



## Course report 2019

Subject	Sociology
Level	Higher

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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 documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

# **Section 1: comments on the assessment**

## **Question paper**

The question paper largely performed as expected. Feedback from the marking team and centres indicated that most felt the paper was fair and accessible for candidates.

The paper provided opportunities for discrimination between A and C grade candidates.

Many candidates produced good-quality answers with A grade candidates producing quality responses across all three sections of the paper. C grade candidates tended to perform better on restricted-response questions, and less well on extended-response questions. Grade boundary decisions reflected this and the grade boundaries were set at notional.

## **Assignment**

Candidates continue to achieve well in this component and coped well with the minor changes made to the assessment. Candidates who had an appropriate subject or issue, and hypothesis tended to perform well.

Most candidates completed assignments that included all requirements; findings, evaluation of sources, analysis and so on.

Candidates continue to choose topics from a very broad range of social issues. In some centres, candidates chose to complete their assignment on very similar topics.

## **Section 2: comments on candidate performance**

### **Areas that candidates performed well in**

#### **Question paper**

##### **Section 1: Human society**

Many candidates performed well in question 1 on common-sense and sociological approaches, a change in the course specification. Candidates who scored well on this question described two differences using terms such as 'whereas' or 'however' to denote a difference. Some candidates used appropriate examples to illustrate differences.

Question 2 was also tackled well by many candidates. Many candidates who achieved marks at the top of the range explained a similarity and a difference between conflict and consensus theories, clearly using sociological language such as 'structural', 'micro' or 'macro' and/or accurate examples. Those who responded accurately made clear the similarity or the difference they were explaining.

Question 3(a) on focus groups, an addition to mandatory content from session 2018–19, was answered well by those who identified the method clearly, as opposed to those who answered generically on methods that generate qualitative data. In question 3(b), many candidates suggested a hypothesis and gained full marks.

##### **Section 2: Culture and identity**

Many candidates provided good responses to question 5, providing explanation of the findings of a study other than *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* by Stanley Cohen. Candidates used a range of studies to answer this question, demonstrating personalisation and choice.

Candidates tackled question 6 in a number of different ways. A grade candidates linked power and status to popular and high culture, for instance, by applying theoretical approaches to the notion of culture.

##### **Section 3: Social issues**

Some candidates produced good-quality responses. Those candidates who achieved good marks tended to have responses with a clear structure, and included all the required content as indicated in the question.

A grade candidates applied theory to the question asked, that is, about a social issue other than social mobility. Good responses analysed the social issue chosen by linking the issue to examples and/or a study, as well as the two theories asked for. C grade candidates were able to demonstrate some understanding of the social issue they chose. These candidates were able to achieve marks where they deployed a logical structure and covered all the requirements in the questions.

#### **Assignment**

Candidates continue to cope well with the demands of the assignment. Candidates who chose an appropriate and accessible topic and research source tended to perform well in the assignment.

Candidates coped well with describing the findings of the research they used, and many achieved high marks for this section.

Candidates who understood their topic and the research findings they used were able to achieve high marks in the analysis section. Many candidates who provided good analysis and conclusions tended to apply sociological theories to their topic (although this is not the only way to gain such marks).

A grade assignments consistently used sociological language, for example in their evaluation of sources, candidates referred to terms such as valid and reliable.

## **Areas that candidates found demanding**

### **Question paper**

#### **Section 1: Human society**

In question 3(c), some candidates did not appear to understand the step of operationalisation in the research process. Centres should ensure that candidates are familiar with all steps and can explain and apply these.

In question 4, some candidates did not appear to be familiar with Weber and therefore, found it difficult to explain the features of the theory. Centres should ensure they refer to mandatory content to ensure candidates are prepared to answer.

#### **Section 2: Culture and identity**

In question 7, the question clearly required the candidate to analyse the relationship between gender and identity using two contrasting theories, however some candidates did not answer this question with reference to gender and identity. Gender is a mandatory aspect of identity, therefore candidates should be prepared to answer questions on the relationship between gender and identity.

#### **Section 3: Social issues**

Some candidates continue to struggle with essay structure as well as content. Candidates develop their sociological skills and knowledge in different ways, but practising examination-type questions, including essays, is good examination preparation.

Some candidates found it difficult to analyse a social issue as opposed to describing the issue and contrasting theoretical approaches.

