A-LEVEL
SOCIOLOGY

7192/3 Crime and Deviance with Theory and Methods
Report on the Examination

7192
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General

This first examination of the new A-level specification elicited a range of responses from students. Many showed a reasonable or good knowledge of sociological material. However, in general students were less successful in applying material appropriately and in analysing and evaluating.

In relation to AO2 (application), teachers should note in particular the comments below on Question 03, where failure to apply material from Item A was a significant problem in many answers and meant that students often failed to gain marks for application.

Similarly, in relation to AO3 skills (analysis and evaluation), opportunities to gain marks on the longer questions (04 and 06) were often missed. In these two questions, many students focused on recounting knowledge at the expense of the discussions and debates that could yield marks for AO3 skills.

While almost all students performed better in relation to AO1 (knowledge and understanding), their knowledge of material was generally better than their understanding of its relevance to the set questions, and the knowledge itself was sometimes overly descriptive or lacking in sociological concepts.

Most students appear to have been able to complete the paper in the time available. Many students wrote at length on questions 04 and 06.

Handwriting in some cases was extremely difficult for examiners to decipher and in a few cases defeated their best efforts. Schools and colleges are advised to take the necessary steps in good time to ensure that students with illegible handwriting are not disadvantaged. In such cases, teachers should approach AQA as soon as possible for information about procedures.

Question 01

This was generally well answered. The most common responses identified racism (institutional or other), stereotyping or labelling by police or other actors in the criminal justice system, which then leads to the targeting of ethnic minorities. Other popular responses identified material deprivation, lack of parental role models, and the targeting of urban, working-class areas for policing as possible reasons.

Where students failed to score full marks, this was usually due to repetition of the same point or a failure to explain the consequence of the point identified, such as the impact of racist attitudes among the police upon their behaviour in terms of targeting particular ethnic groups for arrest. A number of answers gave accounts of ethnic differences in sentencing (that is, of those already convicted), rather than of differences in conviction rates, which was not creditworthy.

Question 02

This question was generally well answered. The functions most commonly outlined were crime and deviance as boundary maintenance, as a source of adaption and change, as a safety valve, as a warning sign and as a source of employment. Some were able to identify ways in which crime and deviance might perform functions for capitalism, although others drifted into a 'functions of law' response. A few legitimately identified a function of crime as that of providing an alternative route to material success.

Question 03

The most successful answers were able to apply material from Item A appropriately and to combine this with knowledge and understanding of relevant sociological material on deviant subcultures' responses to the difficulties of achieving mainstream goals. In these good answers, the elements selected from Item A were generally underachievement at school and living in a deprived neighbourhood or an unstable neighbourhood. The sociological material deployed usually came from Cohen (in relation underachievement) and/or Cloward and Ohlin (in relation to deprived neighbourhoods and/or unstable neighbourhoods). Knowledge was accurate and included relevant concepts such as cultural deprivation, status frustration, alternative status hierarchy, inversion of values, different types of subculture (eg criminal, conflict, retreatist, anti-school), utilitarian and non-utilitarian crime, legitimate and illegitimate opportunity structures, population turnover, 'turf wars', 'double failures' and criminal apprenticeships. Material from Item A was integrated successfully into these accounts of subcultural responses (eg underachievement at school was linked to knowledge about the cultural deprivation of the working-class boys in Cohen's study). Throughout, the focus was on analysing the ways in which subcultures respond.

Many less successful answers were able to present some knowledge of deviant subcultures but failed to make appropriate use (or in some cases, any use at all) of the material in Item A, and this was a major source of failure to score good marks. There was often a tendency to conflate different sociological sources and concepts or to render them inaccurately (eg accounts of Cohen in which status frustration was said to give rise to utilitarian rather than non-utilitarian crime). Some answers misapplied Merton, failing to recognise that his typology was of individual rather than subcultural responses. Others misinterpreted Willis or Miller as describing 'reactive' subcultures (those formed by reaction to failure to achieve mainstream goals) rather than as independent subcultures that had never subscribed to such goals. Many answers attempted some evaluation, though often this was inappropriate to the set question. These answers were typically along the lines of "*not all who fail to achieve mainstream goals join deviant subcultures*", rather than, for example, offering criticisms of how sociologists have explained the subcultural responses, which is what the question was focused on.

