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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 candidates produced a pleasing standard of work overall. At the top of the mark range there were some excellent answers that combined detailed knowledge of the relevant sociological material with well-honed assessment and analytical skills. Answers in the middle of the mark range often displayed evidence of sound sociological knowledge and understanding, but were rather limited in terms of evaluation and summation. Scripts that merited only low marks were frequently characterised by reliance on assertion and commonsense understanding, as opposed to sociological evidence and academic reasoning.

There were no rubric errors and the candidates appeared to have no difficulty in completing the required number of answers in the specified time.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

The Sociological Perspective

Question 1

Some weaker answers were limited to a general description of the process of socialisation. Better answers focused specifically on the evidence that socialisation plays a major part in shaping human behaviour. The evidence cited included, for example, the cases of so-called feral children, Durkheim's study of suicide, cross-cultural differences in human behaviour, and studies of gender divisions.

Question 2

This was essentially a question about structure versus action, determinism versus voluntarism. It also provided an opportunity for candidates to discuss modernist versus post-modernist perspectives on social identity. Weaker answers were restricted to a few general points about the nature of socialisation in general. Better answers were analytical and directly focused on the question as set. Most of the good answers covered the broadly philosophical theme of the extent to which human action is directed by free will. However, a few answers examined creditably the influences on particular social identities, such as those based on class, gender, and ethnicity.

Section B

Sociological Methods

Question 3

Most of the candidates identified the question correctly as an opportunity to discuss the issue of value-freedom in sociology. With better answers the proposition in the question was explained fully and there was a credible account of why sociologists may find it difficult to achieve objectivity in their research. The best answers also contained a well-developed assessment of the part that values may play in sociological research.

Question 4

This was a popular question. Most of the candidates understood that the different types of interview used in sociological research include structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. Some answers contained useful references to group interviews. However, a few candidates wrongly identified particip observation as a variant of the interview method. Postal questionnaires were also incorrectly cited in some answers as an example of interviewing. Good answers provided an accurate, detailed and balanced account of the theoretical and practical strengths and limitations of the different types of interview.

Section C

Social Differentiation and Stratification

Question 5

Relatively few candidates attempted this question. Weak answers were confined to a few poorly developed points about poverty. Better answers offered an account of two or more sociological explanations of poverty. At the top of the mark range, answers also unpacked the idea expressed in the question that poverty is a stigma that prevents poor people from achieving social advancement.

Question 6

This was the more popular of the *Section C* questions. Lower in the mark range answers were restricted to a few assertions about the reasons for sexual inequality. Better answers described two or more sociological explanations of why women continue to experience inequality in employment. At the top of the mark range, each explanation offered was assessed in a developed and well-informed way.

Paper 9699/02

Data Response

General comments

It is pleasing to report clear evidence of progress in the skill and technique with which candidates are answering these structured-data response questions. A particular improvement is that most candidates are now avoiding the mistake of writing unnecessarily long answers to the part **(a)** and **(b)** questions that carry the fewest marks. The main focus of their time should be on answering the longer part **(c)** and **(d)** questions.

There were no common misinterpretations of the questions and no rubric errors. There were slightly fewer answers to question two than to questions one and three.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a)   Most of the candidates were able to offer clear and accurate definitions of the term 'bias'.

(b)   While most candidates were able to identify two sources of bias in a piece of sociological research, many failed to describe each example and so they achieved only half of the marks available.

(c)   Lower in the mark range answers were limited to one or two vague points about the importance of rigour and method in sociological research. Better answers offered a sound account of the hypothetico-deductive method and attempted to show how it makes sociology superior to common sense understanding.

(d)   This was well answered in most cases, with the focus usually on the positivist versus interpretivist positions on the issues of objectivity and scientific rigour in sociology. Candidates who questioned the degree of rigour and objectivity in the natural sciences, and linked this to appropriate debates about the scientific status of sociology, particularly impressed the Examiners.

Question 2

(a) Most of the candidates were able to offer clear and accurate definitions of the term 'interpre...

(b) Weaker answers discussed the difficulties of carrying out participant observation studies in gene... Better answers focused appropriately on the issue of gaining access to the study group.

(c) Candidates achieved some credit for noting some of the strengths and/or limitations of participant observation. However, better answers addressed directly the issues of why it might be considered important to study people in their natural surroundings.

(d) A basic account of the positivist critique of research based on participant observation merited a mark in the middle of the range. Better answers included an attempt to assess the coherence and persuasiveness of the arguments against participant observation.

Question 3

(a) Most of the candidates were able to offer clear and accurate definitions of the term 'inequality'.

(b) This was well answered, with examples of inequality including that based on class, gender, age, ethnicity, and disability.

(c) At the bottom of the mark range answers were confined to a few general points about the supposed social benefits of inequality. Better answers demonstrated a sound understanding of the functionalist theory of stratification, usually through appropriate references to the ideas of Parsons, Durkheim, and Davis and Moore.

(d) Weaker answers usually lacked a theoretical framework for discussing the issues raised by the question. Better answers were often couched in terms of the Marxist theory of stratification. At the top of the mark range the answers also included an attempt to assess how far it is the rich and powerful groups who benefit most from inequality in society. This was best achieved through juxtaposition of the Marxist, functionalist, New Right and post-modernist theories of stratification.

