Course Report 2018

Subject	Sociology
Level	Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. 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. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

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

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: question paper

In general, candidates had done sufficient preparation to answer the essay question in section 3 and accessed the full range of available marks in each section of the paper.

The paper provided good opportunities for discrimination between A and C candidates. 'A' grade candidates performed well across the paper. They produced good-quality answers in sections 1, 2 and 3, with well-structured responses which explained points, used examples as appropriate and demonstrated understanding and use of sociological language. 'C' candidates tended to perform better in response to short-answer questions, and less well in their response to the essay question, often displaying gaps in their knowledge.

Component 2: assignment

Candidates continued to achieve well in this component.

Most candidates' responses included all the requirements, such as findings and evaluation of sources. Candidates continued to select topics from a very broad range of social issues.

In some centres, candidates chose to complete their assignment on very similar topics.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

In general, candidates who performed well noted the command words in the questions, and what exactly they were being asked, and structured their responses accordingly. Candidates who performed well demonstrated their knowledge across the paper.

Section 1: human society

Candidates tended to respond well to all questions in this section.

High-scoring candidates answered in detail, providing explanation and/or detail as required. For example, for Q1(a), high-scoring candidates explained why the point made was an advantage.

Many candidates responded well to Q2. Those who achieved marks at the top of the range compared the similarities and differences between feminism and functionalism rather than merely detailing the features of one theory and then the other. For example, '…a similarity is that both theories are structural theories, this means they both take a macro approach, examining society as a whole and the influences society has on the individual…' or '….one difference is that feminism is a conflict theory, whereas functionalism is a consensus theory. This means that, as a conflict theory, feminists claim that there is a dominant group in society (men) who dominate the institutions of society and run them in their interests, whereas functionalism is a consensus theory and claims there is no one dominant group in society and institutions work to the benefit of all….'

Section 2: culture and identity

Many candidates produced very good responses to Q4, using one structural and one action theory to analyse the ways in which culture and identity are linked.

Candidates took many different approaches to answering the question. Good-quality responses demonstrated the candidate's ability to apply sociological theory to analyse culture and identity. Examples of this included detailing the link between the institutions of society and the formation of culture and identity in general, for example using a (Neo) Marxist approach to analyse the significance of the bourgeois-dominated superstructure, while some focused specifically on gender identity in culture by applying a feminist approach.

In applying action theory, responses ranged from details on identity formation (for example using symbolic interactionism to examine the influence of significant others and the generalised other) and linking this to wider culture.

Section 3: social issues

Some candidates produced very good quality essays that answered the question asked. Those who scored highly addressed the question and explained differing theoretical positions on mobility and the findings of the study used on mobility.

Candidates who achieved high marks demonstrated their analysis of mobility by applying sociological theories and studies, and used wider examples from further study or investigation. These candidates demonstrated an understanding of the topic and the concepts and used theories to interpret and analyse data on social mobility.

Strong responses followed a logical structure. The structure varied, but generally followed the requirements given in Q5: theory 1, theory 2 and study, and linked them all.

'C' candidates demonstrated a basic understanding of social mobility by explaining different theoretical approaches on mobility and a study. In general, following a structure helped candidates to answer the question and ensure they covered all the requirements.

Component 2: assignment

Candidates continued to cope well with the demands of the assignment. Those who chose an appropriate and accessible topic and research source tended to perform well across the assignment.

The requirement to explain research findings was completed particularly well, with many candidates scoring highly. Candidates also explained the differences between common sense and sociological approaches.

Analysis was most effective where candidates understood the topic and the findings fully: for example linking the specific research used to wider research. Candidates who scored highly in analysis and conclusion tended to use theories to explain the research data and contrast different theoretical approaches.

Candidates who scored highly were able to consistently use sociological language throughout their assignment. For example, in their evaluation section these candidates referred to sociological terms such as the validity and reliability of the source.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Section 1: human society

Some candidates produced overly long and descriptive responses to short-answer questions, such as Q1(a). This wasted time and did not gain marks if it did not answer the question.

Although the marks could be accessed in a variety of ways, in responding to Q1(b) a number of candidates did not mention the British Sociology Association (BSA) ethical code. Centres should cover these ethical guidelines in relation to research methods.

In Q2, some candidates described the similarities and differences between feminism and functionalism, rather than analysing them. This meant they were unable to achieve all the marks available. Candidates should look at the command word in the question and respond accordingly.

Section 2: culture and identity
Some candidates did not appear to be prepared for Q3(a) asked on a study, other than the compulsory study (S. Cohen: *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*). Centres should remind candidates that it is a requirement to study Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* and at least one other study in this section.

Those candidates who did answer this question achieved the full range of marks. Centres should remind candidates to look closely at the command word in the question. In this case candidates were asked to evaluate the study: those who merely described the study were not able to access all the marks available.

Section 3: social issues
Some candidates found the requirements of essay-writing demanding. While applying two theories and a study to analyse social mobility allowed some candidates to demonstrate their sociological knowledge, some candidates found it difficult to link the theories to mobility and to the study used.

