



External Assessment Report 2015

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 of issues with the paper from candidates, centres or Markers. 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 full marks.

The most successful candidates tended to score well in Sections 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 as in previous years, 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 account of the specifics of the question, particularly whether it required explanation or description. For instance in A1 ensuring three differences were described and in A7 ensuring two disadvantages were explained.

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 not giving 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 A3 where they made reference to terms such as meritocracy, effective role allocation or functional prerequisites.

Candidates who achieved high marks tended to use examples as part of their explanations, for instance in answering A8 by giving an example of a hypothesis (although answers could be made in general) or methods used, if they chose fieldwork as a method.

Section B

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

Good responses tended to be planned and structured, focusing on the question asked, in this case about social closure. These responses also tended to apply theories not just to the topic but to the question asked.

Candidates who performed well 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.

High scoring responses answered the question by integrating the aspect with theories and studies. These responses tended to be well planned and structured.

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

Areas which candidates found demanding

Section A

Some candidates found A2 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 Weber or Symbolic Interactionism.

Some candidates found A4 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. Centres should emphasise to candidates that sociological language should be used in answers and stereotypes and that common sense language should be avoided.

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 general points. This is often a waste of time and effort, as candidates can only achieve up to four marks for an introduction. Furthermore, some candidates were unable to demonstrate an understanding of social class and social closure, again using 'common sense' or anecdotal evidence, instead of sociological evidence.

Section C

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

C1 The Family: This was the most popular option. Some candidates did not address the question on conjugal roles, 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.

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 gender.

C4 Mass Media: This question was generally well done. However, some candidates did not address the question on ownership and control and so were unable to achieve maximum marks. These candidates' responses tended to be overly general on the media.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

This is the last year of this particular Higher Course. If centres wish to present candidates for the new Higher Sociology Course in future years, they should familiarise themselves with all appropriate SQA documentation to enable them to support their candidates effectively. There is guidance in the 2015 Course Report for the new Higher Sociology Course.

Centres should encourage candidates to practice the type of questions required by using the Course Assessment Specification, past papers and specimen 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 relevant Course and Unit 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 A2. Centres should note the requirements as stated in the relevant Course and Unit documents and emphasise to candidates the significance of such theories and the type of questions that may be asked.

Section A

Candidates should note the marks allocated to each question and produce their responses accordingly. Candidates should note that questions may be asked on features, strengths and weaknesses of action as well as on structural theories. 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 social closure and not just class 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 C3, candidates should explain their contrasting theories' views on gender and crime. Studies should relate to the theories used and/or aspect discussed in the question. If a candidate uses feminist and Marxist theories, the studies should either support or refute feminist and Marxist 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 analysing the changes in conjugal roles in the family.

While 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 conjugal roles.

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.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	1136
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Number of resulted entries in 2015	884
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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	20.7%	20.7%	183	70
B	24.7%	45.4%	218	60
C	22.3%	67.6%	197	50
D	6.7%	74.3%	59	45
No award	25.7%	-	227	-

The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore no adjustment to grade boundaries was required.

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.