

Sociology

Advanced GCE **2537**

Applied Sociological Research Skills

Mark Scheme for June 2010

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- (a) Using only ITEM A, identify two strengths of operationalising the concept, 'social capital'. [6]

AO2

Interpretation and Analysis

[0-6 marks]

Reward answers which refer to any two of:

- the concept of social capital is unclear; operationalising the term, gives a clear measure of 'social capital';
- it could mean different things to different people, both individually and/or amongst different cultural groups; social class, ethnicity, geographical region; operationalising the term, gives a common understanding of 'social capital';
- operationalising such a concept allows precise measures to be made;
- and all respondents to gain a consistent understanding;
- use of five indicators should increase validity.

- 4-6** The candidate shows the ability to select and analyse two strengths of operationalising the concept of 'social capital'. At the top of this level both strengths will be clearly selected and explained. Reference is likely to be made to reliability.

At the bottom of this level two strengths will be accurately selected but not explained or one strength will be accurately selected and explained and the other will be less clear.

- 1-3** The candidate displays some ability to select and analyse two strengths of operationalising the concept of 'social capital'.

At the top of this level, the candidate will display some ability to select and analyse one/two strengths of operationalising the concept of 'social capital'. Responses will either offer one strength with an explanation or two strengths and one will be partial.

At the bottom of this band answers will be limited. Only one strength may be offered with a partial explanation, or two strengths identified in a partial way that is likely to be confused or expressed in an unclear manner.

- 0** No relevant sociological points (NRSP).

*NB: Candidates who introduce reasons from outside the item should **not** be rewarded for this material.*

- (b) Identify and explain one strength and one weakness of using self completion, structured questionnaires to research the views of local residents about the services provided by their local council. [8]

Strengths

- *Anonymity of the respondent*
- *Quantitative data*
- *Consistent, reliable and/or easily comparable data*
- *The ability to research large samples of respondents across a wide geographical area*
- *Any other reasonable response*
- *Lack of interviewer/researcher effect*

Weaknesses

- *Low/poor response rates*
- *Respondents being those with strong 'motives' to respond*
- *Socially desirable answers; low validity*
- *Limited qualitative data; lack of detail in responses; low validity*
- *Any other reasonable response*

AO1 Knowledge and Understanding [0-8 marks]

- 7-8** The candidate shows wide-ranging and detailed knowledge and understanding of one strength and one weakness of using self completion structured questionnaires. The candidate presents material so that it addresses the context of the views local residents have of the services provided by their local council. Responses will accurately address relevant key concepts. There will be few if any errors or grammar, punctuation or spelling.
- 5-6** The candidate displays knowledge and understanding of one strength and one weakness of using self completion structured questionnaires to investigate the views local residents have of the services provided by their local council; one may be explained more clearly than the other. The candidate presents material so that it addresses the context.
- There may be occasional errors of grammar, punctuation or spelling
- 3-4** The candidate displays basic knowledge and understanding of one strength and one weakness of using self completion structured questionnaires to investigate the views local residents have of the services provided by their local council.
- Candidates who present only one strength or one weakness should not be rewarded above this level.
- 1-2** The candidate will display limited knowledge and understanding of one strength and one weakness of using self completion structured questionnaires to investigate the views local residents have of the services provided by their local council. The response is likely to be of only marginal relevance to the perceptions local residents have of the services provided by their local council.

Errors of grammar, punctuation and spelling may be noticeable and distracting.

(c) Summarise the findings of the research in ITEM A.**[10]**

Candidates may include the following:

- more than half of people felt well informed about local affairs (59 per cent);
- communities could influence decisions (56 per cent);
- a minority felt that they personally could influence decisions in the area (26 per cent);
- 18 per cent 'felt civically engaged'.

From the table:

- *as many points with accurate statistical support as possible;*
- *feelings of civic engagement are lower than taking action for all age groups;*
- *felt civically engaged and taking action is lowest amongst the youngest group; 16-29;*
- *felt civically engaged is highest amongst the group; 40-49;*
- *took action is highest amongst the group; 50-59;*
- *similarity of all age groups 30-69; declines after.*

Expect to see terms such as high, low, greatest, smallest, least, in comparison, similarities, differences, patterns, trends and so on.

Comments relating to proportion should be credited; 'double', 'treble'; 'half of'; 'a third of' etc.

Points should be supported by accurate references to the textual material and the statistical data.

AO2 (a)**Interpretation and Analysis****[0-10 marks]**

- 8-10** The candidate clearly shows the ability to select from and analyse a wide range of data from the research findings in Item A. Candidates should support their answers with reference to accurate material from the text and statistics from the table.
- 6-7** The candidate will show the ability to select from and analyse a range of the findings identified in Item A. Responses will be partially supported by reference to accurate material and statistics.
- 4-5** The candidate shows basic ability to select and analyse a range of the findings identified in Item A. These answers are likely to be list-like. Answers may describe the data rather than analysing it. Some answers may focus on one type of data but in a detailed way. Candidates who consistently make assumptions about the data should be placed in this level.
- 1-3** The candidate displays limited ability to select and summarise some of the findings identified in Item A. Such candidates will probably only identify one/two pieces of data. Candidates who use most data inaccurately will be placed in this band.
- 0** No relevant sociological points (NRSP).

