



## External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	<b>Sociology</b>
Level	<b>Higher</b>

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. All individual questions scored marks across the range from zero to full marks.

Once again, the compulsory question in Section B did not pose candidates any additional difficulty, and marks in Section B were roughly equivalent to marks gained in Section C.

Most candidates completed the paper. Candidates who achieved very low or no marks tended to miss out a significant number of questions or whole sections and/or wrote very little in their responses. Evidence suggests such candidates were not adequately prepared for the rigor of Higher Sociology and perhaps would have benefited from presentation at Intermediate 2.

The most popular choices of questions in Section C were again The Family, and Crime and Deviance. Once again, very few candidates opted for the Welfare and Poverty option.

### Candidates who achieved an A pass tended to:

- ◆ Answer consistently well across all sections of the paper.
- ◆ Use sociological language consistently well in all sections, particularly with reference to theories and concepts. For instance, in Section A, Question 5, including relevant terms such as 'patriarchy'.
- ◆ Use sociological language to explain the relevant theories and arguments asked for by the question. For instance, when discussing Marxism and social closure, notions of bourgeois elites were discussed (Section B); or discussions of Marxist theories on crime and statistics might include notions of 'selective law enforcement' or white collar crime.
- ◆ 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 relating theories/studies to the question asked.
- ◆ Did not take up time with unnecessarily lengthy description of concepts and issues that were not relevant to the question asked. For example, in the Section C essay on The Family, many candidates wasted time and effort on over lengthy descriptions of the history of the family and the variety of family types.

### Candidates who achieved B or C passes tended to:

- ◆ Be somewhat inconsistent in their responses, for instance achieving high marks in Section A but achieving much lower marks in essays.

- ◆ Write essays that did not directly respond to the question asked but addressed the topic more generally and thus sometimes, but not consistently, made relevant points.
- ◆ Achieve higher marks where questions required description rather than analysis/explanation/evaluation, for instance in Section A Questions 1, 2 and 6.
- ◆ Waste time on overly long, descriptive introductions in their essays, for instance explaining what they were going to write about.
- ◆ 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 many candidates included lengthy detail and description with regards to historical changes in the family but did not relate this to the question on conjugal roles, theories or studies, and made no evaluative points. Hence candidates wasted valuable exam time writing information for no marks.

## **Areas in which candidates performed well**

### **Section A**

- ◆ Candidates generally performed well in this section. Marks ranged from 0 to 40.
- ◆ Q1 on sociological versus common sense was almost universally well done.
- ◆ Candidates who scored highly in Section A understood the specifics of the question, particularly whether it required explanation or description, and the marks available. Explanation requires more detailed points, for instance explaining why a particular point is a strength (for example in Question 3 on structural and action 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. For example, although Q1 was generally very well done, some candidates wrote over-lengthy responses for the 2 marks on offer.
- ◆ Candidates who scored well used sociological language in questions, for instance in Question 5, making reference to 'patriarchy', 'Liberal feminists' or 'Radical feminists' as part of an answer on the weaknesses of feminist theory.
- ◆ Candidates who performed well demonstrated a good grasp of sociological theories, eg Q2 and Q4.
- ◆ Candidates who scored well made similarities/differences clear, as opposed to merely describing features, for example, in Question 3.
- ◆ Candidates who achieved high marks tended to use examples as part of their explanations. For instance, in Q3 some candidates used specific examples from particular structural and action theories.

### **Section B**

- ◆ Marks were broadly equivalent to those in Section C.
- ◆ Strong responses from candidates tended to be planned and structured. Strong responses answered the question asked, in this case about class and social closure, and related theories and/or studies in some way to the question asked.
- ◆ As only four marks are available for an introduction, strong responses did not waste time on overlong narrative introductions on the general nature of stratification, mobility and so on.

- ◆ In strong responses, candidates used a broad range of sociological studies, classic and modern.
- ◆ In strong responses, candidates address the issue of social closure — by defining the term, by using relevant theories and studies, and by linking them to the aspect.

### **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.
- ◆ Strong responses related theories and/or studies in some way to the question asked, for example C3 on family and conjugal roles, by using feminist theory and study and linking this to conjugal roles.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Section A**

- ◆ Some candidates found Section A, Question 5 demanding. However, many answered this question well. Some candidates only identified one weakness, but many were able to describe two relevant weaknesses.
- ◆ Unfortunately it is still the case that some candidates explain feminism in ‘common sense’ terms and use stereotypical language to do so. This would seem to indicate a lack of understanding of feminist theory by some candidates.
- ◆ Some candidates found QA4 demanding. Others managed to answer the question well.
- ◆ Some candidates found difficulty in describing the theory step in the research process, many making vague rather than specific points.

### **Section B**

- ◆ Candidates gained marks across the spectrum for this question and it was generally in line with marks gained in Section C. However, some candidates did not answer the question specifically, for instance writing about class generally rather than addressing the issue of social closure. These candidates disadvantaged themselves as they could not achieve maximum marks.
- ◆ A significant number of candidates continue to write long, descriptive introductions on social class and mobility in general, defining terms and concepts. Whilst defining terms and concepts is good practice, only four marks are available for introductory remarks and overlong descriptive introductions are a waste of candidates’ time (please refer to the published marking instructions).
- ◆ A significant number of candidates did not relate theories and studies to the issue of class and social closure.

