SOCIOLOGY

Paper 2251/12
Paper 12

Key messages

* Candidates must use the source when instructed to do so, i.e. for **Question 1(a)** and **1(c).** For **1(c)** encourage candidates to make an explicit reference to the source which they should then go on to develop through description.
* In **Questions 1(a)** and **1(b)**, when candidates are asked to 'identify' something, they should be encouraged to avoid writing long descriptions or explanations as they are unnecessary.
* Encourage candidates to create a glossary for the key terms identified in the specification.
* Candidates need to be clearer about the difference between 'how' and 'why' in the option **(c)** and **(d)** questions in order to maximum marks for the appropriate questions.
* It remains the case that candidates do not need to spend time defining key terms in the question before beginning their answers.
* More confident students should practise writing evaluative rather than summative conclusions in which they make a judgement about the 'extent' to which the claim in the question is correct.

General comments

Overall, many candidates responded well to the demands of the question paper, demonstrating a good knowledge and understanding of sociological terminology, along with relevant application of this knowledge to the questions. The level of maturity and sophistication in some of the best candidate responses was excellent. Many candidates were well prepared to discuss the strengths and limitations of methods. However, it remains the case that some candidates use concepts such as validity and reliability interchangeably and or together when making a point. Use of the source for the relevant questions in **Question 1** was variable (see key messages). The option 'Culture, Identity and Socialisation' was more popular than 'Social Inequality', but in both candidates showed a good grasp of the key theories, ideas, concepts and arguments and many used these to good effect. As last year, there were very few rubric errors or non-responses.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a) Most candidates were able to identify the two methods used by feminists from the source. A small number of candidates stated 'interview' or 'structured interview' rather than 'unstructured interview' which meant that they failed to score the appropriate marks. Similarly, a small number of candidates referred to 'group interview' rather than 'focus groups'.

(b) Most candidates were able to identify two types of observation. A few candidates went on to write superfluous descriptions.

(c) Most candidates used information from the source to identify why some sociologists like to use unstructured interviews and, in many cases, these were then well described and developed. Many referred to interviewees describing experiences in their own words and the importance of the interviewer developing a relationship with the interviewee. Some candidates referred to the source but did not then develop the description. In some cases, candidates made implicit, rather than explicit, reference to the source. There were some candidates who were able to give reasons why some sociologists like to use unstructured interviews but failed to reference the source.

(d) Whilst there were many good responses to this question, some candidates showed a confused understanding of the social survey method. More successful responses focused on strengths such as sample size and generalisability; closed and pre-set questions and reliability. A few candidates identified generic practical issues such as cost or saving time as strengths with inadequate justification. A small number of candidates went on to describe limitations.

(e) This question was generally well answered with some excellent knowledge of a variety of strengths and weaknesses of the focus groups method. Common strengths included the ability to elicit more valid information due to the interaction between participants and the open-ended, qualitative nature of the discussion. In terms of limitations, many candidates identified the interviewer effect/bias or the lack of reliability or participants dominating and intimidating others during discussion. A minority of candidates were not clear about what a focus group and reverted to time/cost issues or linked focus groups solely to product testing.

(f) Many candidates did not fully understand the demands of this question and were, therefore, unable to access the top band. The question asks 'why' sampling is important for sociological research; candidates who only described various sampling methods (random, snowball, quota, stratified were popular) rather than explaining their importance, could only access marks in the lower bands. More successful responses made appropriate reference to the importance of large or stratified samples for the purposes of achieving representativeness and generalisability, and snowball sampling for accessing deviant or hard to reach groups. Practical reasons for the use of sampling featured frequently and with varying success. A small number of responses confused 'pilot study' with sampling.

(g) The vast majority of candidates were able to show some understanding of the importance of validity in sociological research. Candidates correctly identified its significance in terms of establishing an accurate picture or the 'truth' about social reality. It was pleasing to see many adopting a theoretical approach and framing arguments in terms of interpretivism and positivism. Some used methods such as unstructured interviews, covert participant observations or focus groups to make a range of points about the importance of validity in gaining qualitative information, verstehen and 'new', previously unthought-of data. In many cases, responses demonstrated a fuller understanding of counter arguments and deployed them more successfully - often providing developed points from a positivist perspective linked to issues such as objectivity, reliability and the importance of achieving a large and representative sample. Others referred to the importance of practical issues and ethical issues. Generally, it was encouraging to see that many responses made an attempt at a two-sided argument and a conclusion. There were a number of candidates who conflated or confused the concepts of validity and reliability.

