AS

SOCIOLOGY

7191/1 Education with Methods in Context
Report on the Examination

General

In general, students found the paper accessible and the vast majority of students attempted all questions and coped with the demands of writing under timed conditions. A small number of students left questions unanswered (particularly question 1), but more positively, there was evidence that students had been prepared well as they demonstrated good knowledge and understanding and were able to apply this appropriately.

Most students wrote within the allotted space and there was an increasing number of students taking advantage of the additional space provided in their answer booklets in producing plans for the extended writing questions. A few students asked for additional pages (particularly for question 5) but did not consistently number or make clear which question the additional content referred to.

Question 1

While many students were able to convey some understanding of the term 'social solidarity', a large number failed to gain both marks. There was recognition that the term is associated with Functionalism but many were only able to offer a partial response. The most common partial response was 'shared norms and values' - mentioning of value consensus without reference to people being bound together in some way or failing to refer to the group aspect of social solidarity. Many also referred to examples of how schools helped foster social solidarity e.g. via assemblies or school uniform.

Question 2

This question produced a wide range of answers. Successful responses clearly identified an aspect of boys' behaviour which could lead to educational underachievement. The most common behaviours identified included 'messing around/ being disruptive', 'truanting' and 'not bothering with work'. Many were then able to go on and explain, for example, that 'therefore boys miss out on their learning and underachieve'. Some students were able to offer an example of boys' behaviour but were less successful in explaining how this leads to them doing less well in education.

Unsuccessful answers were unable to explicitly identify an example of boys' behaviour, for example, mentioning 'laddish subcultures' or 'anti-school subcultures' more generally. Others referred to 'teacher labelling' but did not link this to how boys' behaviours change as a result and so did not gain credit.

Question 3

Students were able to offer a wide range of ways that the education system could be seen as fair to everyone. The most common responses referenced compensatory policies such as GIST/WISE, Sure Start and Free school meals. Other popular responses included 'free education for all', 'taking the same exams' and 'following the same (National) curriculum'. Successful answers were then able to develop and qualify how this could be seen as fair for everyone.

The most common error was to simply state that 'students are able to work hard and achieve' or to meritocracy more generally, without qualifying how this meant that the education system was fair to everyone.

Question 4

This question required students to apply their knowledge of one area of the specification (external factors and processes within schools that influence class achievement) to another area (subject choice). Many students had been well prepared for this question and structured their answer with two distinct paragraphs (without the need to include an introduction and conclusion) and demonstrated skills of application and analysis by connecting different aspects of the question. However, weaker answers often focused solely on outlining some of the factors affecting social class and achievement without attempting to link these to subject choice. Additionally, a significant number of responses focused solely on gender and subject choice and therefore did not score as highly.

Better answers unpacked knowledge on factors such as parental aspirations, cultural capital, language codes and teacher labelling and applied this in explaining how they affect the subject choices of working and middle class pupils. The most successful responses referred to specific subject choices such as the working class being more likely to opt for vocational courses such as engineering or health and beauty due to their working class habitus.

Question 5

Students were able to offer a wide range of factors from both outside the school and inside the school in explaining the difference in achievement of different ethnic groups. Weaker answers reflected a limited knowledge and understanding of external factors and only offered a thin, undeveloped account of one or two of these with few, if any, sociological concepts. Furthermore, some failed to differentiate between different ethnic groups and made sweeping generalisations to all groups, incorrectly asserting that all ethnic minority groups are underachieving. Furthermore, a significant number of responses failed to achieve higher than the 8-12 band due to listing external factors without referencing how these have impacted on specific ethnic groups or drifting into explanations of social class more generally. This was particularly the case when material deprivation as a factor effecting achievement was discussed.

More sophisticated responses were able to differentiate between how external factors, such as family structure, impacted on different ethnic groups. Other concepts that were commonly discussed included speech codes, parental aspirations and cultural/economic capital. Many went on to consider factors within school such as teachers labelling, streaming and pupil subcultures. However, some were content to describe these internal processes without linking them explicitly to external factors or to achievement and therefore were juxtaposed. By contrast, in better responses students were able to apply their knowledge explicitly to ethnic differences in achievement and were able to suggest that internal and external factors might be interlinked.

Overall, there was a lack of specific evaluation of external factors. Some students offered stand-alone evaluation points of internal factors, e.g. using Fullers study to reject the impact of teacher labels, which therefore were not directly relevant to the question.

Question 6

The most important factor in answering this question successfully was the extent to which students applied their understanding of official statistics to the specific issue of investigating how successful a school is. However, some students were content on simply presenting strengths and limitations of the method without applying them to the issue in the question. Students generally found this method problematic and had a limited range of points. There was a high incidence of students recycling the item, particularly on official statistics allowing the researcher to see 'patterns and trends' and enabling 'comparisons between schools'. Very few students were able to develop these 'hooks' both in terms of the methods and applying them to the issue in the question. This was also the case for the weakness stated in the item 'which may not capture fully the experiences of the life of the school'. However, many students were able to relate this to official statistics lacking validity.

Other responses presented some generic research characteristics of investigating education, such as that head teachers may wish to protect the reputation of the school. However, a large number of students discussed this in terms of official statistics being a primary method (e.g. references to pupils and teachers not wanting to fill out questionnaires). Better responses were able to apply this as a strength of official statistics in that the researcher does not have to face the problems of access or ethical issues that can apply to primary methods.

The most successful answers were able to apply a characteristic of successful schools to the method of official statistics to reach the requirements of the top band. For example, some explained the problem of definitions used in official statistics to measure 'successful schools' has changed (such as the move from A*-C to Progress 8) meaning that comparisons over time cannot be easily made. Others explored ways that schools might manipulate the statistics by not entering students for the exams or the way that schools can hide attendance issues to make the school appear more successful and therefore not valid.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.