



## Course Report 2016

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**

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

The question paper largely performed as expected and no changes were made at the awarding meeting. Feedback indicates that the paper was perceived as fair and accessible for candidates. Most candidates understood what was required, and were able to complete the three sections of the paper in the allocated time.

Candidates accessed the full range of marks in the question paper; in all questions candidates scored between zero and full marks. Candidates' responses tended to score similarly in all three sections.

Many candidates answered questions in Section 1 (Human Society) and 2 (Culture and Identity) very well.

Question 6 elicited poor responses from some candidates. This was especially disappointing given the very straightforward nature of the question about socioeconomic inequality that was asked, and given that candidates were asked specifically about one of the mandatory studies. Many responses lacked evidence of the ability to apply theories to the topic. However, most responses to Question 6 showed that candidates devoted enough time to completing the extended response question.

### **Component 2: assignment**

Responses to the assignment, in general, were to the standard expected for Higher level. The topics chosen were very varied and included different aspects of media, gender, social class and subcultures. However, some topics posed a difficulty for candidates, in terms of the complexity of the sociological issue or difficulties in accessing current research they could understand.

Most candidates followed the rubric given on the SQA website, completing all sections to the best of their ability. Candidates who followed a plan tended to be more successful than those who did not.

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

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

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

The question paper performed as expected and candidates accessed the full range of marks across the paper. Candidates who achieved an A pass tended to perform well across the paper.

## **Section 1**

Many candidates answered Section 1 well.

Candidates who performed well explained their answers in detail as required; for instance, Question 1(a) explaining the advantages and disadvantages of using Official Statistics as a research method, strong responses included points explaining why quantitative data (produced by Official Statistics) is useful in identifying trends for example in exam results.

Most candidates coped with the style of question 1 and identified the method accurately and/or the type of data produced.

Similarly, in Question 2 candidates who used their detailed knowledge of feminism scored highly, for instance in describing strengths and weaknesses of different areas of feminism such as liberal, Marxist and radical.

## **Section 2**

Many candidates answered Section 2 well.

In Question 3 many candidates produced good quality responses by linking Symbolic Interactionism and identity in a number of ways; for instance, using the concepts of 'significant others', 'looking glass self' or 'labelling'.

Many candidates answered Question 5(a) well. Most candidates opted to describe the findings of Cohen's study and those who accurately described the findings scored highly.

## **Section 3**

Candidates who were able to structure their answer tended to score highly. The question required the candidate to apply theories as well as one mandatory study (in this case — Blanden and Machin). Candidates who were able to apply their knowledge scored very highly, for example linking social inequality to theory; for instance, explaining that Marxists claim inequalities stem from social class (bourgeoisie and proletariat).

## **Component 2: assignment**

The most successful candidates were those who opted for a topic that they could understand and for which they could find relevant and accessible research.

Most candidates identified a clear and accurate hypothesis and therefore scored well in this section.

Many candidates explained the differences between common sense and sociological explanations of their topic well. Those who scored highly made the difference clear and used accurate examples in their response. Furthermore, candidates who explained their point fully and used exemplification specific to their assignment topic scored highly.

Candidates who scored highly tended to make the research findings clear and accurate. In the analysis sections candidates scored highly when they analysed the findings in relation to one or more theories (although this is not the only way to analyse findings).

In the conclusions section candidates who scored well were able to make points that were analytical (in addition to analytical points previously made) or make conclusive points from findings and analysis. Furthermore, candidates who used research findings with wider research such as official statistics scored well.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

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

#### **Section 1**

In Section 1 Question 2, some candidates did not express their knowledge in sociological terms and instead used incorrect/irrelevant opinions on feminist theory. Some candidates found it difficult to explain strengths and weaknesses of feminist theory as their responses lacked accuracy, and for instance contained irrelevant opinion, and appeared to lack knowledge of feminism, different types of feminism and gender inequality in general.

#### **Section 2**

In Section 2 Question 4, some candidates found it difficult to explain the influence of secondary socialisation on gender. Candidates who scored highly on this question were able to exemplify their points by using specific secondary agents, for instance to explain the influence of the media on gender or use one or two secondary agents to answer the question.

In Section 2 Question 5(b), some candidates found it difficult to explain the contribution the study had made to their sociological understanding of culture and identity. Candidates who scored well in this question were able to apply their knowledge, not just to repeat the findings of the study.

