



Course Report 2015

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| Subject | Sociology |
| Level | 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 and assessors 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 assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

Section 1: Comments on the assessment

Component 1: Question paper

The question paper is worth 60 marks of the overall marks for the Course assessment.

The paper is divided into three sections dealing with different aspects of the Course. Each section is worth 20 marks each. Marks gained by individual candidates varied. Marks in Sections A, B and C were roughly equivalent.

Section A: Human Society

Candidates coped well with questions on theories and methods.

Section B: Culture and Identity

In general, candidates coped well with questions in this section, accessing the full range of marks.

Section C: Social Issues

Candidates who planned and structured their response performed very well in this section.

Component 2: Assignment

The assignment is worth 30 marks, 33%, of the overall marks for the Course assessment.

Candidates selected a wide range of sociological topics for their assignments.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Component 1: Question paper

Section A: Human Society

Candidates coped well with questions on theories and methods.

Section B: Culture and Identity

In general, candidates coped well with questions in this section, accessing the full range of marks.

Section C: Social Issues

Candidates who planned and structured their response performed very well in this section.

Component 2: Assignment

Candidates coped well with the demands of the assignment and accessed the full range of marks.

Candidates who focused on a plan that matched the assessment requirements scored well.

Candidates chose a wide range of topics for their assignment. Candidates from some centres focused on a narrow selection of topics.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Section A: Human Society

Candidates who performed well in Section A planned their answers and used appropriate sociological language. Successful candidates also took account of the marks awarded to each response and avoided overlong and repetitive responses.

Candidates who performed well included detail in their responses, for instance in Q1 (b) strong answers referred to specific detail of differences between feminist and action theories.

Candidates tended to answer the question on research methods very well. Most candidates answered Q2 very well and many scored highly.

Section B: Culture and Identity

Candidates who performed well in Section B were able to answer both questions in detail. Strong answers to Q3 applied functionalist theory to the development of identity and included detailed explanation.

Section C: Social Issues

Successful responses were planned and included analysis, applying Marxism and one other theory to the issue of socio-economic inequality. Candidates who scored highly made conclusive points based on a range of evidence, such as theories, studies and statistics.

Component 2: Assignment

Candidates who planned their assignment were most successful. Most candidates completed the assignment within the word count.

Many candidates explained the differences between common sense and sociological explanations and scored highly in this section. Candidates who scored highly related the explanations to their chosen topic.

Most candidates provided detailed findings from their research. Candidates who related their findings to sociological theories achieved marks at the higher end of the scale.

Candidates who chose sociological research as their source found it easier to evaluate findings, for instance making a judgement about the validity and/or reliability of the source.

Most candidates made some form of conclusion, most concluded on their findings with reference to their hypothesis.

Section 4: Areas in which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Section A

Some candidates' responses lacked detail, for instance in Q1 (b) some responses focused on conflict in general rather than feminism specifically or merely described each theory rather than analysing the differences.

Section B

Many candidates tended to be descriptive in their response to Q4. However, some candidates managed excellent explanations of power and status in Cohen's study 'Folk Devils and Moral Panics'.

Section C

Some candidates found the question demanding as they did not plan their response.

Some responses tended to be overly descriptive and therefore candidates wasted a lot of time on overlong sections of description when the question asked for analysis.

Some responses included common sense language and explanations rather than the required sociological explanations.

Component 2: Assignment

Some candidates found it difficult to evaluate their findings because they did not choose sources of information that contained enough sociological explanation/evidence or detail. For instance, candidates who chose two sources from newspapers found it difficult to provide detailed findings and to evaluate their findings.

Some candidates found it difficult to find relevant information on their topic and hence found it difficult to make any meaningful analysis and/or evaluations.

Centres can provide guidance to candidates on their choice of topic (see *Sociology Assignment General Assessment Information*, p5).

Some candidates were unable to produce an appropriate hypothesis.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

Centres should ensure that candidates are as prepared as possible for the external examination by utilising the *Course Assessment Specification (CAS)*, past paper and specimen question papers — all available on SQA's website.

Centres should remind candidates that sociological language and terminology should be used throughout the paper and assignment.

Centres should prepare candidates to answer short answer questions and extended responses.

Section A

Candidates should be prepared to answer questions on the main sociological perspectives and theories (see CAS). This included features as well as strengths and weaknesses of each theory. Candidates should also prepare to answer questions on any research methods — features, strengths and weaknesses.

Section B

Candidates should be prepared to answer questions on culture and identity: socialisation and the formation of identity, cultures and subcultures, power and status, aspects of identity, aspects of culture and relevant research (including the Cohen study). Candidates may also be asked questions on a study of their choice.

Centres and candidates should refer to the mandatory content in the CAS document.

Candidates should prepare responses that provide detailed sociological explanations.

Section C

Candidates should prepare to answer questions on socio-economic inequality and this can involve the application of theories as well as studies (mandatory and/or candidate choice).

Candidates should prepare to answer questions on a social issue of their choice and this can involve the application of theories as well as studies.

Component 2: Assignment

Centres should provide candidates with advice and support when choosing their topic (see *Sociology Assignment General Assessment Information*). In choosing a topic, cognisance must be given to the range of sociological information and research that is available as this will assist candidates to complete their assignment tasks.

Candidates should formulate a clear hypothesis for their assignment.

Candidates should identify and use sources that will best help them to meet the requirements of the assignment (see relevant Course and Unit documents). Sources must be able to provide clear findings and be such that analysis and evaluation can occur.

Centres must emphasise to candidates that they are expected to provide sociological evaluation and analysis relating to their assignment topic/hypothesis and sources.

Candidates should plan their assignment carefully and structure their final report.

Candidates should stick to the word limit.

Candidates should make clear reference to sources.

Further information

Overall the Course assessment (assignment) proved to be less demanding than intended. Section A of the question paper was less demanding than intended, however Section C was more demanding. The C grade boundary was therefore increased by four marks and the A and upper A grade boundaries were increased by two marks and one mark respectively.

The 2016 question paper will be reviewed for consistency with SCQF level 6. In addition, the marking instructions and documentation for the Coursework are to be reviewed/revised for clarity and to re-align the marks with the skills expected at SCQF level 6. This work will take place for implementation in the academic year 2015–16.

Statistical information: update on Courses

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|------------------------------------|-----|
| Number of resulted entries in 2014 | 0 |
| Number of resulted entries in 2015 | 155 |

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

| Distribution of Course awards | % | Cum. % | Number of candidates | Lowest mark |
|-------------------------------|-------|--------|----------------------|-------------|
| Maximum Mark - 90 | | | | |
| A | 20.6% | 20.6% | 32 | 65 |
| B | 27.1% | 47.7% | 42 | 57 |
| C | 16.8% | 64.5% | 26 | 49 |
| D | 9.7% | 74.2% | 15 | 45 |
| No award | 25.8% | - | 40 | - |

Overall the course assessment (Assignment) proved to be less demanding than intended. Section A of the Question Paper was less demanding than intended however Section C was more demanding. The C grade boundary was raised by 4 marks and the A and upper A grade boundaries were increased by 2 and 1 mark respectively.

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.