Section B

Question 2

(a) Most candidates scored at least one mark for their definition of informal social control. A minority of candidates confused socialisation with social control. Better answers linked the idea of being forced to conform/sanctions with agents such as the family, peers etc, often giving an example to illustrate the point.

(b) Most candidates were able to identify examples of norms expected by students in school but in some cases did not develop their example or gave a 'list' of examples. Popular answers including following rules and regulations of the school, wearing school uniform and being courteous to teachers.

(c) This answer drew mixed responses. Although a good number of candidates were able to describe different roles that young people might have, fewer responses provided a clear and accurate explanation of how young people experience a conflict between discrete social roles. In a small number of cases candidates gave examples of role conflict experienced generally and not specific to the young. Candidates who scored less well were drawn into a discussion of peer pressure and the problems of adolescence, whilst others focused on confusion over sexual identity.

(d) Overall, this was generally well answered. Many candidates were able to give reasons, with some development, often showing a good understanding of sociological ideas and concepts, for example, making appropriate references to Functionalist and Marxist ideas about sub-cultures. Key explanations included interests, status frustration, rebellion etc.

(e)   There were some interesting responses to this question with many candidates showing an awareness of the influence of gender on social identity and a good understanding of the debate. Oakley's ideas on canalisation and manipulation were popular, well understood and deployed. The influence of secondary socialisation, in the form of the media and peers, also featured frequently. It was pleasing to see some candidates discuss masculinity, linking to both traditional ideas of the breadwinner and hegemonic masculinity but also some reference to the 'new man'. Counter arguments mostly focused on age, ethnicity and social class with varying degrees of sophistication. It was encouraging to see that most candidates gave a two-sided response, often with a conclusion. Less successful responses were characterised by partial development and/or a lack of sociological concepts. In some cases, candidates engaged in a nature/nurture debate. Some candidates confused sexuality with gender, and some referred to gender change as a counter argument.

Section C

Question 3

(a)   Most candidates were able to give fairly a clear definition of 'social inequality' with some varied examples such as unfair treatment due to class, gender and ethnicity. Some candidates who did not achieve full marks repeated the word 'inequality' as part of their definition.

(b)   This question drew a mixed response. Candidates who score well correctly linked social exclusion to the idea that some groups are denied access to goods, services or rights that the majority enjoy. Some candidates struggled with this question and referred to peer group exclusion instead of focusing on social exclusion as a part of class, ethnic or gender discrimination.

(c)   Many candidates were able to give generic reasons for increasing equality. More successful responses were able to make more explicit reference to equal opportunities legislation and how they have tackled discrimination resulting in improved life chances. Others referred exclusively to the welfare state and linked this to improvement in life chances. Answers mainly included references to 'work', 'education' and 'housing'. Points were not always well developed but most candidates did score medium marks. A minority of answers did not engage with the idea of life chances.

(d)   Most candidates were able to give some explanation as to why welfare states were introduced, often with appropriate reference to political and moral reasons e.g. the alleviation of poverty or the reduction of social inequality. Better responses often made references to Marxist and functionalist ideas. However, relatively few responses were able to reach the top band mainly due to insufficient development of points cited. In some cases, candidates simply described welfare states, whilst others discussed criticisms of welfare states.

(e)   Many candidates responded well to this question on the extent to which gender inequality still exists in the workplace. Most candidates engaged with the debate and attempted a two-sided response, making reference to ideas and concepts such as feminism, patriarchy, the gender pay gap, vertical and horizontal segregation, division of labour, glass ceiling and glass cliff among others. Counter arguments such as equality legislation and high-profile role models featured frequently. Some candidates discussed the historical traditional roles which were not directly relevant and in a minority of cases candidates misunderstood the question and referred to types of inequality in the workplace other than gender. As with **2(e)** the best candidates attempted to address the 'to what extent' aspect of the question in their conclusion.

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Paper 2251/22
Paper 22

Key messages

Many candidates still begin answers by defining terms in the question or with an account of what used to be the case before modern industrial societies. Candidates may choose to do this if it helps them to focus on the question but should realise that they will not start getting marks until they address the question itself.

Candidates should ensure that what is written specifically addresses the issues raised in the question – several examiners commented that candidates were failing to score additional marks because they were describing and writing about sociology generally rather than answering the specific question set. This will never result in a high mark being awarded and should be avoided.

Refer to sociological terminology, theory and concepts where relevant; using sociological terms will raise the overall quality of the candidate's answer and will allow access to those marks awarded for sociological/conceptual engagement.

