



External Assessment Report 2010

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

Candidates responded well to the demands of the paper in general and passes were in line with previous years.

Candidates scored marks across the range from zero to almost full marks.

Once again, the compulsory question in Section B did not pose candidates any additional difficulty and most candidates appeared to be well prepared. Although marks gained by individual candidates varied, marks in Section B were roughly equivalent to marks gained in Section 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 Higher Sociology and perhaps would have benefited from presentation at Intermediate 2.

Most candidates completed the paper and there is evidence that changes made to the exam structure have enabled more candidates to complete the paper. Although most candidates answered the questions consecutively, those who did not tended to complete the paper.

The most popular choices of questions 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 and essays consistently well.
- ◆ Use sociological language consistently well in all sections, particularly with reference to theories and concepts. For instance, in Section A, Question 3, including relevant terms such as 'base', 'superstructure' and 'hegemony'.
- ◆ Use sociological language to explain the relevant theories and arguments asked for by the question. For instance, when discussing functionalism, education notions of meritocracy were discussed (Section B) or feminist theories on gender and crime may include notions of 'doubly deviant'.
- ◆ Demonstrate a necessary grasp of the Course content and exam technique, thorough preparation and the ability to structure answers, particularly essay questions. Those who achieved well appeared to have prepared not only the content required but essay structure and writing, as well as technique with regards to Section A answers.
- ◆ 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 unnecessarily lengthy description of concepts and issues not relevant to the question asked. For example, in the Section B essay on education, many candidates wasted time and effort on over lengthy descriptions of the education system.

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 more generally and thus sometimes, but not consistently, making relevant points.
- ◆ Achieve higher marks where questions required description rather than analysis/explanation/evaluation, for instance in Section A Questions 4, 5, and 8.
- ◆ Waste time on overly long, descriptive introductions in their essays, for instance explaining what they were going to write about.
- ◆ Some candidates continue to write about the aspect asked in the question separately; for instance including it as an isolated and descriptive 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 marking instructions). For instance, in Section C1 including lengthy detail and description with regards to historical changes in the family but not relating this to theories or studies and making no evaluative points.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Section A

- ◆ Candidates generally performed well in this section. Marks ranged from 0 to 40.
- ◆ Candidates who scored highly in Section A understood 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 a strength, for example in Question 4 on the strengths and weaknesses of structural theories.
- ◆ Candidates who performed well demonstrated preparation of content and technique, for example taking into account the number of marks allocated for each question, and did not give overlong answers for a question worth only a few marks.
- ◆ Candidates who scored well used sociological language in questions, for instance in Question 2, making reference to 'patriarchy', 'Liberal feminists' or 'Radical feminists' as part of an answer on the strengths of feminist theory.
- ◆ Candidates who performed well demonstrated a good grasp of sociological theories, eg distinguishing between Marxism and Neo-Marxism using concepts such as hegemony.
- ◆ Candidates who scored well made clear differences between similarities/differences as opposed to merely describing features. For example, in Question 5, explaining specific differences between conflict and consensus theories (either using general points or referring to specific theories).
- ◆ Candidates who achieved high marks tended to use examples as part of their explanations, for instance in Question 8 referring to specific qualitative methods (although answers could be made in general).
- ◆ In general, candidates answered the questions on research methods well.

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.
- ◆ Strong responses from candidates tended to be planned and structured, answered the question asked, in this case about education and attainment, and related theories and/or studies in some way to the question asked, that is about attainment with regards to gender, ethnicity or class.
- ◆ Did not waste time on narrative introductions on the history of education in the UK.
- ◆ Candidates used a broad range of sociological studies, classic and modern, to answer the question.

Section C

- ◆ The most popular choice of question was the Family, and fewest candidates opted for Welfare and Poverty.
- ◆ Strong responses integrated the aspect with theories and studies and tended to be well-planned and structured.
- ◆ Relate theories and/or studies in some way to the question asked, for example C3 on crime and gender, by using feminist theory and study.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Section A

- ◆ Some candidates found Section A, Question 3 demanding. However, many candidates answered this question well. Hence, there seemed to be evidence that some candidates were not prepared for this question.
- ◆ Some candidates found Question 2 challenging and responded by giving features rather than strengths. Moreover, it is unfortunately still the case that some candidates explain feminism in 'common sense' terms and use stereotypical language to do so.