### **Section C**

#### **C1: The Family**

- ◆ Candidates gained marks across the spectrum for this question.
- ◆ Some candidates did not address the question specifically, that is 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 (please refer to the published marking instructions).

- ◆ A significant number of 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' and/or provide weakness only, using a common sense approach. An accurate understanding of feminist theory is a requirement at this level.
- ◆ Again a significant number of candidates still address the aspect of conjugal roles separately rather than using theories and studies to address the issue. This disadvantaged candidates who could gain no more than four KU marks (allocated for introduction) for any such isolated description of the aspect. Furthermore, although four marks could also be allocated for further evaluation, responses approached in this way tended to be very descriptive and to lack evaluation.
- ◆ Some candidates demonstrated a lack of clarity on the issue of conjugal roles and in particular the findings of the Willmot and Young study.

### **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 and discussed poverty in general. Such responses often used a common sense approach and tended to lack sociological language and terminology in their responses.
- ◆ Candidates who achieved marks at the higher end of the spectrum also tended to evaluate theories and studies in their essays.
- ◆ Most candidates who described the aspect in isolation were unable to gain more than four KU marks (allocated for introduction). Essays approached in this way tended to lack any evaluation.

### **C3: Crime and Deviance**

- ◆ Candidates gained marks across the spectrum.
- ◆ 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 official statistics. Hence, some candidates missed the opportunity to gain up to four marks (Introduction). This may reflect a lack of preparation with regards to essay structure and practice.
- ◆ A number of candidates addressed the aspect of 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 four KU marks (allocated for Introduction). Responses approached in this way tended to lack evaluation.
- ◆ Strong responses answered the question using theories and or studies. Candidates who used Marxist theory scored highly when they addressed issues of statistics and selective law enforcement and/or white collar crime. Similarly, candidates who performed well in this question using feminist theory addressed the claim of under-reporting of crimes associated with women as victims eg rape.

### **C4: Mass Media**

- ◆ This question was generally well done, with candidates gaining marks across the spectrum.

- ◆ Some candidates did not address the question and were therefore unable to achieve maximum marks. These candidates' responses tended to be overly general on the media and/or to focus on ownership and control rather than socialisation.

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

### **General**

Successful candidates tend to be those who demonstrate preparation in terms of content and technique (both in restricted response questions and essays). 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 must use appropriate sociological and inclusive language throughout the paper. Centres should be vigilant with regards to the use of stereotypical language.

Although most candidates complete the Higher Sociology paper, some do not. 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 little point, for instance, in writing copious amounts for Section A if candidates are then unable to complete Sections B and C.

Some candidates achieved very few marks across the entire paper, and there is an argument that these candidates could perhaps have benefited from presentation at Intermediate 2.

There is again some evidence to suggest that some candidates do not have an adequate understanding of feminist theories. Some candidates struggled with basic concepts in Section A Q5. Centres should note the requirements as stated in the Arrangements documents, and emphasise to candidates the significance of feminist theories.

There is evidence that some candidates were not prepared to answer Section A Q4 on Weber. 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 tailor their responses accordingly. For example, writing a full A4 page for Q1 (worth two marks) is not effective time management.

Candidates should note that questions on the weaknesses of feminism as well as all other theories studied (see Arrangement documents) may be asked.

Candidates who scored marks at the higher end of the spectrum tended to answer precisely on research methods, for instance in Q6 and 7.

## **Section B and C**

Candidates must answer the question asked. They 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 class and social closure. Studies should relate to the theories and/or 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 statistics. Therefore, when using theories candidates should try to describe/explain each theory's findings on statistics and crime. For example, a candidate using Marxist theory as a contrast to feminist theory may make the point that whilst both agree that official statistics don't tell the 'whole story' about crime, Marxists claim that in the collection/use of official statistics it is class rather than gender that has the most significant impact.

Studies should relate to the theories used. Therefore 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 conjugal roles in QC1 or social closure in QB.

Some candidates' responses on Studies were vague. Candidates who describe findings precisely tend to gain marks at the higher end of the scale. Moreover, evaluative marks can only be given to relevant and accurate evaluative points. Stating a study is 'good' or 'bad' is not the standard required at this level.

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 the conclusion given at the end of an essay, but it does not necessarily have to be *in* the conclusion. This may include evaluation of theories or studies beyond what is given in the evaluative 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 four marks and should avoid descriptions of what they will include in their essay.

Centres should make candidates aware of the criteria for achieving 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 in the final examination differs from that required in NABs. Lengthy description of aspects will not be awarded marks (beyond the four

KU marks that may be allocated for 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 2010	895
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	982
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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	14.4%	14.4%	141	70
B	20.8%	35.1%	204	60
C	24.7%	59.9%	243	50
D	7.4%	67.3%	73	45
No award	32.7%	100.0%	321	-

## **General commentary on grade boundaries**

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that 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, though, 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.