



External Assessment Report 2009

Subject	Sociology
Level	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the Examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

- In general candidates responded well to the demands of the paper, scoring marks across the range from zero to almost full marks.
- Once again candidates were clear as to the compulsory question in Section B and most appeared to be well prepared. Although marks gained by individual candidates varied, marks in Section B were equivalent to marks gained in Sections C.
- Candidates who achieved few or no marks tended to miss out a significant number of questions or wrote very little in their responses. Evidence suggests they were not adequately prepared for the rigor of the Higher Sociology examination.
- As in previous years, candidates tended to answer the paper consecutively. Nevertheless, a significant number of candidates answered Sections B and C before A.
- Most candidates completed the paper and there is evidence that changes made to the exam structure have enabled more candidates to complete the paper.
- The most popular choices of question in Section C were The Family and Crime and Deviance; once again the least popular option was Welfare and Poverty.

Candidates who achieved an A pass tended to:

- Answer questions in Sections A, B and C consistently well.
- Use sociological language consistently well in all sections, particularly with reference to theories and concepts. For instance in Section A, Q4 on action theories and Section C, C4 on socialisation and the media, A pass answers were characterised by the use of sociological language to explain the relevant theories and arguments.
- Address the specific question asked, relating theories and studies to the question asked.
- Demonstrate thorough preparation and the ability to structure answers, particularly essay questions; addressing the question asked, relating theories and studies to the points made.
 - Include evaluative points in their essays, either as conclusions or in the body of the essay, for instance as additional strengths or weaknesses of theories or points relation theories/studies to the question asked.
- Did not take up time with lengthy description of concepts and issues not relevant to the question asked.

Candidates who achieved B or C passes tended to:

- Be somewhat inconsistent in their responses, for instance achieving high marks in Section A but not on essays.
- Write essays that did not directly respond to the question asked but addressed the topic generally.

- Achieve higher marks where questions required description rather than analysis/explanation/evaluation.
- Waste time on overly long, descriptive introductions, for instance explaining what they were going to write about.
- As in previous years some candidates wrote about the aspect asked in the question separately; for instance including it as an isolated section in their essay. This approach disadvantages candidates as no specific marks are allocated to a description of the aspect; rather marks are achieved by relating the aspect to theories and/or studies. (Please refer to published MIs). For instance in section C Q4 some candidates described socialisation and the media in isolation and did not evaluate their points or tackle the question asked.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Section A

Candidates generally performed well in this section. *Marks ranged from 0 to 40.*

- Candidates answered questions relating to action theory generally better than in previous years.
- Candidates who scored highly in Section A took cognisance of the specifics of the question, particularly whether it required explanation or description, and the marks offered. Explanation requires more detailed points, for instance explaining why a particular point is strength, for example in Q2.
- Candidates who scored well used sociological language in questions, for instance in Q2 making reference to ‘meritocracy’, ‘socialisation’, ‘consensus’ or ‘role allocation’ as part of an answer on the strengths of functionalist theory
- Candidates who scored well made clear differences between similarities/differences as opposed to merely describing features. For example in Q5 explaining specific differences between structural and action theories.
- Candidates who achieved high marks tended to use examples as part of their explanations, for instance naming a theory in Q6 is not a requirement but is a good technique to elaborate on a description of this step in the research process.

Section B

Given that candidates can be asked a question on class stratification or education, responses here tended to be strong.

Marks were broadly equivalent to those in Section C.

Candidates who produced strong responses tended to:

- Plan and structure their answer
- Answer the question, in this case about social mobility.
- Relate theories and/or studies in some way to the question asked, that is about social mobility

Section C

The most popular choice of question was the Family and fewest candidates opted for Welfare and Poverty.

Strong responses integrated the aspect they were asked about into theories and studies and responses tended to:

- Plan and structure their answer

- Answer the question, for example C1 on the family and changing conjugal roles.
- Relate theories and/or studies in some way to the question asked, for example C3 on crime and labelling.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Section A

Some candidates found Section A Q2 demanding. Many candidates answered this question very well however there seemed to be evidence that some candidates were not prepared for this question. Some responses only addressed features but even these responses often lacked detail and specific information about functionalism.

Many candidates answered Q4 on action theories well and there was an improvement on the responses of previous years. However, many candidates found it difficult to expand on points and did not explain the specific strength or weakness identified.

Section B

The essay on social mobility was generally well done, with candidates gaining marks across the spectrum and generally in line with marks gained in Section C. However, some candidates did not answer the question specifically, for instance some candidates wrote about class and social closure or class generally. These candidates disadvantaged themselves as they could not achieve maximum marks if they did not address the question.

A significant number of candidates continue to write long, descriptive introductions which waste time and can only attract a maximum of 4 marks.

Similarly, candidates who gave long descriptions about social mobility in isolation and did not try to relate it to the question asked/theories/studies could not gain any additional marks as there are none available (please refer to the published MIs).

Section C

C1. The Family

This question was generally well done, with candidates gaining marks across the spectrum. Some candidates did not address the question on conjugal roles specifically and were therefore unable to achieve maximum marks. Many candidates provided very long and descriptive details about the changing nature of the family or family in general, however such description cannot gain any marks other than the 4 marks provided for introductory points (please refer to the published MIs).

A few candidates continue to apply feminist theory very poorly to the question/topic; a common and recurring error is where candidates describe the theory itself as 'negative', rather than its effects on women. An accurate understanding of feminist theory is a requirement at this level.