Candidates should spend time thinking about what questions are asking about and planning answers to those specific questions in their designated 15 minutes of reading time – this is particularly important in the 15 mark essay questions to ensure that candidates remain focused on the specifics of the question. Some candidates are not using paragraphs in their longer responses, making it difficult for examiners to see where points begin and end. Candidates would benefit from Centres teaching essay writing skills and techniques for the 'part e' questions to try and rectify this, as 'range' is one of the key factors considered by the examining team when awarding their mark.

Some candidates struggled to access questions when they did not understand the key term in the question (e.g. paternal, anti-school sub-cultures, master status, folk devils etc). As these key terms in the questions will be drawn directly from the syllabus, it is essential that candidates become familiar with all of these. Many students did not get any marks at all for some questions because of this issue.

Centres should encourage candidates to use the marks per question as guidance for how much is to be written and how long should be spent on a particular question. Some candidates, for example, were writing as much for a part **(a)** question worth 2 marks as for a part **(e)** question worth 15. Time needs to be better managed in order to maximise the marks awarded.

In the part **(b)** questions some answers were insufficiently developed (remember that the command word is to 'describe'), so the candidate was unable to achieve full marks even though it was evident that they possessed relevant knowledge.

General comments

For this Summer 2019 marking session Section A (family) and B (education) were the most popular in terms of candidate responses. Section C (crime) was also answered by a significant number of candidates, particularly on the 0495 variant. The least answered option was Section D (the media) which the examining team felt included a higher number of less successful responses across all sub-questions.

There were a significant number of excellent candidate responses seen during this June marking session, demonstrating, not only very strong sociological knowledge and understanding, but also an increased awareness of the requirements of the examination. This was most encouraging. Many candidates are thinking sociologically in terms of theory, concepts, studies and evidence and are successfully applying their classroom knowledge to the specific examination questions. Relevant, contemporary, cultural and local examples were often used alongside the more traditional 'textbook' examples in order to justify several of the points made.

Very few rubric errors were seen in this examination session, allowing candidates to best maximise their chances of success. Some candidates did not number or incorrectly numbered their answers, though, and centres would be advised to ensure candidates are aware of the importance of doing this diligently.

More candidates seemed to be aware of the need to look at and develop both sides of the argument for the 15 mark questions and this is thus helping them to access the higher marks. Conclusions were added by most candidates, again helping them to form judgements to their responses.

There were noticeably fewer answers based on 'common sense' this session which is good to see. Even those candidates who scored only a few marks on the paper seemed to have some understanding of the sociological approach. They did not always use this appropriately in order to answer the questions set, however.

There was a good range of answers produced, with marks awarded across the full spread of marks. In the part **(a)** question, candidates should look to include **two** separate elements in their definition. Examples can be a really useful way of adding a second element to an answer and are thus to be encouraged. Part **(b)** needs two distinctly different points – separate and label these clearly for the examiner. In part **(c)** questions make sure there are more than two points made, evidenced and developed. For part **(d)** adopt the same approach as for (c) but develop ideas further, consider more range and ensure concepts/theory are used appropriately. Concepts and explicit sociological engagement tend to be the key differentiator between a part (c) and a part (d) question. In terms of the 15 mark part **(e)** question, candidates should be encouraged to organise their answers into paragraphs and to develop each idea fully using theory, studies, examples and/or concepts wherever relevant. Aim for three points for and three against the claim in the question. Each point should be directly focused upon what the question is asking about and should engage sociologically and conceptually wherever possible. Scoring well on the 15 mark questions obviously helps to boost the overall marks on the paper for candidates so is really important. Some candidates are choosing to answer the 15 mark questions first to make sure that they do not run out of time, this worked well for several candidates this session.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1 – Family

(a)   Most candidates were able to answer this question correctly although some candidates confused 'empty shell marriages' with 'empty-nest families'.

(b)   Some candidates were able to give two correct points here but some did not understand what paternal meant or mistook it for 'parental'. Common correct answers included the breadwinner economic provider role, disciplinarian, male role model and taking a share in childcare.

(c)   Some excellent answers which focused on modified, classic, vertical, horizontal extended families but too often answers were confused, very general or concentrated on functions rather than forms. Also some tended to focus on the past and why there had been extended families then.

(d)   This was generally answered well with a range of points made about the changing role of women, feminism, higher rates of divorce, secularisation, independence in an individualised society and older people after the death of a partner in an ageing population. A few candidates tried to discuss single parents or other households where there was more than one person living and thus did not score well.

