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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

SOCIOLOGY

GCE Advanced Level and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Paper 9699/01

Essay

General comments

The standard of performance was very good overall. The questions from **Sections A** and **B** were answered particularly well by the majority of candidates who chose these options. The questions from **Section C** on social stratification were less popular and were answered less well.

While some candidates demonstrated the full range of skills required to achieve high marks at AS Level, others were less successful. In particular, there was scope with many of the candidates to demonstrate more fully the ability to assess and evaluate arguments. The skill of using examples from studies to illustrate key points was also poorly applied in many of the answers.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This was a popular question, which candidates answered very well overall. Answers that focused on the positivist versus interpretivist debates in sociology, generally achieved quite high marks. This was particularly the case where the analysis was complemented by a critical assessment of the extent to which the methods used in the natural sciences are a model of objectivity and scientific rigour. The best answers also addressed the *can* and *should* issue alluded to in the wording of the question.

Question 2

Candidates who answered this question generally demonstrated a sound understanding of the functionalist view of how social order is constructed and maintained. However, the assessment of this view that the question required was poorly developed in many of the answers. The few responses that gained high marks all included a well-informed assessment of the functionalist theory. This was often achieved by contrasting the functionalist view with other perspectives, such as the Marxist, feminist and post-modernist.

Question 3

There were a few misconceived answers to this question that simply provided an account of the strengths and weaknesses of different research methods. This type of tangential response to the question gained only low marks. Better answers demonstrated how the sociologist's theoretical perspective might influence his or her choice of research method. The best responses also included some discussion of other possible influences on choice of research method.

Question 4

This was a popular question, which candidates answered quite well overall. Virtually all of the answers rightly made use of the distinction between structured and unstructured interviews. Some also impressed by, in addition, discussing other types of interviews, such as group and semi-structured interviews. The best answers considered a range of advantages of each type of interview, covering both practical and theoretical issues. Weaker answers tended to be more restricted in their coverage of the theoretical issues, with few references to key concepts such as reliability and validity.

Question 5

Many of the answers to this question lacked sociological insight and knowledge. Such answers were based on assertion and general knowledge, and so gained only low marks. Better answers used appropriate sociological sources to identify some of the links that may be drawn between income and/or wealth and social class. Further marks were awarded to those candidates who demonstrated an understanding of the implications for class analysis of differences in lifestyle and the growth of consumerism in modern industrial societies. Candidates who used post-modernist ideas to illustrate the importance of lifestyle in class analysis today particularly impressed the Examiners.

Question 6

Although this was not a popular question, there were some very good descriptive accounts of the nature of ethnic inequality in particular societies. To achieve high marks, however, this descriptive approach needed to be complemented by an attempt to explain why such inequality exists. Unfortunately, answers often lacked that analytical dimension and so failed to gain high marks.

Paper 9699/02
Data Response

General comments

It was pleasing to note that there was an improvement this session in the skill candidates demonstrated in answering structured data response questions. There were fewer cases, for example, of candidates inappropriately spending a disproportionate amount of time answering the **(a)** and **(b)** questions that carry the least marks. Most of the candidates appeared well prepared for the examination in terms of relevant knowledge and understanding, but many lacked the analytical and evaluation skills required to achieve high marks. Candidates would also be well advised to make more references to relevant sociological studies in illustrating their answers.

There were some muddled answers that wrongly viewed sex and gender as referring to different biological functions. Most candidates, however, recognised that while sex refers to the biological differences between males and females, gender describes the socially assigned roles and expectations associated with males and females.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**

- (a)** There were some muddled answers that wrongly viewed sex and gender as referring to different biological functions. Most candidates recognised that while sex refers to the biological differences between males and females, gender describes the socially assigned roles and expectations associated with males and females.
- (b)** Some candidates simply described examples of gender socialisation and were awarded no more than half of the marks for a tangential response. Better answers identified particular sources of evidence, such as cross-cultural contrasts in the respective roles performed by the sexes.
- (c)** This was well answered overall, with a range of examples offered to illustrate the role of the family in gender socialisation. The best answers included references to relevant sociological studies and perspectives.
- (d)** Some weak answers merely described various aspects of gender inequality, with little or no direct reference to feminist theory. Good answers referred to actual studies by feminist writers and/or to different strands of feminist theory.

Question 2

- (a) Most of the candidates distinguished correctly between quantitative and qualitative data.
- (b) This too was well answered, though a few candidates failed to develop their points sufficiently to gain full marks.
- (c) The best answers demonstrated a good understanding of both the practical and theoretical considerations that should be taken into account when designing a questionnaire. Some weaker answers discussed methodological considerations generally, with little or no direct reference to questionnaires.
- (d) While some candidates demonstrated a sound understanding of objectivity, reliability and validity, in answering this question, others were less well-informed about these key sociological concepts. Some candidates wasted time by discussing the advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires in general, rather than concentrating on the concepts specified in the wording of the question.

Question 3

- (a) Most of the candidates demonstrated a sound understanding of the distinction between absolute and relative poverty.
- (b) Candidates who understood the differences between cultural and material or economic dimensions of poverty, generally answered this question quite well. There were also good references to differences between countries in terms of how poverty might be defined and what would constitute a minimum income and standard of living.
- (c) Some answers demonstrated little or no understanding of the concept of an underclass, and instead discussed issues relating to poverty in general. Better answers focused on the theoretical debates about the underclass, and discussed arguments both for and against the usefulness of the concept.
- (d) A sound understanding of the culture of poverty theory was demonstrated in many of the answers, but only a minority complemented this with an effective assessment of its strengths and limitations. The best answers often contrasted the culture of poverty theory with structural theories of inequality, particularly accounts within the Marxist tradition.