#### **Section 3**

In Section 3 some candidates found question 6 demanding. Those who scored marks at the lower end of the range were unable to discuss the mandatory study's (Blanden and Machin) main points and/or specific findings, or link functionalism to the concept of inequality.

Some candidates found it difficult to apply any theory to the social issue of inequality. Candidates were asked to use two contrasting theories, one of which must be functionalism. Some candidates were unable to demonstrate any knowledge of functionalism in relation to socioeconomic inequality, which was surprising given the key concept of meritocracy in functionalism.

## **Component 2: assignment**

Candidates' success on their assignment was to a great extent dependent on their choice of topic. Some candidates chose topics for their assignment that they found too complex, either in terms of their sociological knowledge or in terms of the accessibility of relevant research.

Some candidates found it difficult to access marks as they simply missed out sections of the assignment; this tended to be candidates who did not follow a plan for instance the advice on SQA website.

Some candidates found it difficult to draw conclusions and therefore lost marks available. This was due to a number of factors including an apparent lack of understanding of the research findings and/or a lack of understanding with regards to theoretical explanations for the topic.

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

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

#### **Section 1**

Candidates are required to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of sociological theories and research methods as detailed in the mandatory content. To check mandatory content, see the Higher Sociology Course Assessment Specification session 2016–17 document on the Sociology page of SQA's website.

At Higher level this does not merely require candidates to describe features and/or strengths and weaknesses, but to apply their knowledge. Centres should continue to emphasise that candidates are required to justify the choice of research method or apply theory to a topic in an obvious way, for instance what feminists would say about inequality. Centres should prepare candidates to apply their knowledge of theories and research methods.

Centres must prepare candidates to answer questions on feminism by ensuring that candidates do not present a caricature of feminism. Common sense answers are not acceptable at Higher level, and all responses should be expressed in sociological language — this includes any claimed criticisms of feminism.

Centres should prepare candidates to answer in the 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 (information is available on the SQA website). Centres can prepare candidates by practicing as many questions as possible.

#### **Section 2**

Centres should continue to develop candidates' knowledge and understanding of culture and identity.

With regards to the mandatory study, Cohen (1972) *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, centres 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 socialisation, gender and age.

### **Section 3**

Candidates should be prepared to apply the theories as noted in mandatory content in all sections of the paper. Centres can find this information in the Course Assessment document (CAS) on the Sociology page.

Where centres are using integrated approaches to learning sociological theories, for instance teaching culture and identity and theories together, they must also prepare candidates to apply theory in other sections. Centres must prepare candidates to apply sociological theory in Section 2 and 3 as well as to answer specific questions on theory in Section 1.

### **Preparing candidates for extended responses**

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 extended response questions. Candidates who scored highly in Question 6 were able to demonstrate their ability to structure their response as well as to apply their knowledge and understanding of sociological theories and studies.

Centres may also find it useful to use Understanding Standards materials (available through the SQA secure website) to provide guidance on the standards expected.

It is also useful to note that changes have been made to the Course Assessment Specification document (update published May 2016) and apply to 2016/17 session.

### **Component 2: Assignment**

Centres should make the requirements of the assignment explicit to all candidates, for instance using the information on the SQA website and detailed within the Candidate Instructions on the SQA Secure website.

Centres can assist candidates in their selection of appropriate topics. Whilst candidates can choose any topic, centres must provide guidance 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 — for instance an assignment with a hypothesis about the representation of women in the media may touch on gender roles, media ownership and control and socialisation. Candidates require some guidance from centres as to the direction of study (see guidelines). Alternatively, the 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.

Providing support at these early stages enables the candidate to complete the assignment more 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 provide candidates with learning and teaching opportunities to understand the research process, ie knowledge and understanding of the Human Society Unit. In particular, candidates should have knowledge and understanding of what a hypothesis is and the ways to formulate their own relevant hypothesis. An appropriate hypothesis will provide candidates with the framework they require for their research.

The best assignments followed a structure — for example following the mandatory sections —and centres could assist candidates by advising them to follow a plan.

Centres should discuss the issue of plagiarism and ethical considerations such as accessing illegal or inappropriate material relating to their topic. This is generally relevant to all candidates but depending on the topic chosen, can be critical for some.

## Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	155
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Number of resulted entries in 2016	954
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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	17.4%	17.4%	166	63
B	20.3%	37.7%	194	54
C	24.4%	62.2%	233	45
D	9.9%	72.0%	94	40
No award	28.0%	-	267	0

## 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.