AQA

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SOCIOLOGY

7191/2 Research Methods and Topics in Sociology
Report on the Examination

7191
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General

This was the third series of exams under the new specification and assessment pattern. Most students seemed able to manage their time appropriately. There were however, some occasional rubric infringements with some students attempting all 22 questions.

In general, students coped well with the demands of the exam. However, some aspects could be improved. The 10 mark outline and explain question requires students to link two aspects of the specification. The best answers took note of both aspects of the question, clearly identified two separate points and developed them in relation to the second part of the question. Weaker answers either ignored one aspect of the question or attempted to cover a number of ideas rather than focusing on two. In relation to all questions, students need to pay attention to the specific wording of questions and address this rather than write generic answers that cover the general topic area.

Section A: Research Methods

Question 01

Students who recognised that the key to this question was the idea of closed questions were largely successful. The most common responses then explored the lack of depth or the restricted answers that closed questions generate. Failure to elaborate was a factor in not getting the full marks. For example, answers that just said that one of the problems was that closed questions tended to produce quantitative data without elaborating on how or why that was a problem were credited as partial answers. There were a number of students who identified generic problems with questionnaires or of research in general and did not gain marks.

Question 02

This attracted a wide range of responses. Better answers explored issues of validity, reliability, representativeness and generalisability. However, a significant number appeared uncertain about what some of these key concepts meant. Many students used a framework of practical, ethical and theoretical factors to help structure their answers and this often proved a successful approach. Others took different examples of qualitative methods and went through them in a descriptive rather than analytical manner. Better responses were able to identify a range of disadvantages of qualitative methods and discuss some advantages that came out of those disadvantages. For example using qualitative methods may mean that there is a problem with subjectivity and the researcher becoming too involved with the subjects of the research. On the other hand, this involvement may mean that rapport is built up and this may improve the depth and quality of the research, which boosts validity. Answers that took this approach were more successful than those that listed disadvantages and advantages with little connection between them. Some students used examples of research to help illustrate the points they were making. While this proved helpful in some cases, there was tendency to discuss issues related to the particular subject of research rather than draw conclusions about the nature of qualitative methods.

Section B

Topic B1 Culture and Identity

Question 03

The majority of answers were able to explain master status with reference to an aspect of a person's identity that dominates other people's perception of that person. Some students were unfamiliar with the concept and thought it was something to do with social hierarchy.

Question 04

This question proved to be more difficult than anticipated. Some answers focused on the impact of social class on choice of leisure activity but did not relate this to an individual's identity. The most common successful answers were able to relate work to class identity or some sort of work- based relationships that helped individual's see themselves as part of a group.

Question 05

Successful answers made reference to characteristics such as, authentic, traditional and rooted in the experiences of ordinary people. Most of these answers were able elaborate on these to gain the additional mark. For example, folk culture is an authentic culture as opposed to culture manufactured by commercial organisations. A number of students seemed unfamiliar with the concept of folk culture.

Question 06

In general, this question was answered poorly with limited knowledge and understanding shown. While students were familiar with agencies of socialisation, they were less clear about national identity. Many answers struggled to find anything specific to say about national identity and instead made generic comments about socialisation and norms and values. Some answers conflated national identity with religious and ethnic identity and often found it difficult to explain how agencies socialise individuals into a national identity. Successful answers were able to discuss the role of schools in shaping national identity via the teaching of history or literature. Others referred to the role of the media in giving people a sense of shared national identity through sporting events, royal weddings or even during wartime.

Question 07

The best answers made reference to different agencies of socialisation (usually education and the family) and the part they play in socialising people into ruling class ideology. This framework allowed students to discuss the Marxist view of the role of the socialisation process, and then to discuss alternative views. Good answers retained the focus on Marxist views and used alternative perspectives as a commentary on Marxist views. Other more limited answers had self-contained sections on different perspectives of socialisation that were unrelated to each other. A number of other weaker answers started with an agency of socialisation such as education and then drifted off into a discussion of the role of education in society rather than the specifics of the socialisation process. There were some very good responses that distinguished between different Marxist approaches to socialisation and the role of structural factors as opposed to individual agency.

Topic B2 Families and Households

The majority of students chose this option

Question 08

Most students were able to define both aspects of the term. Some answers failed to say what socialisation was and hence only provided a partial definition. Less often answers failed to explain the primary aspect of the question.

Question 09

The most common answer was "toxic childhood ", with an example explained. Many answers referred to negative aspects of technology and problems of children's exposure to it. Those who failed to score usually omitted to explain what was negative about the experience that they identified. For example identified 'poverty' or 'divorce' without explaining what the negative consequence was.

Question 10

Many students successfully identified and outlined three reasons for the fall in the death rate since 1900. The most common responses mentioned were medical improvements, better access to health care, less dangerous occupations and decreased smoking rates. Weaker answers failed to outline the reason and it was sometimes unclear how the factor influenced the death rate. A number of answers suggested that a falling birth rate was a reason for a falling death rate or suggested that people were living longer so the death rate had declined.

Question 11

It was not always clear which areas of choice students had chosen to discuss. Some answers were highly descriptive accounts of family diversity without linking this to the idea of increased choice. Some answers failed to identify or discuss how patterns of family life had been affected. The best answers had a theoretical dimension that helped students discuss the nature of the increased choice. These answers often referred to Giddens or Beck and explicitly discussed post-modernist views on family. Common areas of choice included divorce, the decision to get married, cohabitation, same sex relationships as well as career choices for women. Good answers analysed the underlying reasons for these changes for example, by referring to the growth of individualism or debates about the nature of what constitutes a family. Weaker answers often lost focus on family patterns and instead discussed general changes to society or family roles. Alternatively, they covered a number of possible changes in society that affected family without developing any one of them sufficiently. Students should be encouraged to write a two-paragraph answer.

