Course report 2022

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 appeals.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022	935

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

A	Percentage	29.4	Cumulative percentage	29.4	Number of candidates	275	Minimum mark required	77
B	Percentage	19.2	Cumulative percentage	48.6	Number of candidates	180	Minimum mark required	64
C	Percentage	16.9	Cumulative percentage	65.5	Number of candidates	160	Minimum mark required	52
D	Percentage	15.5	Cumulative percentage	81.0	Number of candidates	145	Minimum mark required	39
No award	Percentage	19.0	Cumulative percentage	N/A	Number of candidates	180	Minimum mark required	N/A

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in appendix 1 of this report.

In this report:

♦ 'most' means greater than 70%
♦ 'many' means 50% to 69%
♦ 'some' means 25% to 49%
♦ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the statistics page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper performed as expected. Feedback from the marking team, teachers, and lecturers indicated it was fair and accessible for candidates. The paper provided opportunities for discrimination between A-grade and C-grade candidates.

Many candidates produced good-quality answers with A-grade candidates producing quality responses across both sections of the paper. C-grade candidates tended to perform better on restricted-response questions, and less well on the essay question.

The modifications to assessment for session 2021–22 appear to have worked well as most candidates understood what was required and completed the two required sections of the question paper in the allocated time.

Section 1: Human Society performed as expected and provided candidates the opportunity to access the full range of marks. Questions allowed for differentiation, but all proved to be accessible.

Assignment

The assignment performed as expected.

Candidates selected topics from a wide range of sociological areas. In some centres, candidates chose to complete their assignments on very similar topics.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper
Section 1: Human Society
All questions saw a full range of marks and functioned well.

Most candidates did well on question 1 and were able to explain the term effectively. Candidates who did very well used sociological language to answer this question and referred to issues such as inequality, gender as a social construct, and male-dominated institutions. Many strong answers also included examples.

In question 4(a), most candidates were able to evaluate structured interviews by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of this method. Strong responses linked the method to the scenario and explained why this method would be good (or not) for the aims of the research. Such responses avoided overly long descriptions of unstructured interviews and focused on why the point made is a strength or weakness.

Candidates who understood the process of operationalisation answered question 4(b) well, particularly where they linked the question to the scenario. Many strong answers used examples, for instance, the type and size of the sample, that could be used in the type of research described in the scenario.

In question 5, candidates who understood the difference between covert instead of overt participant observation answered this very well. Strong responses explained the advantages of using covert rather than overt.

Section 2: Culture and Identity
The essay responses were, in general, better than in previous years.

Candidates who structured their answers in question 6 were able to achieve marks in the higher range, although the type of essay structure varied. Many candidates produced good-quality introductory remarks, for instance, defining terms such as culture, identity, gender, or social construct. Depending on the way the candidate answered the question, some responses included data on age and/or gender. Candidates who scored highly applied theories (one structural and one action theory) to the question asked, that is to what extent society influences identity. Candidates could achieve the marks in several different ways, but most did this effectively by analysing each theory's view on the influence of society on identity and comparing them. Many candidates used age and/or gender identity and applied the theories they used to one or both aspects. Analysis is required in this question and many candidates attempted this. The candidates who used analysis well understood the theories they were using and applied them accurately to the question.

Candidates who produced strong responses used a study that linked to one of the theories used and gave detail about the study's findings. Furthermore, these candidates demonstrated their understanding of the link between the study used, the question, and one of the theories.

Assignment

Candidates who completed assignments that included all requirements: findings, evaluation of sources, analysis and so on, performed very well.

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). Strong assignments consistently featured sociological language, for example the terms 'valid' and 'reliable' in relation to evaluating sources.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Section 1: Human Society

Although some candidates found these questions demanding, most candidates accessed all the questions in Section 1. No questions were found to be inaccessible.

Question 2 is a basic one as the course assessment requires candidates to look at 'similarities and differences between theories'. Nevertheless, some candidates struggled to identify which theories were which, for instance, several candidates incorrectly identified feminism as an action theory because feminists take action. Moreover, a strong response should make differences clear by using linking words such as 'whereas' or 'however'. Some candidates merely listed features of structural theories and features of action theories rather than identifying differences.

In question 3, some candidates found it difficult to give accurate strengths and weaknesses of Symbolic Interactionism as they appeared to lack the knowledge of the basic tenets of this theory.

Some candidates lost marks in question 4 by not linking the use of the method to the scenario given. Candidates must read the questions carefully.

In question 4(b), some candidates struggled to accurately identify what was involved in operationalisation. This considerably impaired their ability to answer the question. The course assessment requires candidates to be able to describe each stage of the research process, including sub-stages of operationalisation. Some candidates appeared to confuse operationalisation with the research process, describing several other stages of the research process in their response.