(e)   The vast majority of candidates were able to access this question – less successful candidates tended to gain marks looking at the 'for' side, using primary socialisation, social control etc. Some students thought they were evaluating when they were actually arguing for, particularly true of Marxism and feminism. This 'e' question was probably the best answered on the paper in terms of concepts. There were some excellent answers which looked at both sides of the debate, using studies such as Leach and those on the dark side of the family. The New Right was used well by many candidates too.

Section B

Question 2 – Education

(a)   Most candidates were able to answer this question at least partially by referring to disadvantaged groups and better treatment. However, several were clearly unfamiliar with the term.

(b)   This was generally a well-answered question. The most common answers seen were secondary socialisation, qualifications/training for employment and social control. There were some common-sense answers, also some repetition, for example norms and values in 1 point and hidden curriculum in the second.

(c)   Many answers spent some time describing anti-school subcultures or reasons for them rather than addressing the specific question. More successful answers were able to use a range of concepts such as labelling, deviancy amplification, self-fulfilling prophecy and status and considered the effects on other pupils as well as the subculture members.

(d)   This was well-answered with responses including ways in which schools are not functional for working class pupils, some minority ethnic groups, girls and/or boys, pupils with disabilities or special needs and with non-academic abilities, career goals or intelligence.

(e)   Candidates generally did well in presenting several ways in which family background can influence educational achievement, whether negatively or positively. Many considered social class, ethnicity and attitudes to gender, as well as factors such as cultural and material deprivation and cultural capital. The opposing view was usually considered by discussing in-school factors affecting achievement such as teacher labelling, setting etc. Theory was really well used by many of the successful candidates in this question.

Section C

Question 3 – Crime, deviance and social control

(a)   There was some confusion about this term, with some candidates thinking it meant a community imposing a sentence. Some answers were helped by good examples, such as litter picking, cleaning graffiti or restoring footpaths which illustrated the idea of giving back to the community.

(b)   This question was well answered. Many candidates chose cybercrime and internet crime as their two crimes and were able to distinguish these successfully through their examples and descriptions. Hacking, identity theft and cyberbullying were some of the most commonly seen examples.

(c)   This question again was well answered on the whole, with most answers making points about official statistics, victim surveys and self-report surveys. Many candidates used methodological terms such as validity, reliability and representativeness to develop their points, however these were not always accurate. Some excellent points about the dark figure of crime and its impact on the crime rates were made. Some candidates did not explain and develop the methods of measuring the crime rates sufficiently.

(d)   Some candidates found it hard to make sufficient different points to achieve the highest marks. There was a tendency for repetition. The most successful answers used concepts such as the self-fulfilling prophecy, deviancy amplification, criminal/deviant career, impact on employment and self-image. Some candidates struggled to link labelling to master status.

(e) Most answers started with a distinction between formal and informal agencies of social control and then considered how these could prevent crime. A range of agencies were usually discussed, with the other side of the debate also being considered, for example - dysfunctional families, deviant subcultures, imitation of media criminality and prisons as universities of crime. The recidivism rate was also mentioned by several candidates. There was also some very good use of material on white collar and corporate crime to illustrate the limitations of agencies in those areas. Institutionalised racism in the criminal justice system was also considered by some. Some candidates tried to use theory in their answers but unfortunately several were not able to link it to the question, simply describing the theory instead which could not be credited.

Section D

Question 4 – Media

(a) Most answers had some idea of 'scapegoats' as groups being blamed but did not always include the idea of the blame being unjustified.

(b) This was often not well answered. Better points included use of social media to create own content, citizen journalism, interactivity and the public complaining to the media.

(c) This was a question on which most candidates had some knowledge but struggled to find enough to say. It is crucial that points made are developed and substantiated. There was surprisingly little use of examples although there were some examples of the mods and the rockers being used successfully.

(d) Answers tended to concentrate predominantly on protecting children from unsuitable content, with some candidates also discussing the need to prevent falsehoods spreading. There was a lack of specific knowledge of laws controlling the media and measures such as the *watershed/film classifications* – however knowledge of protecting minors, government secrets (without the specific law) and political influence were in evidence. Answers tended to lack concepts.

(e) Most answers were able to list some more common stereotypes of age groups such as children, teens and the elderly; a few included examples which strengthened their answers. There was little evidence of an ability to apply the ideas to their own experience of the media. Candidates struggled to make points on the other side of the argument, often resorting to opposites of the stereotypes described earlier or a discussion of gender/ethnic stereotypes. This was the least successful of the part (e) answers with several responses showing just common sense.