



Course Report 2017 – External Assessment

Subject	Sociology
Level	National 5

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 balance of questions and the level of demand within the question paper was found to be consistent with previous years. There was a considerable improvement in candidate performance compared to the 2016 diet; post-examination analysis indicated that this was due to better preparation of candidates by centres, rather than any variation in the question paper.

While several questions provided scope for A-grade candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, all questions were accessible to most candidates. All sections of the paper were generally well tackled, and there were no sections which did not perform as expected. As a result, no adjustments were made to the grade boundaries.

Component 2: assignment

The assignment performed as expected. The overall performance of candidates in this component was broadly similar to the previous year, although there were fewer candidates whose topic was unsuitable. The task for the assignment was unchanged from previous years and this continuity seems to have allowed centres to prepare candidates for this task. There were very few candidates for whom the assignment task seemed inappropriate.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

The overall standard of answers was high, with many candidates demonstrating sound sociological understanding. In particular, questions 2 (a) and 2 (b) were very well answered, as were questions 3 (a) and 1 (c). Candidates were clearly well prepared for all sections of the paper, including the social issue 'other than differential educational achievement', which had created difficulties for many in previous years.

It was also very encouraging to see question 2 (e) well handled, as a similar question on diversity was highlighted in last year's course report as being misinterpreted by some candidates.

Component 2: assignment

Sections A and C continue to be answered well by almost all candidates. One of the largest changes from previous years was that many more candidates coped well with section D than previously. This allowed candidates to do better on the whole than they had previously — most other sections performed in a similar way to previous diets.

The greater sociological understanding that candidates went on to show in the question paper probably accounts for the improvement in marks for section D.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Some questions proved more challenging than others. Question 3 (b) had the lowest average mark and question 2 (d) had the fewest candidates achieving full marks.

Question 3 (b) required candidates to use a theory to explain a social issue. This clearly demands higher-order thinking than some of the more direct questions as candidates must be able to not only understand, but use, the theory

Question 2 (d) required candidates to explain ways in which a piece of research evidence had helped them understand culture and identity. This is again a complex question where candidates must demonstrate knowledge of a piece of research evidence and apply that knowledge to culture and identity. While many candidates were familiar with a piece of research evidence and could show this, fewer were then able to apply this knowledge to their understanding of culture and identity. Other candidates were able to explain their understanding of culture and identity, but were less sure of the research evidence. This combination of factors resulted in fewer candidates achieving full marks in this question than others.

Very few questions were left unanswered by any candidate, but this happened most frequently for questions 2 (d) and 3 (b), where the complexity of the task seems to have proved too demanding for some. Candidates should be encouraged to attempt to answer all questions even if they are unsure of part of the answer.

Component 2: assignment

Section E proved to be the most demanding section by far, as it invariably does. There were a number of candidates who failed to get more than 5 out of 10 marks for this section. Section E requires candidates to 'communicate sociologically informed views'. The ten marks available are divided into three parts worth 2, 4 and 4 marks respectively.

All the marks are for explaining the topic they have chosen in light of the research they have undertaken. Candidates need to show sociological understanding while doing this. The task is therefore more complex than previous sections where candidates show what they have found.

There are 2 marks for explaining the topic by making clear links to the sources. Too often candidates do not do this explicitly enough in this section. There are 4 marks available for explaining the topic using sociological theory (or perspective or concept). While some candidates did this well, others did not gain as many marks as they could through lack of depth to their theoretical understanding, not linking the theories well enough to the topics, or by not mentioning theories at all. The final 4 marks in section E are for explaining whether the evidence supports or challenges the common-sense view of the topic outlined in section B. Again, there were a number of candidates whose answers were too basic and others who did not do this at all.

The other sections did not prove as demanding, though section B proved slightly trickier than the rest, as there are still some candidates who write generically about common-sense versus sociological views when topic-specific differences are required. The number of candidates who did this, however, was less than in previous years.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

It was very heartening to see that previous messages to centres about the preparation of candidates had been taken on board. Centres should be commended for the preparation of candidates for this course, as they were clearly prepared for, and familiar with, both the course content and the expectations of the two assessment components.

Candidates were presented at the correct level and equipped for the assessment.

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	259
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	242
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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	40.1%	40.1%	97	56
B	21.1%	61.2%	51	48
C	15.7%	76.9%	38	40
D	5.8%	82.6%	14	36
No award	17.4%	-	42	-

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.