Course report 2026

Higher Sociology, SCQF level 6

We've written this report for teachers and lecturers. We recommend you read this with the published course assessment documents and marking instructions.

The report:

- provides a summary of how each course component performed
- highlights areas of the question paper and coursework where candidates performed well and areas where they did not perform well
- has advice you might find useful when preparing candidates for assessment

We collect and prepare the statistics in course reports before we complete the appeals process.

Copyright © Qualifications Scotland 2026

Statistical and grade boundary information

Course entries

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 932

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 914

Distribution of course awards (including minimum mark to achieve each grade)

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	421	46.1	46.1	77
B	164	17.9	64.0	66
C	134	14.7	78.7	55
D	84	9.2	87.9	44
No award	111	12.1	100	Not applicable

We've not applied rounding to these statistics.

In this report:

- 'Most' means greater than or equal to 70%.
- 'Many' means 50% to 69%.
- 'Some' means 25% to 49%.
- 'Few' or 'a few' means less than 25%.

You can find statistical reports on our website.

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's 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 make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Senior Qualifications Scotland staff normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors use 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.

We can adjust the grade boundaries downwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
We can adjust the grade boundaries upwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
If levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries.

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.

How the course assessment performed

Question paper

The question paper performed as expected. Candidates accessed all questions and marks ranged from 0 to full marks.

All sections of the question paper were accessible and allowed for differentiation.

Assignment

The assignment performed as expected, and candidates were well prepared.

Many candidates achieved high marks and the average mark for the assignment continues to increase. Candidates chose a broad range of social issues, for example those related to social media, crime, toxic masculinity, rap music, medicalisation of drugs, horror films, and women’s pensions.

How candidates performed

Areas where candidates performed well

Question paper

Some candidates produced good A-grade responses, and these candidates produced quality responses across all three sections of the paper. C-grade candidates tended to perform best in section 1. Candidates responded well to questions on action theories in sections 1 and 2, and some produced good quality essays in section 2.

Section 1: Human society

Many candidates answered questions 1, 2 and 3 on sociological theories very well.

Question 1: Many candidates used appropriate sociological language, using concepts such as consensus and meritocracy. Candidates who achieved high marks in this question explained why the point they made was a strength or a weakness, for example explaining that the concept of meritocracy is a weakness because of structural inequalities faced by groups such as women and minority groups.

Question 2: Many candidates answered this question well. They explained what Marxists mean by saying, for example, that Marxists classify a person's social class in terms of their relationship to the means of production. Strong responses included details on the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and the effects of social class on individuals and groups.

Question 3: Most candidates answered this question on the features of Weberism and many did very well by describing specific features, such as the concept of verstehen.

Question 4: Candidates who answered this question well demonstrated an understanding of the entire research process and the ways of conducting research.

Question 5: Many candidates answered this question very well and evaluated the specific advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires as a research method. We asked candidates to evaluate, therefore the best answers explained why the point

they made was an advantage or a disadvantage. For example, a candidate who claimed that a disadvantage of questionnaires as a research method is that they produce quantitative data would need to explain why this is a disadvantage.

Section 2: Culture and identity

The essay question was in section 2 this year. The question was worth 25 marks and required candidates to analyse the relationship between cultures and subcultures. Candidates had to use one structural and one action theory and a study of their choice.

The best essays were well structured, for instance: introduction, theory 1, theory 2 and study. Candidates who achieved high marks used sociological terminology and concepts such as socialisation.

Most candidates who answered question 7 chose either Marxism or feminism as their structural theory. Candidates who used their chosen theory in their response, rather than making generic points about theories, produced good quality answers that achieved high marks. Those using Marxism applied it to the relationship between cultures and subcultures, and included points about cultural hegemony and the power of bourgeois institutions. Those who used feminism as their cultural theory tended to discuss points about patriarchal institutions and gender roles. Candidates who gained high marks wrote clearly only about what each theory said about the relationship between culture and subcultures.

Candidates chose a range of studies to include in their essays, including the mandatory study by S. Cohen, ‘Folk Devils and Moral Panics’. Candidates who achieved high marks in their essay were clear about their study’s findings and what they revealed about the relationship between culture and subcultures. For instance, Cohen’s findings explain the demonisation of the youth subcultures and their creation as ‘folk devils’ leading to a ‘moral panic’.

Section 3: Social issues

Some candidates answered question 8 well by demonstrating their understanding of the Oxford Mobility Study. Candidates who achieved high marks not only knew the findings of the study but understood what they meant and translated this into their

response. For instance, explaining the high rates of social mobility found by linking this with structural changes in employment.

Many candidates produced good responses in question 10. Candidates used Marxism and one other theory to analyse a social issue of their choice.

Candidates who gained high marks were very clear about the social issue they had chosen.

The question required candidates to apply Marxism to the chosen social issue. Candidates who produced high-quality answers explained the Marxist view of their social issue using the relevant sociological terms and concepts. Candidates who chose the issue of social mobility discussed issues such as exploitation, life chances of the proletariat and social closure.

