



Course report 2025

Higher Sociology

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. You should read the report with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2025 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 885

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 932

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	380	40.8	40.8	77
B	184	19.7	60.5	66
C	148	15.9	76.4	55
D	107	11.5	87.9	44
No award	113	12.1	100%	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

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

You can find statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper performed as expected, and candidates engaged with all questions. Candidates achieved marks ranging from zero to almost full marks.

Overall, the paper provided opportunities for discrimination between A-grade and C-grade candidates. More candidates than in previous years produced good quality A-grade responses, and these candidates tended to produce quality responses across all three sections of the paper. C-grade candidates performed well in section 1.

Candidates continue to not answer questions on action theories well, and this was the case in sections 1 and 2. More candidates than in previous years produced a good quality essay in section 3.

All questions functioned as planned and therefore no adjustments were made to the notional grade boundaries.

Assignment

The assignment requires candidates to complete a 1,500–2,000-word report on a social issue of their choice, using at least one sociological study. The marks are then divided into sections, for instance 4 marks for evaluating the sources. Overall, the assignment performed as expected, with candidates gaining slightly higher marks than in previous years. Candidates continue to achieve high marks in the sections requiring knowledge, for example findings from sociological studies.

Candidates continue to choose a wide range of topics on social issues, from the representation of women in films to the relationship between poverty and education, to toxic masculinity and crime. Candidates used a huge variety of sociological studies, research and other sources of sociological significance for their assignment.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Section 1: Human society

Candidates generally performed well in this section, attaining the full range of marks across all questions. A-grade candidates tended to perform consistently well in all questions (theories and methods).

Many candidates answered question 1 well, using sociological language, for example by explaining what feminists mean by patriarchy. Candidates who scored at the lower end of the marks tended to focus on the characteristics of feminism as an example of a structural and/or conflict theory rather than the unique features of feminism.

Many candidates answered question 2 well.

Some candidates answered question 3 well and explained one strength and one weakness of Weberism. Candidates who answered well used different aspects of Weberism to illustrate a strength or weakness for example using claimed criticisms of Weber's protestant work ethic.

Many candidates answered question 4(a) very well and evaluated focus groups as a research method. Some candidates answered about methods that generated qualitative data generically and were able to gain some but not full marks.

Question 5 was tackled well by most candidates.

Section 2: Culture and identity

Candidates generally performed well in this section, attaining the full range of marks across all questions. A-grade candidates tended to perform consistently well in all questions in this section.

Many candidates answered question 6 well, using structural and action theories to analyse the relationship between gender and culture. Candidates who scored highly in this question addressed the concept of gender rather than just describing the generic points of each theory on culture. Candidates who chose feminism as their structural theory tended to score highly.

A-grade answers used sociological language such as norms, values and patriarchal society.

Questions 7(a) and (b) were done well by most candidates who described at least one finding from Cohen's study and evaluated the study well. Candidates who scored highly were very aware of salient points of the study and the methodology used and so were able to draw strengths and weaknesses from these.

Candidates who scored well in 7(c) identified the key ideas from the study and applied them to contemporary issues such as moral panics about Islamophobia, or the demonisation of the working class, or the power of media in general.

Section 3: Social issues

Many candidates produced good quality answers in this section with essays scoring slightly higher overall than in previous years.

The task required candidates to apply two theories and one study to the question of social mobility in UK. Essays that scored highly had a clear structure of introduction, theories, studies and answered the question. The question required candidates to apply their knowledge and understanding of theoretical approaches to social mobility. Candidates who scored highly wrote clearly only about what each theory said about social mobility. Candidates who were accurate about the study findings scored highly.

Candidates who scored highly in the essay tended to write an introduction that included accurate points about social mobility and/or definitions of sociological terms, such as intergenerational social mobility. They also applied the theories chosen to social mobility, using sociological language such as social closure, meritocracy or bourgeoisie. Additionally, they tended to be very specific on findings, for instance accurately explaining 1:2:4 rule according to Goldthorpe's Oxford Mobility study.

Assignment

The assessment task remains the same and overall, the assignment performed as expected, with candidates gaining slightly higher marks than in previous years.

Candidates continue to choose a very wide range of topics for their assignment, including many very current topics such as transgender issues, socio-economic effects of the pandemic and misogyny.

Candidates who completed assignments that met all requirements as outlined in the coursework assessment task, for example hypothesis, findings, references and so on, tended to achieve high marks.

Most candidates chose a sociological topic and produced a working hypothesis.

Most candidates chose at least one relevant sociological study, and many candidates used another sociological study for their second source. Most candidates scored highly in describing the findings of their two studies.

Most candidates used at least one theory to analyse the findings, and many included other data such as official statistics to enhance their analysis.

Most candidates who scored A-grade marks produced a good conclusion. Many of these conclusions included comparisons with other theories or made recommendations as to how the social issue could be tackled.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Section 1: Human society

In question 2, a few candidates did not explain the differences between structural and action theories well. These candidates did not demonstrate the level of understanding required at Higher level. Whilst some candidates answered very well, some candidates did not achieve full marks on this question.

Some candidates did not perform well in question 3 on Weber, and their responses did not demonstrate an understanding of Weberism. Many candidates seemed to have some knowledge of Weberism, but their responses lacked any depth of explanation. For example, some responses merely mentioned concepts such as *verstehen* rather than explaining why this would be a strength or weakness.

