

Principal Assessor Report 2002

Assessment Panel

Social Sciences

Qualification area

**Subject(s) and Level(s)
included in this report**

**Sociology
Higher**

Statistical Information: update

Number of entries in 2001	
Pre appeal	
Post appeal	338

Number of entries in 2002	
Pre appeal	463
Post appeal	

General comments re entry numbers

2002 saw a substantial increase of 125 candidates sitting the exam and this builds on a similar increase seen between 2000 and 2001. If this increase is maintained, this augurs well for the future.

General comments

Results show that there were a number of candidates that should not have been presented at Higher. This varied from candidates scoring 1 out of a possible 135 to candidates writing one or two paragraphs only for each essay to candidates who wrote full books but with content so poor that it was impossible to award marks at this level. Whether these candidates were from composite classes where the focus was on other Higher candidates (thus they were there as 'timetable fillers') or whether they were prepared inadequately for the exam is a matter of speculation.

Grade Boundaries at C, B and A for each subject area included in the report

Grade A	–	94
Grade B	–	79
Grade C	–	65

General commentary on grade boundaries

Notional percentage cut-offs for each grade

Question papers and their associated marking schemes are designed to be of the required standard and to meet the assessment specification for the subject/level concerned.

For National courses the examination paper(s) are set in order that a score of approximately 50% of the total marks for all components merits a grade C (based on the grade descriptions for that grade), and similarly a score of 70 % for a grade A. The lowest mark for a grade B is set by the computer software as half way between the C and A grade boundaries.

Comments on Grade Boundaries for each subject area

<p>There were a few candidates whose marks were on the cusp between a compensatory award and a C pass. The performance of candidates was judged to have met the lower C Grade standard and therefore the pass mark was lowered by two marks.</p>
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Comments on candidate performance

General comments

2002 saw the introduction of a new format for the Higher Sociology paper. In previous years, there were two papers with Paper 1 being allocated 1 hour for completion, a 20 minute break, and Paper 2 comprising three questions from Sections A, B and C with an allocated time of 1 hour 40 minutes. This year, Papers 1 and 2 were combined to form four Sections. Section A, B, C and D. Time allocated was 3 hours with no break. This meant candidates had 20 minutes more to spend on the question paper than in previous years.

Good candidates did write more this year - many using two answer books - although this was partly because Section A was answered in an answer book rather than on the actual paper (as had been the case in previous years).

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Generally speaking, candidates tackled Section A more thoroughly than Sections B, C and D. This is perhaps because Section A comprised short-answer questions rather than an essay. In some cases, this brought up the overall mark of candidates whose performance in the essay sections was weaker. However, within Section A there were discrepancies in questions with some being answered less well than others. Question A1 and A6 were answered well by most candidates.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

In Section A, some questions were less well answered than others. The ones that appeared to be less well answered were those that asked for differences between theories and/or explanations. Instead of making two clear points as one difference, some candidates described one point and then simply made a statement that the other side was 'the opposite' or the other explanation 'is not'. This was not sufficient to gain full marks at this level.

In Sections B, C and D, the main difficulty for candidates appeared to be writing essays that were coherent and well argued rather than simply providing lists of theories and studies. Very good candidates were able to do this and do this consistently in each essay, but poorer candidates did not synthesise their knowledge and understanding.

Another difficulty in Sections B, C and D was that some candidates did not read the questions properly or had not been prepared adequately by centres. Although all essay questions asked for theories and studies, questions can sample from across the outcomes within individual units and therefore some exam questions were designed to test particular parts such as features, changes, aspects, etc. In some cases, candidates lost marks because they had not read the question properly and therefore missed out vital material from their answers.

Some candidates appeared to answer questions on a chosen topic based on the previous year's exam paper. Sampling from across outcomes will vary between questions from year to year and therefore candidates should be prepared to answer from any part of the curriculum.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

General

- To gain a good pass, candidates need to write well across all Sections and time themselves so that they are tackling all the questions they are required to complete.

Section A

- Candidates need to write concisely but comprehensively in this section. One word or short-phrase answers cannot gain full marks and candidates should distinguish between an explanation and a description.
- Candidates need to write full answers when asked for differences. For example it is not sufficient to say sociological explanations use research to support their theories and common-sense explanations do not. This is not really explaining a difference. Similarly, it is not sufficient to say that consensus theory believe society is harmonious whereas conflict theory does not.

Sections B, C and D

- Candidates need to write three essays in a consistent way. One good essay and two poor essays do not produce good passes. Candidates need to practice essay writing under exam conditions. Candidates also need to be advised that there is less time to write an essay in the external exam compared to the time given for the internal assessment and centres should be coaching candidates in good exam technique.
- Candidates need to read the question and answer accordingly. Although all questions ask for the use of theories and studies, some questions also sample from other outcomes in the unit assessments. For example, candidates may be asked to describe features, changes or focus on an aspect. If these are not asked for, candidates should still write some sort of introduction e.g. explain what is meant by class stratification, deviance, mass media before discussing theories, etc.
- Candidates need to synthesise knowledge and understanding and write a coherent essay. Some candidates simply write 'lists' and use theories and studies that are unconnected. Such essays cannot be awarded high marks.
- Candidates need to include evaluation of theories, evaluation of studies, demonstrate the way in which studies used support or refute the theories used, make evaluative comments and draw meaningful conclusions from their discussion in their essays to gain top marks.
- Candidates should be reminded that questions can sample from across the course units and this will vary between questions from year to year. Candidates should be prepared to answer questions on any part of the curriculum - this year, some candidates answered questions on a particular topic based on the last year's question paper.