- (d) With reference to **ITEM B**, outline and explain the research process that you would adopt in collecting **qualitative** data from parents to discover parents' views on the effectiveness of the services the local council provides for children with behavioural and learning difficulties. [14]

Candidates are likely to focus on:

1 The research process

- *Background research*
- *Aims/research question*
- *Target population/sampling frame/sampling technique/sample size*
- *Theoretical considerations*
- *Pilot study*
- *Access*
- *Operationalisation of concepts (effectiveness of services; behavioural and learning difficulties)*
- *Method/s of collecting qualitative data (semi-structured/unstructured interviews, questionnaires using open ended questions/observations to collect qualitative data)*
- *Ethical concerns*
- *Relevant key research concept; validity, reliability, representativeness, generalisation.*

2 The research context

- *Parental views*
- *Effectiveness of services for children with behavioural and learning difficulties*
- *Services (as above) in school and outside school.*

AO1

Knowledge and Understanding

[0-6 marks]

- 4-6** The candidate will show a wide ranging and detailed knowledge and understanding of the research process.

Candidates at the top of this level will contextualise their response. At the bottom of this level the candidate will show some knowledge and understanding of the research process. This may be undeveloped.

The candidate will present material in a way that directly answers the question. There will be few if any errors of grammar, punctuation or spelling.

- 1-3** The candidate will display basic knowledge and understanding of selected elements of the research process.

Candidates may use inappropriate methods such as closed question questionnaires or postal questionnaires.

At the top of this level, the candidate will present material in a way that at least partly addresses the question.

At the bottom of this level the research responses will be limited. The research is likely to be ignored and the response is likely to focus on only one element of the process.

- 0** No relevant sociological points (NRSP).

AO2**[0-8 marks]**

- 7-8** The candidate will show the ability to explain and justify their choice of the research process. At the top of this level candidates will usually make clear links between theory/ies and the research design. Responses are likely to address issues of reliability, validity, representativeness and/or generalisability accurately.
- 5-6** The candidate will show some ability to explain their choice of research process and justify some elements of that process. Candidates are likely to focus on the strengths/advantages of the research method rather than on the wider research process. The key research concepts and/or theory may be addressed in an undeveloped way.
- 3-4** The candidate will show basic ability to explain some elements of the research process. Some candidates may focus only on the methods. Responses which address issues of reliability, validity, representativeness and/or generalisability in a partial and/or confused way are likely to be in this level.
- 1-2** The candidate will display limited ability to explain one or two aspects of the research process/method. There may be a weak description of one/two key research concepts. Candidates may use inappropriate methods such as closed question questionnaires or postal questionnaires.
- 0** No relevant sociological points (NRSP).

- (e) **Assess the potential weaknesses of your research proposal, briefly explaining how you intend to overcome them.** [22]

AO1 Knowledge and Understanding [0-14 marks]

- 11-14** The candidate will show a wide ranging and detailed knowledge and understanding of the potential weaknesses of the research process. Responses will use relevant key research concepts accurately.

The means of overcoming weaknesses will be clearly stated in a way that addresses the research context.

At the top of this level candidates will accurately address theoretical issues in relation to the context and the research process. There will be few if any errors of grammar, punctuation or spelling.

- 8-10** The candidate will display a wide range or detailed knowledge and understanding of the potential weaknesses of the research process. Some appropriate means of overcoming these weaknesses should be suggested though there may be a tendency to identify weaknesses rather than come up with solutions.

At the top of this level candidates will address the research context. There may be occasional errors of grammar, punctuation or spelling.

- 5-7** The candidate will demonstrate basic knowledge and understanding of the potential weaknesses of the research process. Responses may focus on the method/s rather than the whole research process. Some basic solutions may be offered. The response is likely to only partially address the research context.

- 1-4** The candidate will display limited knowledge and understanding of at least one potential weakness associated with the method or process. There is likely to be minimal reference to solutions. The response may not be related to the context of the research. Errors of grammar, punctuation or spelling may be noticeable and intrusive.

- 0** No relevant sociological points (NRSP).

AO2 (b) Evaluation [0-8 marks]

- 7-8** The candidate will show the ability to evaluate the research and offer a range of sociological solutions to the weaknesses identified. These will clearly address the research context. Relevant key research concepts such as reliability, validity, representations, generalisability and ethos will be explicitly and accurately addressed.

- 5-6** The candidate will show the ability to evaluate some aspects of the research process and suggest some sociological solutions to the weaknesses identified, though these may not be fully explored. Relevant key research concepts such as reliability, validity, representativeness, generalisability and ethics will be addressed though it may be implicit.

- 3-4** The candidate will show the ability to make a basic evaluation of their research process. Some responses may focus on the method/s. Relevant key research concepts such as reliability, validity, representativeness, generalisability and ethics may only be addressed implicitly. Solutions will be basic.
- 1-2** The candidate will show limited understanding of at least one issue with regard to the research process/method/s. If offered solutions are likely to be common sense.
- 0** No relevant sociological points (NRSP).

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