Question 12

The best responses were able to link specific policies to the impact they had on the role of the family. Application of policies such as the Welfare State to the functions identified by Murdock and Parsons were evident in some responses, particularly the economic function and the socialisation function. The New Right view was often taken from the item and developed into a general description of the negative impact of welfare benefits on family structure. Very few of these answers focused on the role of the family, and therefore few students discussed the ability of lone parent families to fulfil the socialisation function adequately. The majority of students had clearly learned some relevant material and were able to write at length about different sociological perspectives on family policy, but relatively few of these answers dealt with the specifics of the impact on the role of the family. Some students interpreted role of the family as conjugal roles and therefore their answers lacked focus. Others wrote at length about the detail of social policies and legislation and again struggled to focus on the question of impact on the role of the family. The more students were able to link policies to the impact on the functions of the family the higher up the mark bands they progressed. Top band answers had explicit evaluation of the debates and a more conceptual sense of the theories.

Topic B3 Health

This option was done by a handful of centres

Question 13

Most students had some idea about this. Successful students were able to explain the idea of something that was previously seen as part of normal life now seen as a medical issue. Partial answers tended to give an example of medicalisation, usually pregnancy.

Question 14

Some students struggled to explain how individuals with mental illness may be stigmatised. These answers tended to describe labelling without being clear about what the labels were or how they were stigmatised labels. Answers that were more successful were able to explain with reference to individuals seen as deviant in some way or as somehow culpable for their own situation and therefore not deserving of any sympathy.

Question 15

Some students seemed unfamiliar with the concept of geographical differences in life expectancy and just outlined differences based on gender or social class or ethnicity. Other unsuccessful answers failed to discuss variations across the United Kingdom and instead drew international comparisons. Good answers tended to identify reasons such as how some areas have poorer access to health resources; how the geographical pattern reflects social class pattern across the United Kingdom; different exposure to pollution. In order to score both marks for each point students needed to outline clearly for example, what the pattern of access to health care resources is across the United Kingdom rather than just state that there is a variation.

Question 16

Limited access to health care due to material factors, cultural beliefs, language barriers and racism of health professionals were the most common ways offered by successful students. Differential beliefs about what constitutes a medical condition and different attitudes to traditional remedies were also popular responses. Successful answers were able to explain how these ways affected differences in accessing health care and explained explicitly how these led to ethnic differences in health chances. Less successful students tended to make unsupported statements about, for example, the educational levels of different ethnic groups, or tended just to assert the reason without any appropriate discussion or analysis.

Question 17

Some students took this as an opportunity to present material from different perspectives on the nature of modern medicine. These answers tended to only briefly consider the question in the title and various feminist views and instead produce varied accounts of Marxist, functionalist and Weberian approaches to the medical profession. The best answers were able to discuss numerous ways in which it can be argued that modern medicine serves the interest of patriarchy. These answers typically referred to employment patterns in the health care professions, the gendered experiences of patients, attitudes to complimentary medicine, as well as aspects and implications of the bio-medical model of health. These answers were often able to frame their answers with reference to different sociological perspectives and arrive at a reasoned conclusion. Weaker answers listed separate approaches in distinct sections while answers that were more effective were able to weave different perspectives into a discussion about particular aspects of modern medicine.

Topic B4 Work, Poverty and Welfare

This option was selected by a handful of centres

Question 18

Successful answers referred to the idea of people having their own view of what constitutes poverty. Partial answers tended to explain that it was a non-official definition. A number of students were unfamiliar with this term.

Question 19

The most common responses explained the impact of loss of routine or loss of purpose on an individual's sense of identity. Unsuccessful answers tended to repeat the question without actually explain the impact of loss of job on identity.

Question 20

Many students struggled with this question. Some answers confused voluntary groups with private commercial providers or with informal carers. Many successful answers made reference to advantages such as: they may save the taxpayer money; they can benefit the individuals involved; they may meet needs not met by other providers. Some students gave examples of services that voluntary groups may provide without outlining the underlying advantages that these groups may bring. These were credited as partial answers.

Question 21

Some answers focused on the impact of technological change and were able to discuss at length Fordism and the views of Braverman on autonomy and control in the workplace. Although knowledgeable, these answers often struggled to identify different social groups and tended to talk in general terms about the effect on the work place. More successful answers discussed the different impact on different types of workers such as skilled/ unskilled or manual/non manual or young/old. These answers were then able explain the impact of technological change in a more focused manner. The impact on workers with disability was also a successful approach taken by some students.

Question 22

Answers to this question often took two different approaches. The first approach was to go through different social groups in the United Kingdom and describe why they might experience poverty. These answers tended to be very descriptive and lacking in sociological analysis. The alternative approach was to explain various sociological perspectives on the causes of poverty. They would explain functionalist, Weberian, Marxist, feminist and New Right approaches often in self-contained sections. The best answers adopted some combination of these approaches by, for example, locating a discussion about why people with disabilities may be more likely to experience poverty in a Marxist context of the value of individuals and groups in a capitalist society. Typical answers referred to social class, age, family type, gender, ethnicity as well as disability. Many successful students were able to contrast structural explanations with more individualistic explanations for poverty.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.