Question 04

Most students had some knowledge of sociological material on crime prevention and control. However, evaluation tended to be limited and, where present, mostly confined to brief one-sentence add-ons at the end of accounts of particular crime prevention strategies.

Among the weakest responses were some very basic, anecdotal or common sense accounts of a few crime reduction methods. Somewhat better answers were able to make a small number of undeveloped sociological points, though these often focused on the causes of crime, with a brief reference to crime prevention and control tacked on at the end of each cause as a corollary.

More successful students knew about a number of different relevant contributions, though their answers varied greatly in depth, breadth and accuracy. Typically they featured situational crime prevention, environmental crime prevention/'broken windows', zero tolerance policing, forms of punishment, addressing deprivation and policing issues, social and community crime prevention, surveillance and profiling.

The best answers gave conceptually detailed and accurate accounts of some of these contributions and embedded them within one or more debates (usually left versus right realism, or debates about surveillance). These answers had explicit, relevant and well developed evaluation of the presented material.

More often, however, sociological contributions were presented as a descriptive list, and sometimes with different contributions conflated. A minority of students attempted a 'perspectives' answer (usually Marxism and functionalism) but often struggled to apply these consistently to crime prevention.

A few students were unable to resist moralising, detailing exotic punishments, or recommending the death penalty or long, harsh sentences as solutions to control or prevent crime.

Question 05

Most students were able to identify two appropriate advantages of overt participant observation (OPO) and to offer at least some limited development of one or both of these. The advantages commonly identified included ethical ones (generally, informed consent or avoidance of deception) and ones such as the ability to make notes or to avoid being drawn into dangerous activities.

Although the question asked for advantages of OPO compared with covert participant observation (CPO), some students focused on one without reference to the other, leaving the examiner to deduce that, for example, the disadvantage of CPO outlined in the answer meant that there must be a corresponding advantage of OPO. This approach left the relevant point partly implicit and resulted in fewer marks being awarded.

By contrast, the best answers made explicit and detailed comparisons, and elaborated on the nature of the advantages (notably, by explaining why or how the advantages were advantages), but weaker answers did not go beyond a basic identification of the advantage(s) with little or no development. Some answers offered a string of advantages in this way, but only the best two of those presented could be credited. Schools and colleges should familiarise students with this rubric requirement and the wording of the question here.

Many students drew dubious and over-generalised inferences from some of the stated advantages. For example, some asserted that by researchers being open about their identity and purpose, this would facilitate access or even build rapport, when this is often not the case in such research.

Some very weak answers were unable to address any advantages specific to OPO and offered points about the advantages of participant observation in general, such as validity, that are arguably as true or even truer of CPO. A few students unfortunately mixed up OPO and CPO.

Although the question was about the advantages of OPO, some students presented extensive but irrelevant evaluative material on either the disadvantages of OPO (eg the Hawthorne effect) or the advantages of CPO (eg greater insight). Schools and colleges should make students aware that there are no marks for evaluation in question 05.

Question 06

Nearly all students had at least a basic understanding of the consensus-conflict dimension in sociological theory and were able to locate functionalism, Marxism and often feminism within this. However, very weak answers did not go far beyond this basic structure and showed limited and even merely fragmentary knowledge of specific theories. Such answers were often highly dependent on Item C and unable to add much knowledge of their own.

Answers that scored somewhat better were able to present an accurate if basic account of at least one main theory. However, the most effective responses showed depth of knowledge of the central

ideas and concepts of consensus and conflict approaches. These answers were explicit in debating the usefulness of the two approaches and often applied material from topic areas in an appropriate manner to illustrate their points.

On the other hand, some students took the question as an opportunity to write descriptively and at length about the functionalist, Marxist and/or feminist views of the family, education, crime and deviance or other substantive topics, but with little regard to the question and thus without reference to the usefulness of the approaches or even to their central concepts. A few students produced 'catch all' theory responses with seemingly obligatory and often lengthy accounts of postmodernism, structuration, etc. These were often presented as 'evaluation' but this tended to be of the structure-action debate and, as such, gained no credit.

One common weakness was that, where students discussed social action theory, the focus tended to shift from consensus-conflict to structure-action. Similarly, while accounts of labelling theory usually showed at least a basic knowledge of relevant concepts, they were more focused on describing the labelling process and its consequences than on showing how this illustrated ideas of conflict between powerful labellers and the powerless labelled. Thus, knowledge of labelling and social action theory was often tangential to the set question.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

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