Paper 9699/03

Social Change and Differentiation
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General comments

All of the questions on the paper were attempted but very few candidates attempted **Section E**. The best answers were those that divided time up in line with the mark allocation and confined part (a) answers to knowledge and saved their evaluation to part (b). Most candidates adhered to the rubric but a few only answered one part of the question. A small number ran their answers together leaving the Examiner to work out where (a) ended and (b) began. However, it is pleasing to report that there were fewer such answers than in previous examination sessions.

In order to improve the achievements of some candidates, Centres need to be sure that the candidates are clear on the meaning of key concepts as they appear in the syllabus. The evidence of the candidates from a limited number of Centres demonstrated that this was not so. A few candidates confined their answers to non-sociological material or used sociological material that was dated. In order to improve grades there is a need for Centres to insure that candidates make use of more contemporary material as a part of their answers.

Good answers were characterised by the level of relevancy when they picked up on the issues in the question; they were well supported by research and theory as well as relevant examples from societies. They also showed a wide-ranging level of argument in their answers and were able to be evaluative in some of their answers.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This proved to be the most popular question on the paper and many answers were excellent. There was evidence of sound teaching with clear understanding of both the links between the family and industrialisation and the debate on the nature of the possible decline of the extended family. Some candidates had sound knowledge of family types and structures; however they described family roles and functions without reference to the economy and some referred to the continuation of extended families in pre-industrial societies, which did not help to answer this question.

Question 2

This was the less popular family question and candidates were both clear and well informed in their understanding, or produced muddled answers.

- (a) The key to answering this part of the question was to focus on the issue of power in families. Some candidates only talked about conjugal roles and the jobs that people did, with no comment made on decision making. It was also relevant to include the position of children and the elderly in the family, which the best answers did.
- (b) Many candidates repeated the answer that they had already given and wrote about how changes affected the family rather than society. Whilst there is a link between sections of a question, candidates should avoid repeating long tracts of description, as this is unlikely to be relevant in both sections.

Section B

Question 3

A well answered question that covered a range of factors that influence female education from both within the school as well as in the wider society. In part (b) there were a few answers that displayed a high level of confusion as it was clear that the candidates did not understand the meaning of socialisation and there were also some who repeated information from part (a). The better answers made reference to the changes in achievement that has occurred in female education.

Question 4

For this question education systems were interpreted in the widest sense, but Centres must instruct candidates to read questions carefully as some described educational theories or processes such as streaming. The best answers focused on two distinctive systems, such as the tripartite system. A high level of competency was displayed in understanding part (b) and the way in which the powerful in society may or may not benefit from education systems. Some of the best answers to the paper were offered to this section.

Section C

Question 5

Centres have obviously prepared candidates well for questions on religion. However some candidates took the opportunity to advocate the positive gains to be had from religion and in doing so failed to answer the question that has been set. In terms of understanding religion in maintaining social order, most candidates had a sound understanding although some broadened the question to look at other aspects of the role of religion which did not gain them credit. There was some confusion among a few candidates between social order and social cohesion. However, there were some excellent summaries of opposing theories.

Question 6

Candidates were able to identify clearly two different religious movements, but a few candidates gain the maximum marks as they did not go on to make any reference to the membership of the movements. In the second part of the question there were a few candidates who argued that the problems of society are caused by religion losing its power, but the majority looked at a range of ways of measuring power in the past and compared that to contemporary societies. A large number of answers limited themselves to discussions about secularisation and although this was creditable there were other aspects of power that could have been used to broaden the debate.

Section D**Question 7**

Many candidates used evidence from education in answering this question and this was valid, but it was necessary to relate this to levels of crime to enter the top band of marks. There were a few worrying answers that referred to the concept as one of gaining self-fulfilment in life. Some very able candidates evaluated the concept and this was not necessary in order to gain full marks for this question. The second part of the question was answered well with clear sociological references both to the powerless and the powerful that commit crime.

Question 8

Generally the first part of the question was answered very well, with the limitations of crime statistics explained clearly. Once again, there was a small group of candidates who displayed some confusion by arguing that the official crime statistics are crimes committed by officials. Answers to the second part were both clear and sociological, appropriately describing both methods and, at the top end of the mark range, also the weaknesses. At the other extreme, some candidates clearly did not know the relevant methods.

Section E**Question 9**

This question was answered by a small number of candidates. Those that did were able to describe the changes that have occurred in female employment, but tended to limit their answers to the consequences of changes to the family and did not extend their answer to the wider society. Some answers were non-sociological. Few candidates did well.

Question 10

Virtually no candidates answered this question and those that did were able to offer some consequences of unemployment but had little or no sociological understanding of the link between work and non-work.

Section F**Question 11**

Clear understanding of the Pluralist and Marxist theories of the role of the mass media was displayed by the small number of candidates who attempted this question. However there was little specific reference to the sociological studies of the media in the political process, although there were some creditable generalised answers.

Question 12

This question was answered by only a small number of candidates and the best of these used specific studies like those of Young to show how the media can create deviancy amplification. In the second part of the question those candidates that understood the meaning of the Hypodermic Syringe Model were able to answer with sociological understanding. However, some candidates who opted to answer this question had clearly not been prepared for it and offered common sense based answers.