### **Assignment**

Candidates who chose topics that were appropriate in terms of their sociological knowledge and skills tended to perform best. For instance, some candidates found it difficult to understand and use academic research papers or sociological studies and therefore found it difficult to achieve marks in the sections on findings, analysis and conclusions.

Centres can provide some support to candidates in choosing appropriate topics and accessible research findings. Some candidates described findings that were at odds with their analysis as they had not fully understood the findings.

Candidates can find it difficult to deal with complex sociological topics, particularly topics that involve a number of sociological concepts, for instance the topic of women and media may involve culture, gender identity, gender inequalities, media ownership and so on. Candidates often find it difficult to identify where their focus should be.

Some topics, such as social media-related topics, may be attractive to candidates as the issues are current, but research may not be readily available or accessible to candidates.

Conclusions continue to be a challenge for some candidates, with some merely repeating points already made. Effective conclusions provide a clear statement on whether the hypothesis has been proven, and additional points or insights that back up the point being made. This may include additional research, or a critique of theoretical approaches used in the analysis.

## **Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment**

### **Question paper**

Centres should refer to SQA's website and all course assessment documents to ensure they provide candidates with the best preparation for the Higher examination.

Centres should continue to ensure they present candidates at the correct level. Higher Sociology requires candidates to demonstrate their skills and knowledge over three sections, as well as the production of an assignment on a topic of their choice.

Good preparation for candidates should include familiarisation with the geography of the paper and the type of command words to be expected. Candidates should respond accordingly to the command word in the question, for example, 'describe' or 'explain'.

Some candidates wrote overly long and descriptive answers to short-answer questions such as question 1. Candidates should be aware of how many marks each question is worth and the corresponding length of response. For example, a 2-mark question should elicit a shorter response than a question worth 6 marks. Centres and candidates are advised to use the published marking instructions and past papers as part of their preparation for the examination.

### **Section 1: Human society**

Centres must prepare candidates to respond to questions on all theories noted in the course specification. For example, question 4 on Weber was poorly answered by some candidates. Similarly, candidates must be prepared to answer questions on all steps of the research process and research methods detailed in the course specification. This includes evaluating and justifying methods as well as explaining features. For instance, questions 3(a) and 3(c) were not fully answered by some candidates.

### **Section 2: Culture and identity**

Candidates should be prepared to answer questions on all aspects of culture and identity as detailed in the course specification. This includes the application of theories to aspects of culture and identity.

Centres should ensure that candidates are prepared in all the mandatory content, for instance on the relationship between age and identity, and gender and identity. Candidates are also advised to practise short-answer questions and essays to ensure the best possible outcome in the final examination.

Many candidates continue to find essay-writing demanding. Centres should provide support to candidates, for instance by practising past paper questions.

### **Section 3: Social issues**

Centres should continue to prepare candidates to answer short-answer questions and essays in this section. These may be on social mobility or another social issue of their choice and so, to be successful, candidates must be prepared to answer on both.

Many candidates continue to find essay-writing demanding. Centres should provide support to candidates, for instance, by practising past paper questions.

### **Assignment**

Centres should continue to support candidates to identify a topic and choose a suitable study of sociological significance. While candidates are encouraged to select their own topic, centres should support them in their choice, for instance in narrowing their focus into a manageable area of study.

Some candidates found it difficult to formulate a hypothesis, for example some expressed their hypothesis as a question or as an overlong statement. Centres should continue to support candidates in their understanding of what a hypothesis is, and how to formulate a hypothesis.

Centres should encourage candidates to use SQA's website, the Higher Sociology course specification, course reports, past papers and published marking instructions, to ensure they are aware of the assessment requirements. Understanding Standards materials will also provide exemplification and commentaries to assist centres and candidates in meeting the requirements of Higher Sociology.

## Grade boundary and statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	1067
------------------------------------	------

Number of resulted entries in 2019	927
------------------------------------	-----

### Statistical information: performance of candidates

#### Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
<b>Maximum mark</b>				
<b>A</b>	20.3%	20.3%	188	77
<b>B</b>	18.8%	39.1%	174	66
<b>C</b>	20.1%	59.1%	186	55
<b>D</b>	16.1%	75.2%	149	44
<b>No award</b>	24.8%	-	230	-



## General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
- ◆ 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.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.