

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS  
GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level and GCE Advanced Level

**MARK SCHEME for the May/June 2010 question paper  
for the guidance of teachers**

**9699 SOCIOLOGY**

**9699/23**

Paper 23 (Data Response), maximum raw mark 50

This mark scheme is published as an aid to teachers and candidates, to indicate the requirements of the examination. It shows the basis on which Examiners were instructed to award marks. It does not indicate the details of the discussions that took place at an Examiners' meeting before marking began, which would have considered the acceptability of alternative answers.

Mark schemes must be read in conjunction with the question papers and the report on the examination.

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- 1 There is a tradition in sociology of studying social problems. Some sociologists become involved in this area of research with the aim of understanding the problems, while others also put forward possible solutions in the form of social policies. This raises complicated issues about whether sociologists should be involved in seeking to change society for the better.

A social problem can be defined as any condition or form of behaviour that leads to concerns about the stability of society. Crime, unemployment, vandalism and divorce are some of the phenomena that may be considered social problems. The concept of a social problem is relative, as what is viewed as a social problem in one society may not be regarded as such in another. Poverty is an example of this. Even within a particular society, the way that social problems are viewed may differ between social groups. For example, some people may view immigration as a problem, while others think that the problem is the racism shown towards immigrant groups by the host population.

It is usually the most powerful groups who are able to define what is considered to be a social problem and what social policies are adopted for dealing with it. For this reason, it is important to discover where power lies in order to identify and understand social problems.

**(a) What is meant by the term social policy? [2]**

Social policy refers to the actions that are taken by the government to maintain and improve the welfare of its citizens. Two marks for an accurate definition along these lines; one mark for a partial definition, such as 'Schemes to help people' or 'Government planning about society'.

**(b) Describe two ways in which a high level of unemployment may threaten the stability of a society. [4]**

Ways in which a high level of unemployment might be a threat to the stability of society include, for example, family and community breakdown, political unrest, alienation, possible adverse impact on the population structure of mass migration, economic instability. One mark for each example and one mark for briefly describing the impact on social stability.

**(c) Explain why immigration may be seen as a social problem. [8]**

0–4 A few general points about immigration, with no direct links to the question, would fit the lower part of the band. Some observations about the processes through which events or behaviour come to be defined as social problems, with no reference to immigration, would merit 3 or 4 marks.

5–8 At this level, there will be a clear attempt to explain the processes through which immigration may come to be seen as a social problem. Lower in the band, the analysis may be less conceptual/theoretical and rely more on general observations about the way social tensions can arise around the issue of immigration. Better answers will identify sources of power that may play a role in defining immigration as a social problem, and these sources might include the media, politicians, pressure groups, trade unions, and community organisations. There may also be references to labelling, moral panics and scape-goating. Although this is not a question about racism as such, able candidates might identify appropriate links between sociological explanations of racial discrimination and the processes through which immigration is identified as a social problem.

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**(d) Assess the view that the purpose of sociological research should be to change society for the better. [11]**

- 0–4 This is a question about the purposes of sociological research and, more generally, the role of values in sociology. However, at this level answers are likely to show only the most modest understanding of the question. A few simple assertions about the supposed purposes of sociological research may be worth 3 or 4 marks.
- 5–8 A rather basic general discussion of different views about the role of values in sociology would deserve 5 or 6 marks. A more sustained discussion along these lines would trigger the top of the band. Answers at this level are likely to be descriptive primarily, and any assessment may well be through the juxtaposition of different perspectives.
- 9–11 Answers at this level will demonstrate a good understanding of the question and develop links with relevant sociological arguments and perspectives. The assessment will be explicit and, at the top of the band, it will be detailed and well informed. A good line of attack on this question would be to contrast those perspectives that favour a value committed approach to the study of society (i.e. feminists, Marxists, Becker, C Wright Mills) with the arguments of the positivists about the importance of a detached, objective approach to sociological research. Answers that question whose interests would be served by using sociological knowledge to find solutions to social problems, are likely to trigger the top of the band. Similarly, candidates might make good use of the post-modernist critique of traditional sociology to shed light on some of the issues raised by the question, and this too may be a way of demonstrating the depth of understanding required to gain full marks.

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- 2 Social surveys are research projects that involve collecting standardised data about a large number of people. This data is typically gathered from questionnaires, though other research methods may be used. In contrast to qualitative research, which provides an in-depth study of social life, surveys usually produce data that is less detailed but which can form the basis for making statistical generalisations. Social surveys are high in reliability, but may lack validity.

Sociologists usually try to obtain a representative sample of the population they wish to study in a survey. Random sampling is an effective way to select a large number of people to study. However, depending on the aims and nature of the research project, other types of sampling may be used.

Surveys involving the collection of information at one point in time are referred to as cross-sectional surveys. Cross-sectional surveys provide a snapshot picture of society. Longitudinal surveys provide data about different stages in the life of an individual or group. This data can be used to analyse change at the individual or micro-level. Longitudinal studies were first used by researchers in the United States during the 1940s to measure changes in public attitudes. It was thought to be more effective to follow the same sample over a period of time rather than to select a new sample each time attitudes were surveyed.

- (a) In sociological research what is meant by the term representative sample? [2]**

A representative sample refers to the selection of a study group that is based on characteristics that are typical of the wider population to which the research project relates. One mark for demonstrating partial understanding of the concept e.g. 'a representative sample is one that is like the rest of society'.