Many of those who chose social mobility chose functionalism as their second theory, as it provided a clear comparison to the Marxist view on social mobility. They analysed concepts such as meritocracy, effective role allocation and the role of inequality as a motivator for individuals.

Some candidates who chose a social issue that was not social mobility achieved high marks. They analysed the issue first using Marxism and then by applying another theory, using clear sociological concepts and language. Candidates chose a range of alternative social issues, such as educational attainment, inequalities, and gender inequalities.

Assignment

Most candidates chose a sociological topic and produced a working hypothesis. The topics chosen were based on social issues ranging from the impact of social media on young people to the gender pay gap in professional football.

Most candidates chose at least one study of sociological significance, most frequently an academic study. Many used sociological studies as their second study, but some also used official statistics, government and other official reports, and reports and studies from voluntary organisations and pressure groups.

Most candidates were accurate in describing the findings of their chosen studies.

Most candidates used at least one theory to analyse the findings of their chosen studies, and many included other data to enhance their analysis. Most candidates who achieved A-grade marks produced a conclusion that did not merely repeat what had gone before, but synthesised the overall arguments and points. Many conclusions included comparisons with additional theories or made recommendations as to how the social issue could be improved moving forward.

Areas where candidates did not perform well

Question paper

Section 1: Human society

Some candidates found question 4 demanding as they seemed unaware of what operationalisation was and its place in the research process. Some candidates' answers showed they had some understanding of this stage in the research process, but they did not add detail, for example by discussing sampling. Some candidates appeared to be unaware of the substages.

Some candidates did not describe the features of a case study in question 6.

Section 2: Culture and identity

Some candidates missed marks in their essay by not making full use of the 4 marks for an introduction. Candidates can use this section to define terms such as culture and subculture, socialisation and gender roles.

Some candidates found it difficult to apply theories to the relationship between culture and subculture. This is a higher-order skill and C-grade candidates tended to describe the general ideas and concepts of the theories rather than what the theories had to say about culture and subcultures.

Some candidates used labelling as their action theory, rather than the broader perspective of symbolic interactionism. These candidates then found it very demanding to gain 7 marks in this section, as they were limited in what they could write about.

A few candidates who used feminism as their structural theory did not apply the theory to the topic of the relationship between culture and subcultures. Some candidates who used a study from a feminist perspective then found it demanding to link the study to culture and subculture.

Section 3: Social issues

For question 8, some candidates described the findings of the Oxford Mobility Study rather than explaining what they showed about social mobility.

Some candidates found question 9 very demanding as they were unfamiliar with the findings of the mandatory study by Blanden and Machin. A few candidates mixed up the findings of Blanden and Machin with the findings of The Oxford Mobility Study.

Assignment

Candidates find evaluation very demanding. They should evaluate the study and sources they use in the assignment by describing a strength and a weakness of each.

Candidates found the conclusion section demanding. Many candidates repeated the points made earlier from their findings and/or analysis section rather than making conclusion points.

Some candidates did not reference the studies and sources used appropriately.

Preparing candidates for assessment

Question paper

Candidates who achieve at A-grade perform consistently well across all three sections in the question paper.

Candidates should use past papers and centre-produced materials to practice exam-type questions.

Section 1: Human society

You should prepare candidates to answer questions on any of the theories and research methods mentioned in the Higher Sociology Course Specification.

You should provide candidates with the materials and learning required to answer questions on the key features and strengths or weaknesses of research methods. They should be able to describe each step in the research process in detail.

Section 2: Culture and identity

Candidates must use sociological concepts, theories and research to investigate culture and identity. You should prepare them to answer both restricted-response questions and essay questions on culture and identity.

You 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.

Section 3: Social issues

You should prepare candidates to answer questions that ask them to apply theories to social issues of their choice or the mandatory topic of social mobility.

Prepare candidates to answer questions on **both** mandatory studies on social mobility. This can include a specific mandatory study as part of an essay. Candidates

should have the materials and learning to fully understand the findings of both studies and relate these to the issue of social mobility. Successful candidates know these mandatory studies in detail and can therefore answer questions in detail.

Remind candidates that when answering a question on their chosen social issue that is not social mobility, they must state clearly what the social issue is.

Assignment

You should support candidates at the beginning of the assignment process, for instance in choosing an appropriate topic and hypothesis. Remind them that some topics are not appropriate for a sociology assignment. You should consult the guidance in the coursework materials available on the Higher Sociology subject page on our website.

While we encourage candidates to choose a social issue they are interested in, they must still take a sociological approach and try to remain as objective as possible. Some sources, while relevant, may be too complex for candidates at Higher level. Moreover, some sources may not be suitable and candidates may need guidance.

You should ask candidates to include either a screenshot of the findings from the study or studies they use, or a direct URL to the study or studies. They can provide them in the references section, and they do not contribute to the word count of the assignment. This allows markers to confirm the detail candidates have provided is accurate.

Throughout the course, you should help candidates to develop the skills necessary to make conclusions.

Practice throughout the course helps candidates to develop the skills required to evaluate the sources used in the assignment.