
A-LEVEL SOCIOLOGY

7192/1 Education with Theory and Methods
Report on the Examination

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General

This second paper of the new A Level specification appeared to be a good differentiator and gave clear opportunities for all students to access the higher mark bands for each of the extended writing questions. There was evidence of some very well taught and well prepared students. This was particularly the case for Question 03 where a far greater proportion of students were able to gain marks on this style of question than in the previous exam series. Many centres had clearly spent time with students focusing on application skills and how to use material from the item. For Question 05 however, there continues to be a pattern of very few students being able to apply their knowledge of the research method to the specific issue in the question. This was balanced with some very strong responses to the 30-mark social class and educational achievement question.

Most students managed their time appropriately however a small minority left some questions unanswered. This mainly occurred for Question 06, often resulting from students giving a very broad answer for Question 04. Whilst not as frequently as in the first sitting of the new specification, a significant number of students are writing too much for the 4 and 6 mark questions. Centres are reminded that these small-mark questions are best answered with a clear 'point' and 'development' structure, rather than lengthy continuous prose. There were some scripts that were very difficult to read, and centres must consider taking the necessary steps to ensure these students are able to word process as their normal way of working.

Education

Question 01

Most students could identify two ways in which marketisation may create inequality of educational achievement, usually via two specific policies. Common responses made reference to marketisation policies enabling middle class parents to choose a better school (due to cultural and/or economic, capital) and higher achieving schools being able to pick middle-class students to maintain their position on the league tables.

However, this question did create problems for many students. A significant number misunderstood the question by stating policies of marketisation such as league tables as the identification rather than the reason why marketisation produces inequality. Sometimes the connection to inequality of achievement was not made effectively enough to gain full marks. A few students selected policies that were not associated with marketisation, for example, the 1944 Act, or referred to private schools producing inequality of achievement between the classes.

Question 02

This question was, in the main, dealt with very effectively, with most students able to identify and explain at least two reasons. Common successful responses included laddish subcultures, the feminisation of education, coursework, changing employment opportunities for males and teacher labelling of males. Some students gave reasons that were too vague to be rewarded such as socialisation and peer group, while others focussed on gender differences in subject choice rather than achievement. Many students were not rewarded the second mark as they failed to apply their reason fully to gender or educational achievement.

Question 03

The majority of students were able to identify one or two 'hooks' from the Item and most were able to link at least one of these to the two ways of reproduction and legitimation of class inequality. More effective answers then developed the hook appropriately utilising relevant concepts. For example, taking 'not seeking to overthrow this unequal system' and developing it in terms of education as an ideological state apparatus which creates false class consciousness through developing the myth of meritocracy which makes working-class students believe the system is fair. Successful responses drew on the work of Althusser and Bowles and Gintis and evaluated these arguments with reference to a critique from a functionalist or less frequently, postmodern perspective.

However, many students struggled to get into the top band even though their knowledge of Marxist views on the roles of education in serving the needs of capitalism was sound. This was often due to students not being able to clearly link the hook from the Item with the appropriate 'way' in which education serves the needs of capitalism. For example they identified the 'reproduction of class inequality' hook but then proceeded to write about the legitimation function, and vice versa. Some students were able to develop one hook successfully, but not a second but very few did not understand that it was necessary to utilise elements from the Item.

Question 4

Most students were able to demonstrate a range of external and internal factors that have an impact on social class and achievement. The vast majority of students were at least able to get into the 13-18 mark band. Stronger responses showed both breadth and depth of knowledge with a good range of concepts. Material was presented analytically with explanations being unpacked. They also offered strong evaluation by comparing the experience of different social classes and how social policies had been introduced to support disadvantage. The very best answers contained specific evaluation and could identify and explain links between factors, for example, in the way language crosses over from the home background to the school.

Weaker responses had a narrower range of explanations and factors or could not present much in the way of studies to support their claims. Such answers tended to be descriptive, limited in terms of concepts and lacked analysis and evaluation. They were also not always applied to social class or achievement, often drifting into a discussion of ethnicity and gender.

Methods in Context

Question 05

Students appeared to be confident in their understanding of participant observation.

Less effective answers were often relatively strong on the method, but the strengths and limitations of participant observation were not applied effectively to either the issue or to the study of education in general. Another characteristic of weaker answers was that they were less explicit in distinguishing between overt and covert participant observation, for example, stating that a problem of participant observation was the Hawthorne effect.

Most students were able to make use of the Item, although some focused in on ‘small groups’ and ‘establishing a good relationship’ without relating these to the strengths and limitations of the method or to the issue. However, stronger responses did take advantage of the hooks from the Item, for example, applying ‘establishing a good relationship’ to issues of validity drawing on the researcher adopting an appropriate role such as a teaching assistant.

The most effective responses could offer one or more application of the method to the specific issue of pupil exclusions, for example, in the way excluded pupils are by definition unlikely to be in school and so cannot be observed in classrooms where the process of exclusion usually begins. Many also were able to advance characteristics of the method such as access and development of a gatekeeper issue, beyond education in general. However, the majority of students were unable to apply a characteristic of pupil exclusions to the method of participant observation to reach the requirements of the top band. For example that a head teacher may only give the researcher restricted access to observe to avoid being ‘uncovered’ as a school that excludes too many pupils, therefore damaging its reputation in the education market.

Theory and Methods

Question 06

There was a wide range of responses to this question, ranging from the non-response to a sustained examination of two problems of using the functionalist perspective to study today’s society. Many students performed less well on this question than on the rest of the paper. In addition to the issue of timing, this appeared to be due to some students lacking confidence in answering a theoretical question. Whilst the majority of students were able to offer two factors (common responses being ‘outdated’, ‘rose tinted’, deterministic or not explaining conflict) few were able to develop these ideas with depth of understanding and analysis. Often good examples of specific functionalist ideas were used and critiqued by Marxism, feminisms or post-modernist perspectives. The best answers showed a clear knowledge of functionalism and why their identified issue is problematic along with sophisticated analysis and application of examples such as fragmentation, diversity and inequalities in society and changing roles and family structures.

A small number of students understood the question to be more about the methods used by functionalists, equating functionalism with Positivism. Whereas this was an acceptable approach, it was then difficult for students to develop their response in any depth.

Centres are reminded that there are no marks for evaluation for this question. A small number of students had specific evaluative statements regarding the strengths of the functionalist perspective ‘tagged on’ to the end of responses that were not awardable.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.