Section 2: Culture and Identity

In question 6, candidates found it difficult to analyse the extent to which society influences the formation of identity. Instead of analysing, they described the issue and contrasting theoretical approaches. Application of theories is required in this type of question.

Some candidates did not choose a theory (or theories) they could apply in sufficient detail to gain all available marks. For instance, some candidates chose labelling rather than Symbolic Interactionism in general, giving themselves less scope to access all available analysis marks.

A few candidates failed to accurately distinguish between structural and action theories and lost marks by using two structural or two action theories.

Some candidates struggled with essay structure as well as the content.

Candidates develop their sociological skills and knowledge in different ways, but practising examination-type questions, including essays, is good preparation for the question paper.

Assignment

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

Centres can provide some support to candidates to choose 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. Some candidates find it difficult to deal with complex sociological topics, particularly topics that involve several sociological concepts, for instance, the topic of women and media may involve cultural attitudes, gender identities, gender inequalities, media ownership, the law, and so on. Candidates often find it difficult to identify where their focus should be.

Some candidates did not tackle the section on evaluation, and some did not answer this well. This may relate to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the research process and research methodologies or to a lack of understanding of the sources used. Some candidates were able to identify two appropriate sources and describe three findings from each. However, a common error for some candidates was to miss out an evaluation. This affected candidates' overall marks.

A few candidates found it difficult to differentiate between their personal views and those of sociological studies and perspectives. Strong assignments demonstrated the conventions of academic report writing, for instance writing in the third person and using academic references.

Some candidates found writing conclusions challenging. Some candidates merely repeated points they had 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, a critique of theoretical approaches used in the analysis, or express implications for government policy.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Centres should remind candidates to use sociological language and terminology throughout the paper. Candidates should understand that they must not use stereotypical language. Some responses this year contained stereotypical language about people over 50.

Centres must prepare candidates to respond to questions on all theories noted in the course specification. Candidates are required to understand the main features, strengths, weaknesses, and differences between theories. See the Higher Sociology Course Specification on SQA's website.

Similarly, candidates must be prepared to answer questions on all steps of the research process and research methods detailed in the course specification. Centres should ensure that candidates are familiar with all steps and can explain and apply these.

Centres should support candidates in the technique used to answer short-answer questions. Some candidates failed to distinguish differences as they did not use words or phrases like 'whereas' or 'in contrast'. Candidates should understand 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 should use the published marking instructions and past papers as part of their preparation for the question paper.

Centres should ensure that candidates are aware of the course content for Section 2: Culture and Identity and encourage them to check this in the course specification. Teachers and lecturers should help candidates with structuring and planning essays by working with SQA past papers and Understanding Standards materials, which show how the 25 marks are allocated in essay questions. This could help them better structure answers to access the separate marks allocated for theories and studies.

Centres should emphasise the need to develop skills and knowledge formed in studying Section 1, continuing the sociological approach in challenging cultural stereotypes such as those regarding age and gender.

Assignment

There must be a balance between the candidate's choice of topic and the suitability of a topic. While candidates should select their own topic, centres should support them in their choice, for instance in helping to narrow their focus into a manageable area of study. Choosing a topic of personal interest often provides candidates with additional motivation. Teachers and lecturers should support candidates to produce an assignment that follows academic conventions, such as writing in the third person and using references.

Centres should support candidates to identify what is and what is not a suitable source for their assignment, for instance reminding candidates that, 'At least one of these named sources must be published research that is relevant to understanding your topic. This may

be either a sociological study or research that has sociological significance.' (See [Higher Sociology Assignment Assessment Task](#).)

Although the assignment is an individual task and teacher and lecturer input is limited, centres must support candidates to develop the required skills and knowledge. Candidates require skills in describing, explaining, analysing, and evaluating research findings. They need to be able to produce a report, which includes references, and to draw on knowledge and understanding from the three areas of the course, in particular Human Society. Candidates also need to use sociological terminology and be able to draw conclusions from their analysis and evaluation of research findings.

Centres should ensure that candidates have a sound understanding of the research process and research methods before they start the assignment. Some candidates found it difficult to formulate a hypothesis, expressing it as a question or an overly long statement. Centres should support candidates in their understanding of what a hypothesis is, and how to formulate one.

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 also provide exemplification and commentaries to assist centres and candidates in meeting the requirements of the Higher Sociology course.

Appendix 1: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
♦ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade 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 for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
♦ Where levels of difficulty 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 on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures including assessment modifications and revision support, was introduced to support candidates as they returned to formal national exams and other forms of external assessment. This was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, SQA adopted a more generous approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses than it would do in a normal exam year, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams have done so in very different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2022. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2022 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the National Qualifications 2022 Awarding — Methodology Report.