A significant number of candidates addressed the aspect of conjugal roles separately rather than referring to the question and/or using theories and studies to answer the question asked. This disadvantaged candidates who could gain no more than 4 ku marks (allocated for introduction) for any such isolated description of the aspect. Furthermore, although 4 marks could also be allocated for further evaluation, responses approached in this way tended to lack evaluation.

C2. Welfare and Poverty

Although the question was tackled by relatively few candidates, many responses were very good, with candidates gaining marks across the spectrum.

Some candidates did not address the specific question asked and discussed poverty in general.

Again, in merely describing the aspect of underclass and a culture of dependency in isolation candidates could gain no more than 4 ku marks (allocated for introduction). Furthermore, although 4 marks could also be allocated for further evaluation, responses approached in this way tended to lack any evaluation.

The responses of some candidates who achieved marks at the lower end of the spectrum tended to lack sociological language and terminology in their responses. These essays described the issues of poverty and dependency culture using common sense language and concepts.

Candidates who achieved marks at the lower end of the spectrum also tended to lack the required detail and evaluation of theories in their essays.

C3. Crime and Deviance

This question was generally well done, with candidates gaining marks across the spectrum.

However, some candidates did not address the question on labelling specifically and were therefore unable to achieve maximum marks.

Some candidate did not make introductory remarks and/or pertinent definitions, for instance of crime and deviance and thus missed the opportunity to gain up to 4 marks (introduction).

A significant number of candidates addressed the aspect of labelling separately rather than relating the aspect to the theories and studies and/or to answer the question asked. Such descriptions of the aspect in isolation disadvantaged candidates who could gain no more than 4 marks (allocated for introduction). Furthermore, although 4 marks could also be allocated for further evaluation, responses approached in this way tended to lack evaluation.

C4. Mass Media

This question was generally well done, with candidates gaining marks across the spectrum.

Some candidates did not address the question on socialisation, and hence were unable to achieve maximum marks. These candidates' responses tended to be overly general on the media and/or focus on ownership and control.

A significant number of candidates addressed the aspect of socialisation separately rather than using theories and studies to answer the question asked. This disadvantaged candidates who could gain no more than 4 marks (allocated for introduction) for any description of socialisation in isolation. Furthermore, although 4 marks could also be allocated for further evaluation, responses approached in this way tended to lack evaluation.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

- Candidates must write consistently well across Sections A, B and C to ensure high marks.
- Candidates who plan their responses and structure essays tend to achieve marks at the higher end of the spectrum. This is something centres should emphasise to candidates and encourage candidates to practice essay questions from past papers and so on.
- Candidates should endeavour to use appropriate sociological and inclusive language in their responses.
- Time management is a significant examination skill. This is something centres should emphasise to candidates; for instance there is little point in writing copious amounts for Section A if candidates are then unable to complete Sections B and C.
- There is some evidence to suggest that some candidates do not have an adequate understanding of feminist and action theories. Centres should note the requirements as stated in the Arrangement documents and emphasise to candidates the significance of such theories.
- There is some evidence that some candidates were not prepared to answer Section A Q2. Again centres should note the requirements as stated in the Arrangement documents and emphasise to candidates the significance of such theories and the type of questions that may be asked.

- **Section A**
- Candidates should read the question carefully, answering by explaining or describing as required.
- Candidates should take cognisance of the marks allocated to each question and taper their responses accordingly. For instance, writing a full A4 page for a 4 mark answer is not effective time management.
- Candidates should note that questions on the strengths of functionalism as well as all other theories studied (see Arrangement Documents) may be asked.
- Candidates should ensure they are familiar with all steps in the research process.

Sections B and C

- Candidates must answer the question asked. Responses should address the specific aspect by applying their knowledge and understanding and not writing generally about a topic, for instance QC1 asks about changing conjugal roles in the family and not just changes in the family.
- Candidates are required to use theories and studies to answer the specific question asked; for instance in Section B candidates should explain their contrasting theories on social mobility.
- Further evaluative marks can appear anywhere in the essay and may relate to theories, studies or general points (relating to aspect) but must be evaluative and not descriptive. Such evaluation may be part of a conclusion at the end of an essay but not necessarily have to be in the conclusion.
- Introductory remarks such as definitions of terms should not be overlong as they only attract up to 4 marks and should avoid descriptions of what they will include in their essay.
- Centres should make candidates aware of the requirements necessary to achieve a good pass in the examination. Application of knowledge is required and to a standard beyond that required in NABs.
- Candidates should note that essay structure differs in the final examination to that required in NABs. Lengthy description of aspects will not be awarded marks (beyond the 4 marks KU that may be allocated from the Introduction). The relevant aspect should be related to the theories and studies used.
- Centres should make candidates aware of the knowledge, evaluation and analysis required to ensure success in the final examination.
- Centres should emphasise the importance of preparation to ensure success in the final examination; this includes knowledge and understanding but also examination technique such as essay planning and time management.
- Although there is no time limit on studies it is essential that any study used is relevant to the question asked for example the extent to which social mobility is a feature of society in the twenty-first century.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	734
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	739
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 100				
A	26.3%	26.3%	194	70
B	20.3%	46.5%	150	60
C	18.4%	65.0%	136	50
D	4.5%	69.4%	33	45
No award	30.6%	100.0%	226	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- Each year SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related as they do not contain identical questions.
- SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.