Paper 9699/03

Social Change and Differentiation

General comments

Candidates on this paper displayed a very wide range of attainment: some answers were superb with essays showing a sophisticated grasp of issues. Others were less so, frequently anecdotal and judgemental with little or no reference to sociological research and theory.

Some candidates were unable to answer well as they did not understand the meaning of the concepts that they were asked to answer on. Centres need to ensure that candidates have a clear understanding of all the concepts that are included in the syllabus as well as mainstream sociological concepts.

Few rubric errors were made this year but candidates are still inclined to spend too long on part **(a)** and not enough on part **(b)**. Generally time throughout the exam was divided well with few answers showing the evidence of an incomplete final answer.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This was a very popular question that was generally well done.

(a)   This part of the question was well answered and there were some excellent descriptions of diversity. There were also some errors such as confusing conjugal roles with the family. Candidates need to be sure to follow the instructions in the question and this one stated 'to-day' so that over reliance on key thinkers such as Anderson and descriptions of the Nayer were not appropriate.

(b)   Candidates displayed a good knowledge of functionalism but there was a tendency to go too far back and go into unnecessary detail much about industrialisation. Again some candidates described the functions of the family without consideration of whether these functions are declining or not.

Question 2

Very few candidates answered this question.

(a)   Candidates needed to know what fertility is to be able to answer this question and although some did, others did not, in some cases describing fertiliser instead.

(b)   As with **(a)** this was a question that some candidates clearly did not have enough knowledge to answer well. It was necessary to know the meaning of status to be able to demonstrate good understanding of the question.

Section B

Question 3

This was a popular question that resulted in a full range of answers.

(a)   There were some excellent descriptions of social mobility and the way in which education can help the process both up and down the social scale. However, there was some confusion with some candidates describing geographic mobility or socialisation rather than mobility.

(b)   Some of the best answers to the paper were from this part of **Question 3**. Marxism was dealt with well and good use was made of such key thinkers as Althusser, Bowles & Gintis, Bourdieu as well as many others.

Question 4

This question was also answered by a range of candidates and was popular.

(a)   Generally this question was well done although some of the material has now become somewhat dated, such as Jackson and Marsdon, Bernstein and Douglas. These studies still have validity but an excellent candidate should be more contemporary. Most answers focused on issues of class at the expense of ethnicity and gender.

(b)   This was a well-answered question. Most candidates used interactionism as the main drive of their answer and they would have benefited from the inclusion of Marxism and the hidden curriculum. Evaluation was good but much of it was implicit in its nature.

Section C

Question 5

Many candidates who opted to answer this question struggled with it.

(a)   The best answers to this question illustrated their work with specific examples. It was clear that many candidates were unsure of what was meant by patterns of worship.

(b)   This question was well answered mostly using Marxism, functionalism and Weber. Some candidates used some interesting examples such as Latin America and Liberation theology.

Question 6

In this question it was clear that some candidates were struggling with the concepts it was necessary to understand in order to perform well.

(a)   Very few candidates understood the nature of fundamentalism frequently confusing it with the fundamentals of religions. Those that did were able to describe how it develops and there were some very good examples, such as that of the U.S.A.

(b)   Better candidates analysed the conceptual and methodological issues involved and produced relevant references to actual societies from around the world. Weaker candidates limited their answers to the West and in some cases argued that secularisation is a 'bad' thing and should be stopped.

Section D

Question 7

Many candidates answered this question and some were excellent, but others lacked a clear understanding of the meaning of the question.

(a)   An alarming number of candidates did not grasp the meaning of the term 'master status' and wrote about the process of labelling in general. There needed to be a clear understanding of the overriding nature of the master status. Some confused it with being a master.

(b)   There were many common sense answers to this question that lacked sociological understanding. The higher scoring candidates showed a clear link between deviance and the mass media by the discussion of such issues as deviancy amplification and moral panics as well studies by key thinkers such as Stuart Hall.

Question 8

This question was only answered by a few candidates who generally struggled with it.

(a)   There were many poor answers to this question with most candidates interpreting 'the old' as extremely old. Few were able to apply sociology to this question.

(b)   This part was answered more sociologically with some very good accounts of Marxism but to do very well it was necessary to tackle the concept of 'usefulness'.

Section E

Question 9

Very few candidates tackled this question and those that did used very little sociology in their answers.

Question 10

Again this question was answered by very few candidates.

(a)   There was a lack of understanding shown in this question with candidates neither tackling the issue of the definition of unemployment nor that of the methodological problems involved.

(b)   A few understood this question and debated who may benefit from unemployment but many described the problems that unemployment brings.

Section F

Question 11

This question was not popular and most of those who answered submitted weak answers, however there were a few whose answers were superb.

(a)   In order to answer this question well it was necessary to know what a state was, which some candidates clearly did not. Many described the ruling class instead and failed to draw the links between them.

(b)   Those candidates that recognised the pluralism implied in the question answered it well; many did not and therefore offered a weak reply.

Question 12

Unusually so few candidates answered this question that no useful comment can be made.