



## Course Report 2017

Subject	Sociology
Level	Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

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 assessment. 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 documents and marking instructions.

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

## **Summary of the Course assessment**

### **Component 1: question paper**

The question paper preformed as expected and no adjustments were made at the awarding meeting. Feedback indicates that the paper was fair and accessible to candidates.

Candidates were able to access the full range of marks in the question paper. Many candidates performed well on all questions in all three sections of the paper, although some found the essay questions challenging.

Candidates who achieved an A tended to perform well across the paper. Candidates who achieved B or C grades tended to score best on short answer questions but lacked depth in questions that required analysis or evaluation.

### **Component 2: assignment**

This component preformed as expected.

There was an overall improvement in the quality of the assignments, with the majority having adhered to the guidelines published by the SQA. There was evidence that many centres have taken on board points raised in last year's Course Report, particularly in respect of the topics/social issues chosen. Candidates who achieved high marks presented assignments with a good, clear structure and had completed all sections. Strong assignments used sociological language throughout and made it very clear what the social issue was and its sociological relevance.

Candidates who performed at C grade level tended to make points around the issue/topic rather than the specific sociological issue, for example discussion on gender in general rather than gender pay inequality specifically.

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

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

#### **Component 1: question paper**

##### **Section 1**

Most candidates coped well with the questions in this section.

Candidates who answered Question 1 well provided very clear differences between structural and action theories by using phrases such as 'whereas' or 'however', for example:

'... structural theories tend to use research methods that generate quantitative data whereas action theories tend to use methods that generate qualitative data'.

Answers that scored highly also explained why the point made was a difference. For example:

'... structural theories tend to use such methods because they take a macro approach and look at trends in society or data relevant to large institutions whereas action theory takes a micro approach and focus on small scale interactions between actors...'

Candidates who described the features of Symbolic Interactionism in Question 2 scored highly, as opposed to those who tried to focus on action theory in general. Candidates who scored full marks gave answers that illustrated understanding by identifying the defining features of the theory, providing detail in their answer and using the appropriate sociological language throughout. Hence answers that cited 'I' and 'Me', 'significant others' and other terms specifically relating to Symbolic Interactionism were credited highly.

## **Section 2**

Question 3 was generally well done, and many candidates demonstrated a good knowledge of the research process. Candidates who added detail to their answer and utilised appropriate sociological language scored highly.

Similarly, many candidates responded well to Question 4 and evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of participant observation. Candidates who explained why points were a strength or a weakness scored highly. Strong answers combined detail and evaluation.

## **Component 2: assignment**

Most candidates chose a relevant and accessible topic.

Candidates who performed best in this section selected topics/social issues that they understood and were able to use their sociological knowledge to explain them.

Candidates tended to choose a clear hypothesis and thus scored well in this section. Similarly, most candidates gave an adequate explanation of the differences between sociological and common-sense explanations of the topic/social issue. Candidates who scored well in this section linked their explanation directly to their topic/issue; for instance, the difference between a common-sense and a sociological explanation of gender inequality.

Most candidates identified at least one relevant source, and many were able to describe their findings in detail.

Candidates who scored highly in the analysis section were also able to analyse their findings by applying sociological theory. This is not the only way to analyse findings but proved to be the most successful way for candidates in this cohort.

Candidates who made highly credited points in their conclusion tended to make additional analytical points related to the findings and/or referenced wider research on the topic/issue.

Most candidates provided references with enough detail to allow the marker to check the findings. The majority of candidates provided very detailed references.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Component 1: question paper**

Some candidates did not use sociological language and this affected the quality of their responses. A number of candidates did not provide sufficient detail in their responses.

#### **Section 1**

- ◆ Question 2: some candidates lost marks as they described Action theory in general rather than Symbolic Interactionism in particular. Centres should prepare candidates to answer questions on specific theories.
- ◆ Question 4: Some candidates found it difficult to evaluate participant observation, and their responses were mainly descriptive.

#### **Section 2**

- ◆ Some candidates found it very difficult to answer in essay format.
- ◆ Some candidates demonstrated some confusion with regards to Cohen's study and seemed to lack knowledge of the findings.
- ◆ Some candidates appeared to have difficulty in applying two contrasting theories to the question.
- ◆ Some candidates did not link theories to the study in any way, for example, linking the age of Mods and Rockers to labelling of young people/teenagers today.

#### **Section 3**

Some candidates could not demonstrate their knowledge of two studies on mobility. Even when the mandatory studies were used, some candidates' responses lacked any detail. Some candidates gave generic responses to question 7 by providing detail of feminism rather than using feminism to analyse a specific social issue.