- (b) Describe two types of sampling used in sociological research apart from random sampling. [4]**

Types of sampling, other than random sampling, include: stratified random, quota, multi-stage, cluster sampling and snowballing. One mark for identifying each type of sampling (two marks maximum) and one mark for describing accurately each example.

- (c) Explain why questionnaires are a useful method of collecting standardised data about a large number of people. [8]**

0–4 An answer that is confined to a few simple points about questionnaires, with no clear links to issues raised by the question, may be worth 2 or 3 marks. Higher in the band, we may see answers that address only one half of the question; for example, explaining why questionnaires are helpful in collecting standardised data, but ignoring their usefulness in studying a large number of people.

5–8 Answers at this level will explain why questionnaires are a good method of collecting standardised data. Within the response, there will also be an attempt to show why questionnaires are appropriate for studying a large number of people. Higher in the band, the explanation offered may have greater clarity and/or identify a wider range of points about questionnaires and their usefulness in collecting standardised data about a large number of people. There may also be relevant links to positivism, though links to theory are not required in order to achieve full marks.

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**(d) Assess the usefulness of longitudinal surveys in sociological research. [11]**

- 0–4 Answers that confuse longitudinal surveys with other research methods are unlikely to be worth more than 1 or 2 marks. However, a response that conflates longitudinal studies with participant observation may justify a slightly higher mark within this band. Alternatively, an answer that is confined to one or two accurate observations about longitudinal studies would fit the top of the band.
- 5–8 The focus here must be on longitudinal studies and not other research methods. A descriptive account of the method and/or a few references to relevant longitudinal research studies, would trigger the bottom of the band. To go higher, there must be some discussion of the strengths and/or limitations of longitudinal surveys. However, any assessment at this level will be limited in range and depth.
- 9–11 At this level, answers will cover a range of strengths and limitations of longitudinal surveys. Higher in the band the research method will be assessed explicitly and balanced conclusions reached about its usefulness in sociological research.

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- 3 Social mobility refers to the upward or downward movement of individuals between the different levels that make-up the system of social stratification. Using occupation as an indicator of class, sociologists have distinguished between long-range and short-range mobility, and between inter-generational and intra-generational mobility. However, there are problems associated with using occupation as an indicator of class for the purposes of studying social mobility. It is also a problem that many studies have not included data on women's mobility, as patterns of female mobility usually differ from patterns of male mobility. A further problem is that researchers often fail to identify ethnicity as an independent variable that may affect opportunities for social mobility.

It is generally agreed that the rate of social mobility is significantly higher in modern industrial societies than in traditional societies. Modern industrial societies are therefore often described as 'open'. They may also be described as meritocratic. A meritocracy is a system in which people are rewarded on the basis of how hard they work and how much ability they possess. However, there is a debate in sociology about the extent to which modern industrial societies are meritocratic.

**(a) What is meant by the term intra-generational mobility? [2]**

Intra-generational mobility refers to the movement up or down the social scale by an individual within his or her lifetime. Two marks for an accurate definition along these lines; one mark for demonstrating partial understanding such as 'a person improving her social position' or 'a person changing his social class'.

**(b) Describe two problems of using occupation as an indicator of social class. [4]**

Problems include: researchers may classify occupations differently and so the results of various mobility studies are not strictly comparable; a person's occupation does not necessarily say anything about the extent of any investment income they have; not every member of society has an occupation; the prestige and status associated with particular occupations can vary over time, making it difficult to compare mobility studies from different eras. One mark for each problem identified and one mark for briefly describing the problem in each case.

**(c) Explain why a person's ethnicity may affect their opportunities for social mobility. [8]**

0–4 A few general points about ways of achieving social mobility, with little or no reference to ethnicity, would be worth 2 or 3 marks. Some simple basic observations about ethnic inequality would justify a mark at the top of the band.

5–8 At this level, answers will focus on the links between ethnicity and opportunities for social mobility. Lower in the band, the response may be confined to a few general points about racial discrimination and its possible impact on life chances for the victim groups. To go higher, the discussion needs to cover a wider range of factors linked to ethnicity that may affect opportunities for social mobility. Answers that distinguish between the social positions of specific ethnic groups are likely to merit a mark at the top of the band.

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**(d) Assess the extent to which modern industrial societies are meritocratic. [11]**

- 0–4 A few random remarks about social class, with little or no clear linkage to the question may be worth 2 or 3 marks. A very simple and possibly flawed attempt to describe the meritocracy thesis could trigger the top of the band.
- 5–8 A basic descriptive account of the meritocracy thesis would be worth 5 or 6 marks. An answer that links the meritocracy thesis to the broader functionalist view of stratification might merit a mark higher in the band. To reach the top of the band, there will be some attempt to assess the meritocracy thesis (perhaps through juxtaposition with one or more conflict theories), though the analysis will be rather limited in scope and depth.
- 9–11 The idea that social position is achieved on the basis of merit in modern industrial societies will be explained fully in answers at this level. The notion that there is a meritocracy will be scrutinized and the assessment will possibly rely mainly on references to contrasting perspectives, most likely the Marxist and feminist theories. Good use of empirical evidence to question the notion of a meritocracy would be another way of providing the required assessment. Well informed use of post-modernist ideas about social class may feature in answers that trigger the top of the band.