

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 2251/01

Paper 1

General comments

There was a wide range of responses from candidates ranging from outstanding to those who seemed ill-prepared for the examination. The paper appeared to differentiate effectively between candidates. Most candidates were able to respond effectively to **Question 1** appearing well prepared for the compulsory question. Performance was more variable on others. The problem for many candidates remains the ability to spend sufficient time on parts c and d of questions. This is particularly a problem in part d responses where some candidates failed to produce a developed answer. In addition, many responses to this part lacked focus and development. However, there were a number of candidates who demonstrated an excellent conceptual understanding and were able to support their answers with relevant data and contemporary examples.

A relatively small number of candidates continued to ignore the rubric and answer all the questions on the paper, but this number appears to be decreasing. As reiterated in previous reports, candidates are far more likely to succeed by answering the specified number of questions thoroughly.

Finally, candidates need to try to support their answers in part c questions and attempt to answer the specific question set in part d questions. Candidates would benefit greatly from regular practice at these longer responses.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a) Most candidates were able to gain marks on this question, though there were relatively few who were able to explain *interpretive sociology*.
- (b) Most candidates were able to identify at least one reason and were able to provide adequate supporting examples.
- (c) This was generally well answered with clear points with supporting examples being provided. A considerable number of candidates failed to understand the purpose of historical documents and focused on their lack of importance in sociological research.
- (d) This was well done with the majority of candidates showing a clear understanding of the advantages of using secondary data.
- (e) This was poorly answered with relatively few candidates understanding the nature of content analysis.
- (f) This question proved to be a good discriminator. There were many responses that made relevant points and provided good supporting examples. A number of candidates showed a clear understanding of the question, but lost marks because they failed to develop the point they were making.

It seems that some candidates need to be adequately prepared on all of the research methods in the specification.

Section B

Question 2

- (a) The majority of candidates scored 2 marks.
- (b) This was well answered with many candidates gaining maximum marks.
- (c) This question produced a range of responses with many answers outlining detailed account of socialisation, gaining high marks.
- (d) There was a range of responses with more able responses looking at the processes of socialisation and addressing the nature-nurture debate.

Question 3

- (a) Most candidates were able to provide a clear definition.
- (b) Most candidates were able to provide examples of informal social control, gaining 4 marks.
- (c) Most candidates were able to answer the question effectively referring to a range of agencies of formal social control.
- (d) Some candidates were able to discuss the issues raised in the question by making reference to Marxist and functionalist perspectives referring to specific examples to support their points. However, many candidates tend to produce a one-sided account making limited references to the benefits the wealthy gain from social control.

Question 4

- (a) The ability to define *Relative poverty* clearly was limited to a relatively few number of candidates. Many candidates tended to confuse the term with *absolute poverty*.
- (b) This was generally answered well with a range of explanations presented.
- (c) This was also effectively answered with most candidates identifying a range of social groups vulnerable to poverty. Better responses provided detailed explanations for the reasons for their poverty.
- (d) This question produced a range of responses with a minority of candidates discussing both cultural and structural explanations of the existence of poverty. Weaker candidates tended to focus on a narrower range of issues and neglected to provide supporting examples.

Question 5

- (a) Most candidates were able to provide an adequate definition to gain two marks.
- (b) This was generally well answered with most candidates identifying marriage, work promotion and some form of financial windfall as means of upward mobility
- (c) This was poorly answered with many candidates tending to describe the reasons for mobility. Relatively few focused their answers on relevant factors.
- (d) This was generally well answered with candidates scoring highly if they provided a theoretical framework. Many good responses discussed Marxist and functionalist account of social class, making references to educational, work opportunities and counterbalancing these arguments by looking at Marxist accounts of continuing inequality. A number of candidates tended to drift away from the main issues raised by the question, discussing ethnicity, and gender issues without a specific link to class. Weaker candidates provided anecdotal evidence of class inequalities.

Question 6

- (a) Candidates who attempted the question were able to provide an adequate definition.
- (b) Generally this was well done with a number of elites identified.
- (c) This was generally well done with many candidates showing a clear understanding of the means by which elite groups have a major influence on political decision-making.
- (d) Many candidates had difficulty with this question with relatively few candidates outlining elite theory or pluralist theories of power. Many answers focused on commonsense accounts of the power of various elite groups. Few candidates focused on the issues raised in the question.

Question 7

- (a) Most candidates were able to explain the term successfully, but a significant number tended to provide a definition of political indoctrination.
- (b) This was well answered and most candidates scored maximum marks.
- (c) This was generally well answered with candidates referring to a range of factors such as: age, gender, image of parties etc.
- (d) There were few good answers to this question. Many responses focused on the reasons for voting rather than discussing the decline in class voting. A number of candidates made reference to relevant issues such as the changing class structure and the growing trends towards instrumental voting, but they failed to relate their ideas effectively to the question.