### **Component 2: assignment**

Some candidates found it difficult to analyse the findings (from the sources they identified) due to the nature of the topic/social issue chosen. Some topics require a level of sociological understanding beyond the level required for Higher Sociology and may require candidates to understand several complex issues at once. For example, a topic related to a specific subculture may require knowledge and understanding of the nature of deviance, the nature of the dominant culture (perhaps a social and historical context) and various aspects of socialisation.

Similarly, some sources identified by candidates made it difficult for them to analyse. This was true of some academic papers that required a breadth and depth of Sociological knowledge far beyond that required at Higher level. This led to some candidates misunderstanding the argument being put forward.

Candidates continue to find it difficult to draw a conclusion. Many candidates who otherwise produced very good assignments achieved few or no marks. Many responses were merely repetition of previous points made rather than conclusive points.

## **Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates**

### **Component 1: question paper**

#### **Section 1**

- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates understand they are required to demonstrate their understanding and knowledge of sociological theories and research methods as detailed in the mandatory content.
- ◆ Centres should prepare candidates to answer in the level of detail required at Higher level. Restricted response questions require detail, explanation and/or analysis, and centres can prepare candidates by making sure that they understand exactly what each command means. Centres may find practice questions of use in preparing candidates.
- ◆ Common sense answers are not acceptable at Higher level, and all responses should be expressed using sociological language.

#### **Section 2**

- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates understand that Cohen (1972) *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* is a mandatory study and should emphasise the specific findings of the study as well as the overall arguments Cohen made.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates can apply theory to culture and identity — for instance, identity and age.
- ◆ Centres should note that an essay-type question can appear in Section 2 or Section 3 of the paper (a 20-mark question could also appear in Section 1 as a ramped question) and candidates must be prepared to answer such questions. Candidates who scored highly in question 5 were able to demonstrate their ability to structure their response as well as to apply their knowledge and understanding of culture and identity.
- ◆ Centres should also ensure that candidates can apply sociological theory to these issues (age and gender) and to studies/findings. Regardless of the model used in learning and teaching, candidates must be prepared by centres to apply sociological theories in Sections 1, 2 and 3. Practice is the best way to do this.

- ◆ Centres may also find it useful to use Understanding Standards materials to provide guidance on the standards expected.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that they are using the current version of mandatory documents such as the Course Assessment Specification.

## **Component 2: assignment**

Centres should continue to provide advice and support to candidates by making explicit the requirements of the assignment. To do this, centres should use the information on the SQA website and detailed in the Candidate Instructions on the SQA Secure website.

Candidates who performed best in the assignment followed the SQA guidelines to ensure all the requirements were included in their work. Providing support at these early stages enables the candidate to complete the assignment independently. There is guidance provided as to what is reasonable assistance — both in the Sociology Course Assignment Task document (SQA secure site) and in the Sociology Assignment General Assessment Information document on the SQA Sociology page.

Centres should also assist candidates in their selection of appropriate topics. Whilst candidates can choose any topic, teachers/lecturers should provide guidance, for instance as to the level of difficulty the topic (or aspect of the topic) poses. The difficulty can be due to the complexity of the topic itself, or complexity may arise from the nature of the research available — for instance academic research papers may prove to be too difficult for some candidates and make it difficult for them to complete their assignment.

Centres should focus on the skills of evaluation of sources and of reaching a conclusion. Developing these skills generally will assist candidates in the completion of their assignment.

In providing learning and teaching opportunities to develop these skills and with regards to the research process, candidates should be better equipped to apply them to their assignment. Centres should also ensure that they include discussion of ethical issues, including plagiarism, as part of their learning and teaching.

Whilst it was pleasing to see that the conditions of assessment for coursework were adhered to in the majority of centres, there were a small number of examples where this may not have been the case. Following feedback from teachers, we have strengthened the conditions of assessment criteria for National 5 subjects and will do so for Higher and Advanced Higher. The criteria are published clearly on our website and in course materials and must be adhered to. SQA takes very seriously its obligation to ensure fairness and equity for all candidates in all qualifications through consistent application of assessment conditions and investigates all cases alerted to us where conditions may not have been met.

## Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	954
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	1024
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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 -				
A	19.2%	19.2%	197	63
B	25.6%	44.8%	262	54
C	22.9%	67.7%	234	45
D	8.5%	76.2%	87	40
No award	23.8%	-	244	-

## 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.