



## External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	Sociology
Level(s)	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

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 paper, and passes were generally in line with 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 abilities to apply theories and research methods.

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. 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

Candidates who achieved an A pass tended to:

- ◆ Answer consistently well in all sections of the paper.
- ◆ Demonstrate knowledge of structural and action theories.
- ◆ Use sociological language consistently well in all sections, particularly with reference to theories and concepts. For instance in Section A, Q 2 including relevant terms such as 'significant others' or in Q2, 'verstehen'.
- ◆ A pass answers were characterised by the use of sociological language to explain the relevant theories and arguments asked for by the question, for instance candidates addressing social mobility (Section B) may mention issues such as embourgeoisement or meritocracy.
- ◆ Successful candidates demonstrate a grasp of the course content **and** exam technique; 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.
- ◆ Answer the question that is asked. For example, while Q C3 asks the candidates about official statistics and crime, many candidates wrote essays that did not refer to official statistics at all. Successful candidates addressed the question in their introductions, using theories and studies to evaluate differing views of the significance of official statistics.
- ◆ 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 relating theories/studies to the question asked.
- ◆ Not take up time with unnecessarily lengthy description of concepts and issues not relevant to the question asked. For instance, in the Section C essay on media and the socialisation process, many candidates wasted time and effort on issues they did not

relate to the question asked, eg over-lengthy introductions on ownership or on recent issues facing the media in UK such as the Leveson Enquiry.

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 not consistently making relevant points. For instance in Section B some candidates addressed the issue of class in general, making some points related to mobility but no evaluative points as to the extent of mobility.
- ◆ Achieve higher marks where questions required description rather than analysis/explanation/evaluation, for instance in Section A Qs 1 and 7.
- ◆ 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 MIs). An example of this is, 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 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 a strength, eg in Q5 on the differences between structural and action theories.
- ◆ Candidates who performed well demonstrated preparation in terms of 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 questions, for instance in Q2 making reference to micro theories, social actors or symbolising as part of an answer on Symbolic Interactionism.
- ◆ Candidates who performed well demonstrated a good grasp of action as well as structural theories, for instance answering Qs 2 and 3 well.
- ◆ 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 (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 Q7 giving an example of a hypothesis (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 Education or Social Class, social mobility or social closure, responses here tended to be strong.
- ◆ Marks were broadly equivalent to those in Section C.
- ◆ Candidates who produced strong responses tended to be planned and structured, answered the question asked, in this case about social mobility, and related theories and/or studies in some way to the question asked
- ◆ 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. Strong responses tended to be well-planned and structured.
- ◆ Relate theories and/or studies in some way to the question asked, for example C1 on changing family patterns by using feminist theory and study.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Section A**

- ◆ Some candidates found Section A Q2 and Q3 demanding. However, some candidates answered these questions well. Hence, there seemed to be evidence that some candidates were not prepared for these questions. 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 Q5 challenging; others answered this question well. Candidates should prepare to answer short questions on Marxism and/or Neo-Marxism.

### **Section B**

- ◆ The essay on social mobility was well done by many candidates, with 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 social class generally rather than addressing mobility specifically. 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 often do not mention social mobility. This is often a waste of time and effort as candidates can only achieve up to four marks for introduction (please refer to published MIs). Furthermore some candidates were unable to demonstrate an understanding of social class, the effects of class and mobility. As an example, some candidates evaluated social mobility using 'common sense' or anecdotal evidence instead of sociological evidence.

## **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 patterns of relationships, 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 MIs).
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ A significant number of candidates still address the aspect separately rather than using theories and studies to address the issue of changing relationship 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 poverty 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. 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.
- ◆ Candidates should also be careful in the language they use when describing / evaluating the New Right perspective on poverty.

### **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. General points on theories and studies were made, as opposed to relating points to the question that is on official statistics.
- ◆ Some candidate did not make introductory remarks and/or pertinent definitions, for instance definitions of crime and deviance. Thus some candidates missed the opportunity to gain up to 4 marks (introduction). This may be a reflection of lack of preparation with regards to essay structure and practice.

- ◆ A number of candidates addressed the aspect of official statistics 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 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 bias, influence and attitude formation.

## **Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

### **General**

- ◆ 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 essays tend to achieve marks at the higher end of the spectrum. This is something centres should emphasise to candidates, encouraging them 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 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. Centres should be vigilant with regards to the use of stereotypical language in relation to feminist theories.
- ◆ There is some evidence to suggest that some candidates do not understand the extent of inequalities, such as those pertaining to gender or class, and the role of sociological theories in providing a framework to explain inequalities.
- ◆ There is some evidence that some candidates were not prepared to answer Section A Q2 and 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 instance, writing a full A4 page for a 4-mark answer is not effective time management.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Candidates who scored marks at the higher end of the spectrum tended to answer precisely on research methods — for instance in Q8 a strong candidate response might include reference to qualitative data. Answers are often enhanced by examples and many candidates find it easier to illustrate their point using an example.

## 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 social mobility 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 Section C3 candidates should explain their contrasting theories' views on crime and the use of official statistics. Hence when using theories candidates should try to describe/explain each theory's findings on the use of official statistics. For example, a candidate using Marxist theory as a contrast to feminist theory may make the point that Marxists claim that official statistics tend to underestimate the extent of white collar crime whilst feminist criticise official statistics on crime for underestimating the extent of crimes against women.
- ◆ Studies should relate to the theories used and /or aspect discussed in the question. 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 there is social mobility in modern UK society.
- ◆ 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 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; MIs 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 subject CAS).
- ◆ Centres should emphasise the need for candidates to use inclusive language and to avoid using stereotypical statements and examples in their answers.
- ◆ 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 2012	908
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	907
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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	18.6%	18.6%	169	70
B	20.5%	39.1%	186	60
C	26.2%	65.4%	238	50
D	5.2%	70.6%	47	45
No award	29.4%	100.0%	267	-

## 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.