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# A-LEVEL SOCIOLOGY

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

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## **General Introduction to the November Series**

This has been an unusual exam series in many ways. Entry patterns have been very different from those normally seen in the summer, and students had a very different experience in preparation for these exams. It is therefore more difficult to make meaningful comparisons between the range of student responses seen in this series and those seen in a normal summer series. The smaller entry also means that there is less evidence available for examiners to comment on.

In this report, senior examiners will summarise the performance of students in this series in a way that is as helpful as possible to teachers preparing future cohorts while taking into account the unusual circumstances and limited evidence available.

## **Overview of Entry**

This series saw a very small entry of students. In general, most students found this paper accessible and there was a clear range of answers with varying evidence to demonstrate the skills of knowledge, application, analysis and evaluation. However, there was generally a lower quality and standard of answers in comparison to previous and more usual summer series.

Most students attempted all of the questions, indicating that they coped well with the demands of writing under timed conditions. However, a few students left questions unanswered (particularly Question 6). Similarly to summer 2019, a significant number of students wrote very lengthy answers to the 4-mark and 6-mark questions which may explain why some seemed to run out of time in answering the final question.

## **Comments on Individual Questions**

### **Question 01**

Unsurprisingly, this question seemed to pose very few problems for students. Most could identify two (with many offering more) external factors and of these, the majority could develop their point further to gain the additional mark. Common responses referred to material deprivation, cultural deprivation and cultural capital. Others gave specific examples such as poor diet, parental support and language codes as part of their answer. Unfortunately, a small number of students failed to gain marks as they offered internal factors.

### **Question 02**

Most students could offer two or three functions that the education system performs. These drew from functionalist, Marxist and feminist perspectives, including such functions as role allocation, promotion of social solidarity, ideological purpose and supporting patriarchal values. Many were then able to develop their point further to gain the additional mark. For example, a number of students developed the point of role allocation in explaining that outcomes of exams help 'sift and sort' students into suitable occupations. In less successful answers, students gave responses that were too similar or overlapping to be credited separately.

### **Question 03**

This question generally proved problematic for students. Although many could apply the notion of schools competing with each other, the majority failed to develop the Item hook about providing

unique products. The failure to develop two applications from the Item meant that many answers scored lower in the 4–7 level.

Some answers demonstrated sound use of marketisation policies such as formula funding, ERA and league tables. However, often the focus in the development of these policies was more on the promotion of parentocracy rather than showing how schools operated more like businesses. Stronger responses maintained a focus on how these policies encouraged schools to act like a business, sometimes drawing direct comparisons with typical business practices. Furthermore, some students were able to develop further analysis and evaluation in discussing issues of differences in economic and cultural capital resulting in some parents benefitting from schools being run like businesses and therefore increasing inequality of opportunity in achievement between social groups.

#### **Question 04**

There were a range of responses to this question with a variety of explanations offered - both internal and external to schools. For example, explanations offered included differences in socialisation, feminism, labelling and the self-fulfilling prophecy. Less effective responses tended to be descriptive and limited in the range of explanations offered. A small number of students seemed to focus almost entirely on explaining why 'girls are underachieving' and appeared to offer a rather historical account of these differences. More successful answers referred to more recent studies and relevant concepts as they covered a broader range of explanations.

Some less effective answers were descriptive of explanations and studies and general to gender differences in schools. Others drifted into explanations of gender differences in subject choice or gender identity without explaining their relevance to achievement. Furthermore, some answers drifted into accounts of social class and/or ethnicity without any reference to differences in gender and achievement. However, more effective answers indicated how these social groups may be interrelated or that, for example, that males and females are not homogenous groups. The better responses clearly applied explanations for gender differences with a focus on achievement.

Many students offered basic analysis in their explanations of gender differences in educational achievement, for example, applying these explanations to either males or females separately. A number of responses offered juxtaposed evaluation of internal versus external factors in explaining these gender differences. More successful answers were able to apply some of the explanations in a more analytical way by comparing and contrasting males and females in explaining differences in achievement. Furthermore, these answers were able to offer more critical evaluation in discussing ways that internal and external explanations are interrelated and contribute to differences in gender and achievement. The more effective answers were able to offer explicit evaluation.

#### **Question 05**

Many students were able to demonstrate some basic knowledge and understanding of non-participant observation (NPO), although this was often in relation to observations more generally. In many answers, there was a limited focus on the non-participant aspect of the method. Instead, there was a tendency to discuss strengths and limitations of covert versus overt observations with some making assertions that NPOs are always covert.

There were attempts at applying knowledge of studying education more generally. Many responses highlighted issues such as gaining access to schools (including gatekeepers) and the problem with those being excluded from research. However, these tended to be rather generic to any research. Better answers were able to apply some of these issues to using NPOs in particular.

Unfortunately, there were few responses that were able to demonstrate application of NPOs to the specific issue and research characteristics of investigating pupil behaviour in schools, for example in the way that being detached and an outsider in the observation you are less likely to understand the reasons and meanings that younger students might attach to the observed behaviours within their anti-school or pro-school subcultures.

#### **Question 06**

Unfortunately, students performed less well on this question compared with the rest of the paper. Many were able to offer two problems of primary qualitative methods, usually referring to practical issues of time taken and costs involved. However, few were able to develop their ideas with any real depth and analysis. A common problem with many answers was confusing and conflating theoretical issues of validity and reliability. A large number of responses seemed to mix or list points together in a confused way. For example, some confused problems of sampling and not being able to generalise with theoretical issues of reliability and/or validity in a rather random way.

#### **Concluding Remarks**

Overall, there were a clear range of marks in this unusually small cohort of students for this specification. The knowledge and skills demonstrated in the education section were broadly similar to previous examination series. However, knowledge and skills in the Methods in Context and Theory and Methods questions were generally weaker than in previous series. It appeared that students had prepared less well for these topics and questions.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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