



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Sociology
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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

The paper performed well; there was no evidence from candidates, centres or markers of issues with the paper. Candidates responded well to the demands of the questions, and passes were generally in line with attainment levels in previous years.

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

Candidates who achieved Grades A and B tended to score high marks in Section A, B and C, demonstrating a broad knowledge of the sociological approach and the ability to apply theories and research methods.

Marks gained by individual candidates varied. Marks in Section B were roughly equivalent to marks gained in Section C. 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.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Section A

Candidates who scored highly in Section A took cognisance of the specifics of the question — particularly whether it required explanation or description. Explanation requires more detail, for instance explaining why a particular point is an advantage or disadvantage, as was the case in Section A Q5, where candidates were questioned on the advantages and disadvantages of using structured interviews as a research method.

Candidates who performed well demonstrated preparation in terms of exam technique, for instance 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 consistently well used sociological language in their answers to questions, for example in Q2 where they made reference to micro-theories, social actors or symbolising as part of an answer on Symbolic Interactionism.

Candidates who achieved high marks tended to use examples as part of their explanations, for instance in answering Q6 by giving an example of a hypothesis (although answers could be made in general) or methods used if they chose fieldwork as a method.

Generally, candidates answered the questions on research methods well.

Section B

Marks in this section were broadly equivalent to those in Section C.

Strong responses tended to be planned and structured, focusing on the question asked, in this case about social class and attainment.

Strong responses tended to apply theories not just to the topic but to the question asked.

Candidates who produced strong answers 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; fewest candidates opted for Welfare and Poverty.

Strong responses answered the question by integrating the aspect with theories and studies. Strong responses tended to be well-planned and structured.

Strong responses also related theories and/or studies in some way to the question asked, for example in C3 by using interactionist theory and a study related to labelling within their answer.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Section A

Some candidates found Section A Q2 demanding. However, some candidates answered this question very well. There seemed to be evidence that some candidates were not prepared for this question. Candidates should note that questions may be asked about action theory in general or on Symbolic Interactionism (and/or Weber in particular.)

Some candidates found Q3 challenging; others answered it well. Candidates should prepare to answer short questions on feminism and ensure that they provide sociological and not common sense answers to these questions.

Section B

Some candidates did not answer the question specifically but chose to address the topic in general. This meant that they could not access the full range of marks on offer (see the published Marking Instructions).

A significant number of candidates wrote long, descriptive introductions, which often focused on the historical changes to education across the UK. This is often a waste of time and effort, as candidates can only achieve up to four marks for introduction. Furthermore, some candidates were unable to demonstrate an understanding of social class, the effects of class on education, again using 'common sense' or anecdotal evidence, instead of sociological evidence.

Section C

All questions in Section C were answered well, with candidates with candidates gaining marks across the spectrum.

C1 The Family: This was the most popular option. Some candidates did not address the question specifically, that is on marital breakdown, 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 four marks provided for as introductory points.

Some 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 as such. An accurate understanding of feminist theory is a requirement at this level.

C2 Welfare and Poverty: Although the question was tackled by relatively few candidates from only a few centres, many responses were very good.

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

C3 Crime and Deviance: This question was generally well done. However, some candidates did not address the question specifically and were therefore unable to achieve maximum marks. General points on theories and studies were made, as opposed to relating points to the question that was on labelling.

C4 Mass Media: This question was generally well done. However, some candidates did not address the question on socialisation and so 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 attitude formation.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Centres should encourage candidates to practice short answer and essay questions from past papers.

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.

There is still 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 Arrangement documents and emphasise to candidates the significance of such theories.

Candidates should be reminded to refer to and evaluate feminism from a sociological point of view and not use common sense language and references.

There is some evidence that some candidates were not prepared to answer Section A Q2. 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 take cognisance of the marks allocated to each question and taper their responses accordingly. Candidates should note that questions on features, strengths and weaknesses of action as well as structural theories may be asked. These may include questions on Weber, Symbolic Interactionism, feminism, functionalism, Marxism and Neo-Marxism.

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, in Section B candidates should explain their contrasting theories on the effects of class and educational attainment and not just education in general. Studies should relate to the theories and/or the aspect used.

Candidates are required to use theories and studies to answer the specific question asked. For instance, in Section C2 candidates should explain their contrasting theories' views on poverty and class. Studies should relate to the theories used and /or aspect discussed in the question. If a candidate uses Marxist and feminist theories, 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 there is a link between class and educational attainment today.

Whilst there are no time limits on studies (and classical studies are often very appropriate) centres should prepare candidates by giving them up-to-date information on topics — for instance the extent of mobility or numbers of parents who are married.

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, and may 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. Candidates should avoid descriptions of what they will include in their essay.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	907
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	1136
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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	24.6%	24.6%	280	70
B	18.1%	42.8%	206	60
C	21.7%	64.5%	247	50
D	7.7%	72.3%	88	45
No award	27.7%	-	315	-

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.