



UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS  
General Certificate of Education  
Advanced Subsidiary Level and Advanced Level

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**SOCIOLOGY**

**9699/02**

Paper 2 Principles and Methods 2

**October/November 2007**

**1 hour 30 minutes**

Additional Materials: Answer Booklet/Paper

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**READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

If you have been given an Answer Booklet, follow the instructions on the front cover of the Booklet.

Write your Centre number, candidate number and name on all the work you hand in.

Write in dark blue or black pen.

You may use a soft pencil for any diagrams, graphs or rough working.

Do not use staples, paper clips, highlighters, glue or correction fluid.

Answer **two** questions.

At the end of the examination, fasten all your work securely together.

The number of marks is given in brackets [ ] at the end of each question or part question.



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This document consists of **3** printed pages and **1** blank page.



Answer **two** questions.

- 1 Sociologists are divided about whether the methods and techniques used in the natural sciences can be applied in sociological research. Sociologists in the positivist tradition support the scientific approach. Through their research they seek to discover 'scientific laws', which could explain the causes, functions and consequences of social phenomena, such as rates of crime and suicide. In contrast, sociologists who support the interpretivist perspective maintain that there is a fundamental difference between the subject matter of the natural sciences and the social sciences. This perspective derives from the work of Max Weber. He rejected the idea that people can be studied in the same manner as the physical world. People attach meanings to what they do and sociology has to acknowledge this and attempt to interpret those meanings. However, this raises the question of whether sociologists are able to interpret other people's behaviour in a way that is objective and value-free. Positivists warn that in-depth studies that focus on understanding the meanings people attach to their behaviour give rise to many difficulties. They are also likely to be contaminated by researcher bias to such an extent as to make the results totally unreliable.

- (a) What is meant by the term *researcher bias*? [2]
- (b) Describe **two** problems that a sociologist may face in seeking to interpret objectively the actions of other people. [4]
- (c) Explain why some sociologists think that people cannot be studied in the same manner as the physical world. [8]
- (d) 'The differences between the logic and methods of the natural sciences and sociology have been exaggerated by the critics of positivism.' Assess this view. [11]

- 2 Unstructured interviews more resemble conversations than the systematic interview schedules of structured interviews. The purpose of unstructured interviews is to gain an in-depth understanding of an interviewee's perception of particular subjects or issues. One advantage is that they can be used flexibly to explore issues at a range of levels. The interview usually takes place between two people, though group interviews can also be used to gain insight into the collective view. Sociologists from the interactionist perspective favour unstructured interviews.

Unstructured interviews allow respondents to feel empowered. Feminists view this as particularly important. They are critical of research methods that are too formal. Feminists prefer respondents to be active participants in the research process and they believe that researcher knowledge and skill should not dominate interviews. For example, Kelly in her study of sexual violence wanted to ensure that all the women she spoke to had some involvement in addition to answering the interviewer's questions. She carried out follow-up interviews in which she discussed the themes and analysis that she was developing, asking for and noting the women's opinions. This enabled 'joint interpretation of meaning', allowing the women to have an input into the findings.

- (a) What is meant by the term *structured interview*? [2]
- (b) Describe **two** advantages of group interviews. [4]
- (c) Explain why feminists are critical of research methods that are too formal. [8]
- (d) Assess the strengths and limitations of unstructured interviews. [11]

- 3 It is generally agreed that the rate of social mobility is significantly higher in modern industrial societies than in traditional societies. Industrial societies are therefore sometimes described as 'open'. They may also be characterised as meritocratic. A meritocracy is a system in which people are rewarded on the basis of how hard they work and how much ability they possess. However, there is a debate in sociology about whether modern industrial societies are meritocratic. Conflict theorists claim that inequality remains a key feature of these societies. In this view, the idea that an 'open' system exists in which people are free to realise their potential regardless of social background is an illusion.

Evidence from social mobility studies is important in the debate about meritocracy. This is because a study of social mobility can provide an indication of the life chances of members of society. For example, it can show the degree to which a person's class of origin influences his or her chances of obtaining a high status occupation. The rate of social mobility may also have an important effect on class formation. For example, if the rate of social mobility is low, then class solidarity and cohesion are likely to be high. However, there are many problems associated with the study of social mobility.

- (a) What is meant by the term *life chances*? [2]
- (b) Describe **two** problems in measuring social mobility. [4]
- (c) Explain why the rate of social mobility may have an important effect on class formation. [8]
- (d) Assess the claim that there are no longer any social barriers to upward social mobility in modern industrial societies. [11]

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