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Paper 2251/02

Paper 2

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General Comments

The overall level of performance was of a similar standard to that achieved for this paper in other recent exam sessions. A pleasingly high number of candidates demonstrated considerable in-depth knowledge and understanding of the relevant topic areas and were able to offer analysis and evaluation of appropriate sociological explanations and theory. At the other extreme, however, there continue to be many candidates who appear to enter the exam with little or no knowledge of the relevant subject content. It should be stressed that success in the examination depends highly on the ability of the candidate to demonstrate a sound understanding of appropriate sociological concepts, explanations and theories. Study of the recommended textbooks is a key part of the process through which candidates prepare adequately for meeting the demands of the question paper.

There were few rubric errors. The questions on the family and education proved marginally to be the more popular. The questions on the mass media generally were answered less well than the other questions on the paper.

Question 1

- (a) Candidates sometimes appeared confused by the term 'unequal partners' and focused their responses inappropriately on the basic roles undertaken by a man and a woman living together. Better answers identified differences in power and status between men and women within the family.
- (b) Good answers referred to factors such as changing occupational structure, increase in male unemployment, and changing expectations of women. There were quite a few weak answers that struggled to identify even one relevant factor.
- (c) Some candidates limited their answer by including only references to their own personal and/or cultural experience. Better answers drew on a wider range of sociological evidence about power and conjugal roles within the family today.
- (d) Weaker answers were confined to one or two simple points of limited sociological insight. Good answers discussed problems that women may face in terms of their relative lack of economic power, difficulty in overcoming the influences of gender socialisation, and negative attitudes towards sexual equality in their society.

Question 2

- (a) This question was answered correctly by almost all of the candidates.
- (b) The candidates generally identified two different family types with little difficulty. A few referred incorrectly to the symmetrical family as a family type.
- (c) Basic answers covered only one or two factors in a limited way. Good answers explained fully a range of relevant factors.
- (d) Good answers addressed the issues raised by the question directly and utilised a range of well chosen evidence and argument to formulate a strong analytical response.

Question 3

- (a) Some candidates confused the term 'gender' with biological sexual differences. Good candidates recognised that the term refers to the socially expected roles that males and females perform.
- (b) Some candidates appeared to lack the appropriate textbook knowledge to answer this question effectively.
- (c) Some candidates limited their responses by discussing only their personal experiences of school. Better answers drew on appropriate sociological concepts and studies to construct a full response to the question.
- (d) Good answers discussed a range of reasons why girls are now achieving better examination results than boys in many subjects. Weaker responses were confined to just one or two relevant factors, with little supporting detail and analysis.

Question 4

- (a) Some candidates confused the term 'informal education' with the hidden curriculum. Most responses correctly noted that the term refers to the learning of skills and practical knowledge through interaction with other people in everyday life.
- (b) Most candidates were able to identify and describe two ways in which formal education helps to prepare young people for earning a living.
- (c) Good answers discussed functions such as the transmission of core values and the maintenance of social order. Weaker candidates offered just one or two commonsense observations with limited sociological bearing.
- (d) Some candidates wrongly focused on discussing the benefits of education for society in general. Better answers referred to specific social groups and made effective use of the concepts of social class, gender and ethnicity.

Question 5

- (a) This question was answered well by most of the candidates.
- (b) This was well answered. The main influences identified were the mass media, peer group and the family.
- (c) Many candidates found this part of the question difficult. Good answers referred to the growth of teenager consumer markets, the influence of pop culture and the extension of further and higher education.
- (d) Very few candidates offered a balanced response. Most argued from limited understanding and sociological insight.

Question 6

- (a) Generally well answered.
- (b) Most candidates were able to identify and describe two relevant examples of how definitions of deviance may differ between cultures.
- (c) Good answers often focused on the way that definitions of deviance, to some extent, reflect the power structures of society. Weaker answers described rather than explained examples of different reactions to deviancy.
- (d) There were some excellent responses from candidates who demonstrated a good understanding of labelling theory and its uses with particular reference to deviancy. Weak responses showed little understanding of the concept of labelling.

Question 7

- (a) Most candidates defined the term correctly.
- (b) There were few good answers to this question. The concept of 'trends' was widely misunderstood. The question required candidates to identify factors such as the globalisation of the media, increasing cross media ownership, and greater concentration of ownership in the hands of media moguls and multi-national corporations.
- (c) Responses varied and weaker candidates often failed to offer relevant examples or explanations.
- (d) Good answers offered a balanced assessment of the powers of those who own and control the mass media. Weaker answers were often based on unconvincing and one-sided arguments, with little use of supporting evidence or examples.

Question 8

- (a) Many candidates clearly had heard of 'agenda setting', but some struggled to offer a sufficiently clear definition to merit full marks.
- (b) Most candidates gained full marks by describing two examples of how the mass media may influence political attitudes.
- (c) Weaker answers merely listed a few points of relevance. Better responses offered well composed explanations for the influences on the selection and presentation of news reports.
- (d) Good answers demonstrated a good understanding of relevant explanations, such as the cultural effects approach and the hypodermic syringe model. Weaker answers lacked a grounding in appropriate sociological theory.