Some candidates found it difficult to explain trends in social mobility and then to use theories to explain these trends. Centres should prepare candidates to apply sociological theories (specified in the course assessment specification) to the social issue in the question. Candidates can develop their skills and knowledge in a variety of ways, but practice examination questions always provide a good basis for such development.

Component 2: assignment

Candidates who chose topics that were accessible in terms of their sociological knowledge and skills tended to perform best. For example, with regard to sociologically significant research data, some candidates found it difficult to understand and use academic research papers or sociological studies and so were at a disadvantage in their assignment sections on findings, analysis and evaluation.

Centres can provide appropriate support to candidates (see SQA's website for details) in choosing a topic and helping them to identify relevant, usable research. Candidates who chose topics that involved a number of concepts and issues were often unable to cope with the complexity of the topic, or to be clear about which aspects to examine in their assignment. Such topics included representation of women in the media, gender identity, culture, influence of institutions and media ownership.

Similarly, while topics such as social media may attract candidates, much of the research available is difficult to access at this level.

Candidates often find it difficult to reach a conclusion in their assignment, and often only repeat what has gone before. Effective conclusions include a clear statement on whether the hypothesis has been proven and additional points that back up the argument or findings, for instance from official statistics. The conclusion may also contain further analysis, such as additional sociological research or a critique of theoretical approaches used previously.

Many candidates who scored highly in analysis explained or interpreted their findings using sociological theories, or linked their findings to other data. For example in an assignment on

inequalities in the UK, the candidate used data on inequalities in addition to the research sources they used to support or refute their hypothesis.

Some candidates found it challenging to question the ethical standards of some research. Centres should direct candidates to the BSA guidelines (see the Higher Sociology course support notes).

In terms of hypotheses, some candidates found it difficult to formulate a hypothesis, some expressed their hypothesis as a question, some made overly long and convoluted statements and, in some cases, the hypothesis was not clear.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Centres should consult SQA's website to ensure they are up-to-date with the requirements of the question paper and assignment for the 2018/19 session.

Centres should continue to ensure that they present candidates at the correct level. Higher Sociology requires candidates to demonstrate knowledge and skills across three sections in the question paper, as well as producing a robust assignment.

Component 1: question paper

Centres should make candidates aware of the geography of the question paper (section 1, section 2 and section 3) and the type of questions to expect.

Centres should remind candidates to note how many marks each question is worth, and that the length of the answer should correspond to this. For example, the answer to a question worth 4 marks should be shorter than one worth 6 marks.

Candidates should also note the command word contained in the question ('Analyse', Evaluate', 'Explain', and so on). Centres should allow candidates to practise as many mock questions as possible.

Centres should help candidates to develop their essay-writing skills — this is best done through practice.

Candidates should use sociological language as much as possible. Candidates who scored highly across the paper demonstrated their ability to use sociological terms, for example referring (appropriately) to the bourgeoisie, patriarchy or consensus.

Section 1: human society
Centres must prepare candidates to answer questions on all aspects of theories, research process and research methods as detailed in the course specification (see SQA's website).

Candidates should answer the question asked. For example, if the question requires explanation, the point must be explained. Centres can prepare candidates by practising short-answer responses as much as possible.

Candidates must be ready to respond to a wide range of questions on individual theories, conflict and consensus in general and, in particular, action and structural theories. This knowledge should be in depth, as outlined in the course specification (see SQA's website).

Candidates should also be prepared to respond to questions on the research process and methods: evaluating, justifying methods and explaining features.

Section 2: culture and identity
Candidates should be prepared to answer questions on all aspects of culture and identity as detailed in the course specification (see SQA's website).

Candidates should be able to apply theories to culture and identity.

Candidates should be prepared to answer questions on the mandatory study and at least one other study of their choice (on an aspect of culture and identity). Centres should ensure that candidates have practised short-answer questions and essays.

Section 3: social issues
Centres should prepare candidates to answer restricted-response and essay questions in this section.

Centres should emphasise that questions may be asked on social mobility or the other social issue and, just as in Q3(a), candidates should prepare at least one study in addition to the mandatory studies in this section.

Candidates continue to find essay-writing demanding. Centres should spend as much time as possible helping candidates with this, for instance by practising past paper questions.

Component 2: assignment

Centres should continue to provide support and advice to candidates in the initial stages of their assignment by helping them to select a topic and choose an appropriate study of sociological significance.

While candidates are encouraged to choose their topic, centres must support them in their choice, for example by advising them to narrow their focus into a manageable area of study.

Centres should continue to remind candidates that their hypothesis should be in the form of a statement, and that this statement must be clear to the examiner. Centres should also remind candidates to use sociological language throughout.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	1024

Number of resulted entries in 2018	1067

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	16.5%	16.5%	176	63
B	20.4%	36.9%	218	54
C	23.9%	60.8%	255	45
D	13.2%	74.0%	141	40
No award	26.0%	-	277	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which 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.

Therefor SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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 SQA's management team.

♦ 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.
♦ 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.

Grade boundaries from exam papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.