Section B

- ◆ The essay on education 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 attainment generally rather than addressing class, ethnicity or gender. 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 on the history of education since the 1800s. Such introductions waste time and can only attract a maximum of 4 marks (please refer to the published marking instructions).

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 specifically, that is on changing family patterns, and were therefore unable to achieve maximum marks. Many candidates

provided very long and descriptive details about the changing nature of the family or the history of the family in general, however such description cannot gain any marks other than the 4 marks provided for as introductory points (please refer to the published marking instructions).

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 still address the aspect of changing family patterns separately rather than using theories and studies to address the issue of changing family patterns. 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 be very descriptive and to lack evaluation.

◆ C2: Welfare and Poverty

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

Only a few candidates did not address the specific question asked and discussed poverty in general.

Again, in merely describing the aspect of gender and class 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 gender 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 specifically and were therefore unable to achieve maximum marks.

Some candidates did not make introductory remarks and/or pertinent definitions, for instance definitions of crime and deviance and different crime rates for different genders.

Thus some candidates missed the opportunity to gain up to 4 marks (Introduction). This may be a reflection of a lack of preparation with regards to essay structure and practice.

A number of candidates addressed the aspect of gender 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 KU 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 bias 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 rather than bias, influence and attitude formation.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Candidates who demonstrate preparation in terms of content and technique (both in restricted response questions and essays) tend to have greatest success. Candidates who plan their responses and structure their 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 throughout the paper and centres should be vigilant with regards to the use of stereotypical language.

Although most candidates complete the Higher Sociology paper, some do not and there is evidence that some candidates spend a disproportionate amount of time on one section to the detriment of their performance in other sections. 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 theories. Centres should note the requirements as stated in the Arrangements documents and emphasise to candidates the significance of such theories.

There is evidence that some candidates were not prepared to answer Section A, Question 3. 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 example, writing a full A4 page for a 4 mark answer is not effective time management.
- ◆ Candidates should note that questions on the strengths of feminism 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.
- ◆ Candidates who scored marks at the higher end of the spectrum tended to answer precisely on research methods, for instance in Question 7, a good candidate response may include, 'As questions are open the researcher is not restricted to pre-set questions and can explore issues in-depth'.
- ◆ Answers are often enhanced by examples and many candidates find it easier to illustrate their point using an example. For instance in Question 8, a general disadvantage of methods that generate qualitative data is that it is often difficult to record data; candidates making this point could enhance their answer by using the example of observation and participant observation, and explaining why it is difficult to record data when using these methods.

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 example, in Section B candidates should explain their contrasting theories on education and class or gender or class. Studies should relate to the theories used.
- ◆ Candidates are required to use theories and studies to answer the specific question asked. For instance, in Section C3 candidates should explain their contrasting theories' views on crime and gender. Hence, when using theories candidates should try to describe/explain each theory's findings on gender and crime. For example, a candidate using Marxist theory as a contrast to feminist theory may make the point that Marxists claim class rather than gender is the most significant aspect when studying crime or that Marxists are often criticised for not specifically examining the significance of gender on crime.
- ◆ Studies should relate to the theories used. Hence if a candidate uses Marxist and feminist theories then the studies should either support or refute Marxist and feminist theories. This should be made clear by the candidate. 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 gender or class or ethnicity affects education in modern UK society. Therefore, older studies referring to women and education should be evaluated in light of the current pattern of educational achievement amongst women.
- ◆ 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 does not necessarily have to be in the conclusion, and include evaluation of theories or studies beyond the required marks allocated in each section, for instance a further advantage/disadvantage of a theory.

- ◆ 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 (please refer to the Understanding Standards Sociology page, Arrangement documents, marking instructions, etc).
- ◆ 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 KU marks that may be allocated from the Introduction). The relevant aspect should be related to the theories and studies used (please refer to the Sociology Course assessment specification).
- ◆ 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.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	739
Number of resulted entries in 2010	895

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	32.6%	32.6%	292	70
B	22.3%	55.0%	200	60
C	16.9%	71.8%	151	50
D	5.4%	77.2%	48	45
No award	22.8%	100.0%	204	—

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, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.