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AS

# SOCIOLOGY

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

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## **General**

This is the second series of the new AS level specification. In general, students found the paper accessible and were able to cope with the demands of writing under timed conditions. The vast majority of students were able to attempt all questions with a very small number leaving some questions unanswered. It is evident that students have been well prepared to demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of relevant material and to apply it appropriately.

Most students wrote within the allotted space in the answer booklet. Many students found the extra space provided in the answer booklet useful with fewer students needing additional page answer sheets to continue their answers compared to last year. Some students did continue to write beyond the allotted space provided in the question paper/answer booklet and asked for additional pages. Again, it was noted that in some instances, students were using non-official stationary.

## **Education**

### **Question 01**

Most students answered this well or at least offered a partial answer. Many were able to offer examples such as norms and values, respecting authority, hierarchy and roles, while others referred simply to being taught or to the learning in school. The best students recognised that there were two elements to the term 'hidden curriculum' and also referred to the notion of being hidden, with references to, for example, the learning being indirect or not official. A small number of students reused the words from the question and therefore could not score for repeating the term.

### **Question 02**

Students offered a wide variety of responses to this question. Some students were unable to clearly identify a selection policy and instead offered policies, such as league tables, Ofsted and marketisation. Others referred generally to the effects, processes or elected to discuss social class differences in general, without relation to a specific selection policy. Some students conflated choice with selection and referred generally to parental choice (or parentocracy), rather than the school choosing.

More successful students were able to identify a range of selection policies, with most referring to the 11+ exam, setting and streaming, and entrance exams. The most successful answers were then able to explain how the identified policy may advantage middle-class pupils or disadvantage working-class pupils in terms of educational achievement.

### **Question 03**

This question required students to outline ways in which schools mirror work in a capitalist society, which then needed development to show how each one is found in both school and in the work place. Many students were keen to show their knowledge of the correspondence principle and were able to identify Bowles and Gintis as authors of the study. Although this showed good knowledge, it was not explicitly necessary in this question. Popular responses referred to hierarchy, rewards, dress codes and fragmentation.

A number of responses did not score an additional mark for an outline due to not identifying a specific example from school and work, with some referring to capitalist society in general. Some students missed the second point, having assumed that the mirror didn't need further, explicit development when only providing an example from either school or work. Some students gave two

ways, which were too similar to both be credited, for example, the existence of a hierarchy and the requirement to show respect to superiors. Some students described functions rather than mirroring.

#### **Question 04**

As the application questions are new in this specification, it is not surprising that students find this style of question more challenging than traditional essay writing. This question required students to apply their knowledge of one area of the specification (educational policies) to another area (ethnic minorities' experience). A number of responses remained in the bottom band due to being solely focused on outlining some of the factors or processes affecting the achievements of minority ethnic groups without attempting to link these to a specific policy. A common example of this was a discussion of the ethnocentric curriculum and teacher labelling only in relation to achievement.

More commonly, many students were able to identify two policies with at least some explanation. A wide range of policies were identified, such as Sure Start, compensatory education, or a collection of policies such as multi-cultural education and EAL support. Some students were able to clearly link a policy towards the experience of education. However, as in the previous year, many referred to social class or religion more generally as a proxy to ethnicity and therefore remained in the middle band.

The most successful answers demonstrated knowledge of two policies (one in each paragraph) and applied these explicitly to the experience of minority ethnic groups, such as the impact on achievement, self-esteem and increased opportunities. Popular responses looked at how the National Curriculum appears ethnocentric, applying examples from different subjects across the curriculum. These responses also showed good conceptual knowledge, with studies and/or key concepts and analysis of how and why there may have been an impact on the experience of ethnic minority groups.

#### **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 internal 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, such as educational policies (eg GIST & WISE), the feminisation of education, GCSEs and coursework, labelling and issues relating to pupil identities. Many students were able to apply a range of factors to the attainment of girls but fewer were able to deal with both boys and girls, and/or apply knowledge in explaining differences in achievement. There was a tendency for some students to drift into an account of subject choice and did not apply this specifically to differences in achievement. Better answers demonstrated application of knowledge explicitly to gender differences in achievement.

Many went on to consider factors outside of school, such as the impact of feminism, changes in the family and changing girls' priorities. However, a significant number of responses failed to link these factors explicitly to internal factors and therefore were awarded for juxtaposition, rather than developed evaluation. Many answers lacked explicit evaluation of the role or importance of the factors that they had discussed. Explicit evaluation in terms of the relative weight attached to each (internal and external), or the interaction between the two was rare. The very best responses were able to give a wide range of factors, connected to concepts and studies with external factors being used in an evaluative way, ie they were clearly linked back to internal factors to stay focused on the question.

## Methods in Context

### Question 06

Schools and colleges have been more adept in preparing their students for the methods in context question than last year. Many students were able to apply the method to researching education as a closed space, especially in terms of understanding access issues. Good responses identified specific characteristics of working-class underachievement, for example that students may be members of class based, anti-school subcultures, and may therefore refuse to cooperate or fill out the questionnaire accurately. Some responses were able to meet the criteria for the top band in developing the point that working-class parents may not return the questionnaire or may give socially desirable responses due to not wanting to appear to be seen as a bad parent if their child is underachieving and from a working class background.

A few answers pursued tangents describing research findings on this topic. Most students were confident in their understanding of questionnaires, although a minority assumed that written questionnaires must use open questions that produce qualitative data and are therefore favoured by interpretivists. Similarly, it was often asserted that anonymity would lead to honesty, without an explanation as to why. Anonymity was often confounded with confidentiality, and the advantage of more candid answers was often stated to be ethical, when it is one of validity. The ethical issue of upsetting respondents with a sensitive question is not removed by anonymity, though it is likely to reduce embarrassment. Another widespread assertion was that this is a sensitive topic. This needs some explanation since sociologists rarely investigate phenomena that are not sensitive, especially in the context of schools.

Some students were content with simply presenting 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 questionnaires could be distributed to a large number of people but failed to apply this point beyond the item. Better answers made good use of formulae to help them cover a range of factors, and were able to make some connections to the research setting (school, classroom, homes) and/or the likely participants (pupils and parents). Few students thought to consider teachers as sources of information. There were many attempts to link the method with the issue, but often the students focused too much on the sensitivity of studying working class underachievement rather than linking this issue specifically to questionnaires. There were many cases of students reaching level 4 rather than fully developing their point to get into level 5. On the whole, many were able to connect using questionnaires to social class, but found it more difficult to add in the additional final layer of educational achievement.

### **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](#)