand the meaning of the second part of the answer.

- (a) Those candidates who understood the meaning of the term hidden curriculum, namely that which is learnt at school but which is not included in the formal curriculum did well and offered many sound examples of the way in which it may operate. Issues of patriarchy, class position, career and ethnic status were amongst the examples offered. Unfortunately there was a disappointing lack of understanding amongst a few candidates who either did not know what it meant or who explained why it existed rather than the way in which it works.
- (b) The range of answers to this question was vast and there were many candidates who struggled with it. They did not look at the way in which pupils regard their education or include typologies like those of Woods but relied on personalised experiences. There were, however, some excellent use of studies such as Willis and the counter school culture.

Section C

Question 5

A few candidates answered this question. Many struggled with part **(a)** although **(b)** was understood to a higher level.

- (a)** Although there were some excellent answers that used examples such as Rastafarians and Pentecostals in their answers candidates who selected this question generally struggled with the patterns of worship that can be associated with different ethnic groups.
- (b)** The best answers to this question dealt with issues such as marginalisation and poverty, or wealth, and showed how this was a causal factor in their religious practice. Although it is a good idea to interrogate the meaning of questions when they are of a higher order a blanket economics factors are not important is a weak answer. Some candidates used Weber's Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism to show how religion impacts on the economy and this was to reverse the meaning of the question.

Question 6

A very popular question leading to some excellent answers that scored very high marks.

- (a)** Most candidates explained clearly what the difference is between the three types of religious organisations the differences between a church and a sect being the most comprehensively understood. Some would have done better by giving clear examples of the different organisations. It was a disappointment to read on a few papers that a church is a building; such answers display a lack of sociological understanding.
- (b)** Although a few candidates took the opportunity to explain the theories of the founding fathers on the future of religion most candidates answered this well. There was a reliance on the secularisation debate, and that was appropriate, but the best candidates took it further and looked at the power that is, or is not, influenced in the world today by religion. This question gave candidates an excellent opportunity to offer a balanced conclusion that took the answer to the highest band and a good number of candidates did that. It is worth noting that if Centres wish their candidates to do better they need to go beyond the founding fathers in their answers. Although their theories are still appropriate evidence for a sociology examination, there is a plethora of contemporary material as well and some candidates write about the founding fathers as if they were still with us.

Section D

Question 7

This was a popular question for which a range of answers were offered. Most candidates displayed a good knowledge of the material required. However Centres need to make sure that candidates know the difference between crime and deviance. They are not interchangeable terms but many candidates used them in such a way in this question.

- (a)** Candidates displayed a good understanding of the meaning of deviance and there were good examples offered. An area that showed a greater weakness in some candidates answers was that in which the process by behaviour can be labelled as deviant as only a few candidates showed how some behaviour is labelled in that way when other similar behaviour is not. Issues of power were not well explored.
- (b)** In spite of the popular nature of this question many candidates were not familiar with the term deviancy amplification. Many were able to explain the role of the police and other agents of social control but many candidates were not able to gain more credit by highlighting the role of the media or by indicating how crime can go up by their intervention.

Question 8

A popular well answered question.

- (a) This question was answered very well. However the understanding of biological explanations was generally explained in greater detail than that of the sociological ones and there was also a tendency to list rather than distinguish the differences. Some candidates also confused sociological explanation with psychological ones.
- (b) Many candidates showed that they had a good knowledge of crime and how it can be a social construction but there were too many who answered this question as if it was one about the recording of official statistics. A greater focus on the role of law enforcement agents was needed. It was disappointing that what some candidates had done this for **Question 7** would have been more appropriate in this question.

Section E

Question 9

There were very few answers to this question and most of these were weak. Of the few candidates who did select this question and **Question 10** Examiners got the strong impression that they had not been prepared for it and offered general knowledge responses.

- (a) Most of the candidates who answered this question thought ageism was how old you are. These answers concentrated on the problems created by employing older workers.
- (b) Candidates displayed little understanding of the nature of the global economy. Answers used common sense material and few were relevant.

Question 10

There were very few answers to this question and most of these were weak. Few candidates display sociological knowledge of this topic in which case they would be well advised to avoid answering these questions.

- (a) As a concept the meaning of professionalisation was not understood, some candidates offered lists of jobs done by professionals rather than looking at the social processes that create them. Others confused it's meaning with embougeoisement.
- (b) Social closure was another concept that few candidates understood. Without a clear understanding it was difficult to offer a relevant answer to this question.

Section F

Question11

Although this question was only selected by a few candidates those that did showed a good understanding of it.

- (a) Many good specific examples of the changed pattern of ownership were offered, many candidates referred to Warner and AOL.
- (b) Many candidates showed a good understanding of the nature of Pluralism in relation to the media and most then offered a Marxist critique. Some focused on the Marxist contention with little or no reference to Pluralism.

Question 12

Of the media questions this was the most popular with candidates but the second part was the one on which most scored their marks.

- (a) There were many weak answers to this question with candidates suggesting that the young like exciting programmes or people watch for the news. Although these gained some credit Examiners were looking for candidates who were describing uses and gratifications linked to specific audience groups.
- (b) This was answered to a higher standard with many candidates using both hegemonistic as well as manipulative theories and interpreting these from a pluralistic or functionalist view. Some candidates were debating the influence of the media rather than ideological control.