
AS

SOCIOLOGY

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

Specification 7191
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General

This first paper of the new AS level specification elicited a range of responses from students. A small minority left some questions unanswered, but more positively, there was evidence of some very well taught and well prepared candidates with a good knowledge of relevant material and an ability to apply it appropriately. In general, however, the skill of evaluation was less in evidence than others. Pleasingly, there were signs that many students had been appropriately prepared for the requirements of the Methods in Context question, particularly in relation to the need to apply their knowledge of research methods to the specific issue in the question.

Many students wrote considerably more than the allotted space for answers in the combined question and answer booklet. Some of these wrote on the blank half pages at the end of Questions 05 and 06; centres should ensure that students are aware that they can ask for additional stationery and that this is available. It was also noted that in some instances students continued their answers on a variety of non-official stationery.

Education

Question 01

Most students answered this successfully by identifying extra support for disadvantaged groups. Many provided examples such as Sure Start to illustrate or clarify their answers. However, some had no clear idea of the meaning of the term, substituting instead definitions of comprehensive or compulsory education.

Question 02

The most popular response was to identify league tables or parental choice as a marketisation policy and then explain how this may advantage middle-class pupils because of their parents' greater cultural or economic capital. However, a significant minority failed to identify any specific marketisation policy, while a few misidentified the tripartite or comprehensive systems as examples of marketisation policies. Some scored one mark for identifying a relevant policy without explaining its effect on class differences in achievement.

Question 03

A wide range of policies from both within and outside the education system were identified, such as GIST or WISE, the Equal Pay Act, the Sex Discrimination Act, the Divorce Law Reform Act and the introduction of coursework. Most students who identified such policies were able to explain how these may have affected girls' achievement. However, others misunderstood the policy thrust of the question and offered examples of non-policy factors, such as the influence of feminist ideas on girls. These responses failed to score.

Question 04

This question required students to apply their knowledge of one area of the specification (the role of the education system) to another area (educational achievement). However, weaker answers often focused solely on outlining some of the factors affecting pupils' achievement without attempting to link these to the functions of education.

Better answers had knowledge of one or more functions of the education system, usually from a functionalist and/or Marxist perspective. These included role allocation, socialisation into shared values, transmission of specialist skills, or reproduction of class inequality. However, this knowledge was sometimes patchy, often accompanied by a tendency to present a loose amalgam of different functions rather than a clear and coherent account.

The best answers applied a good knowledge and understanding of the functions of the education system to the issue of achievement. For example, an account of the meritocratic nature of selection (from a functionalist perspective) led onto the idea that equal opportunities and being judged by universalistic standards would raise achievement levels by motivating all pupils to achieve to the maximum of their abilities.

Question 05

There were a range of different responses to this question and many made appropriate use of the Item. Weaker answers reflected a limited knowledge and understanding of home background

factors and only offered a thin, undeveloped account of one or two of these, with few if any sociological concepts.

Others showed more developed knowledge and understanding of relevant material. This often included the concepts of cultural and material deprivation, and featured home background factors such as speech codes; parental education, interest, attitudes or income; cultural and economic capital; housing; diet; the cost of 'free' schooling; and selection by mortgage. 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 social class or to achievement, while a few drifted into ethnic or gender differences instead. By contrast, in better answers students were able to apply their knowledge explicitly to class differences in achievement.

Most answers tended to lack explicit evaluation of the role or importance of the factors that they had discussed, but some good responses considered the suggestion in the Item that internal and external factors might be interlinked and used this to good effect in evaluation.

Methods in Context

Question 06

The most important factor in answering this question successfully was the extent to which students applied their understanding of group interviews to the specific issue of boys' underachievement. However, some students were content simply to present a range of strengths and limitations of the method without applying them to the issue in the question. Some of these answers picked up on the idea in the Item that group interviews tend to be largely unstructured and then focused on an account of unstructured interviews without further reference to the 'group' dimension.

Other responses presented some generic research characteristics of investigating education, such as that head teachers may wish to protect the reputation of their school and therefore be unwilling to allow research to take place. More developed versions of this approach pointed to the possible negative consequences for a school's reputation, in a marketised education system, of research into underachievement among its pupils.

Better responses identified specific characteristics of underachieving boys, for example that they may be members of anti-school subcultures, and may therefore treat the interviewer as an authority figure to be mocked, refuse to cooperate, or be truanting and thus be unavailable for interview. The best responses connected issues such as these to the strengths or limitations that result from the group nature of the method. For example, some argued that peer pressure arising from an anti-school subculture within the group, or embarrassment at having to talk about the reasons for their underachievement (such as their home and family life) in front of friends, may distort the outcome of the group interview.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)