In question 4, some candidates answered generically about methods that generate qualitative data and therefore did not gain marks. The question required a response about focus groups specifically.

Many candidates did not answer question 4(b) as expected. For example, some responses contained a question or description rather than a hypothesis.

Section 2: Culture and identity

Some candidates did not apply an action theory to question 6. For example, some candidates used only labelling theory (rather than symbolic interactionism in general) and so put themselves at a disadvantage.

Many candidates did not answer question 7(c) well, which asked them to apply their knowledge of the key ideas of any study on culture and identity. Candidates could use the mandatory study or their other choice for culture and identity.

Section 3: Social issues

Some candidates did not perform well in the essay and did not write about two theories and a study.

Candidates who achieved at the C-grade tended to describe rather than apply the theories, often giving generic points about the theory rather than what the theory had to say about social mobility. These candidates tended to not be specific about the study findings and often made generic points that paraphrased findings rather than fully describing and/or explaining them. They also did not relate the study to the theory and/or social mobility.

Some candidates did not interpret data from studies and elsewhere to make conclusions or analyse the issue of social mobility.

Assignment

Some candidates did not evaluate the studies used in their assignment well.

Candidates who achieved at the A-grade tended to give a strength or a weakness of the methodology used by the studies in their assignment.

Most candidates did not perform well in the conclusion section. Candidates who achieved at the C-grade tended to describe and to repeat points made earlier.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Section 1: Human society

Candidates can be asked questions on any of the theories mentioned in the Higher Sociology course specification on our [website](#).

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates practice describe and explain type questions on all the theories noted in the course specification. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to use the sociological language associated with each theory, for instance bourgeoisie and proletariat when discussing Marxism, and meritocracy when discussing functionalism.

Teachers and lecturers should pay particular attention to action theories; candidates who achieve A-grade marks can answer questions on symbolic interactionism and Weberism.

Any of the research methods listed in the course specification can come up in the question paper and candidates must be prepared to answer questions on any research method. Teachers and lecturers should provide candidates with the materials and learning required to answer questions on the key features, strengths or weaknesses of research methods.

Section 2: Culture and identity

To be successful in this section, candidates must use sociological concepts, theories and research to investigate culture and identity. Teachers and lecturers should prepare candidates to answer both short questions and essay questions on culture and identity.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure that candidates are fully knowledgeable about the mandatory study, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* by S Cohen. They should include

the cultural background to the study, the study findings and the methods used. Candidates must also understand (and be able to articulate their understanding) of the concepts of 'folk devils' and 'moral panics'.

Teachers and lecturers should also make sure that candidates are fully aware of one other study on culture and identity.

Teachers and lecturers must prepare candidates to apply structural and action perspectives and the sociological theories (feminism, functionalism, labelling, Marxism and symbolic interactionism) to describe, explain, analyse and evaluate culture and identity and other concepts such as socialisation, age, gender and power. The Higher Sociology course specification on our [website](#) has more information on this.

Teachers and lecturers should prepare candidates to answer questions and essays. The best way to do this is through practice, for instance by using past paper questions.

Section 3: Social issues

Teachers and lecturers should prepare candidates to apply structural and action perspectives and the sociological theories (feminism, functionalism, labelling, Marxism, symbolic interactionism and Weberism) to describe, explain, analyse and evaluate social mobility and another social issue of their choice. The Higher Sociology course specification on our [website](#) has more information on this.

In preparing candidates to answer questions, including essays on social mobility, teachers and lecturers should develop candidates' abilities to apply theories to social mobility and to their other chosen social issue. This can be done through practice.

Social mobility is a difficult concept for some candidates, and teachers and lecturers should take time to ensure candidates have a sociological understanding of social mobility. Teachers and lecturers should also ensure that candidates can link the findings of the mandatory studies to social mobility. For instance, does the study show that there is limited social mobility or there is a lot of social mobility?

Candidates should also be able to explain different types of social mobility, for instance Goldthorpe found a lot of absolute social mobility.

Teachers and lecturers should tell candidates that high scoring essays tend to have a good structure, for example, introduction, theories, study. However, A-grade candidates do not give overlong introductions, as they use their introduction to define terms such as absolute and relative mobility.

Assignment

Teachers and lecturers should continue to encourage candidates to choose their own sociological topic.

Teachers and lecturers should continue to prepare candidates for their assignment by providing support in the beginning of the process, for instance in choosing an appropriate topic and hypothesis.

Teachers and lecturers should remind candidates that some topics are not appropriate for a sociology assignment. For instance, some topics may be better suited to RMPS or psychology. Also, candidates should be careful if they use a topic they feel particularly strongly about that they must still take a sociological approach and try to stay as objective as possible.

Some sociological topics are more complex than others, and teachers and lecturers can provide guidance to candidates at this stage. For instance, a candidate may find a topic looking at media representation of minority ethnic groups too complex as it requires understanding of a range of complex issues such as the general discrimination and prejudices faced by minority ethnic groups across the UK, diversity of minority ethnic groups in UK, ownership of media and effects of media representation.

Teachers and lecturers can give candidates advice on the type of sources they can use, and which ones will be most useful. For example, a research paper can be very useful but may be too complex for a candidate at this level.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, we aim 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, we hold 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 our 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. We 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.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy](#).