

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/11

Essay

General comments

This session there was further evidence of improvement in the study skills demonstrated by the candidates in answering the questions. In many cases, the responses were well constructed and included references to appropriate sociological concepts, theories, evidence and debates. Good answers demonstrated both a sound understanding of the relevant subject matter and a high standard of analysis and assessment. It was also pleasing to see candidates making more use of references to appropriate sociological studies. Some candidates would have achieved higher marks had they been able to demonstrate a better understanding of the differences between the main theoretical perspectives in sociology.

There were no common misinterpretations of the questions. **Questions 1** and **3** attracted the most answers. There were comparatively few answers to **Questions 5** and **6**. Most candidates appeared able to write two answers fully in the time available. There were no common rubric errors.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

There were some answers at the lower end of the mark range that discussed only the general features of socialization, with no links to the functionalist theory specifically. Slightly better were answers that demonstrated a sound understanding of the concept of socialisation within a broadly functionalist perspective. Candidates who were able to provide an accurate account of the functionalist theory, with no assessment of its strengths and limitations, gained marks in the middle of the range. Good answers often compared the functionalist theory with other theories of socialisation, including the Marxist and interactionist approaches. High quality answers often included an analysis of the conservative and deterministic assumptions inherent in the functionalist perspective.

Question 2

There were some answers at the lower end of the mark range that demonstrated only a simple understanding of Marxist theory. A few candidates conflated the ideas of Marx and Weber. A lot of answers were confined to a basic account of Marx's main ideas, with no assessment or reflection on the relevance of those ideas for understanding society today. Better answers distinguished between different contributors to Marxist theory, including Lenin, Gramsci, Althusser, and Miliband. Good answers included a sound assessment of the value of Marxist theory for understanding modern industrial societies. References to post-modernist theory often featured in answers of a high standard. Feminist theory was also used to good effect by some candidates in developing a critique of Marxist theory.

Question 3

There were a few answers where the candidates confused primary data with secondary data. Some candidates seemed to think that official statistics are the only source of secondary data. Answers based only on references to official statistics were too narrow in focus to achieve high marks. Good answers discussed different types of secondary data, both quantitative and qualitative, and focused on the issue of subjectivity in sociological research. To reach the upper part of the mark range, answers needed to include an assessment of the claim that most types of secondary data are too subjective to be useful in sociological research. Some candidates made good use of references to relevant sociological studies to support their arguments. Another feature of many high quality answers was consideration of how sociologists from different theoretical perspectives use secondary data in their research.



Question 4

Answers at the lower end of the mark range were often confined to a few simple observations about research methods, with no direct links to the question. Many candidates were able to identify a few ways in which the values of the sociologist may influence the research process, but they failed to provide an assessment of the extent to which research findings may be affected by researcher bias. Without an appropriate assessment, answers could gain no more than around half marks. Good answers often included references to the ideas of thinkers such as Weber, C Wright Mills, Becker, Berger, Gouldner and Gomm. To gain very high marks, it was necessary to link theoretical debates about the role of values in sociology to specific examples of how the values of the sociologist might influence the findings of their research.

Question 5

There were some answers that offered only a few simple observations about the nature of social class in general. Better answers linked the question to relevant sociological debates, such as the embourgeoisement thesis and the debates about proletarianisation. Some candidates made good use of references to the post-modernist idea that class divisions are no longer relevant in understanding contemporary societies. Good answers included an assessment of the view that economic and cultural divisions between the working class and the middle class are disappearing. Some answers were confined to discussing debates about social class that were prominent in the 1950s and 1960s. Answers that reached a high standard generally included some references to more recent contributions to the analysis of social class divisions in modern industrial societies.

Question 6

There were some answers in which the candidates expressed only personal opinions about the appropriate roles of males and females. Other answers at the lower end of the mark range were limited to a few observations about the forms of inequality associated with gender divisions. Answers that triggered the middle of the mark range often comprised a summary of the main ideas associated with feminist theory. Better answers included an assessment of the value of feminist theory in understanding gender-based inequality. Some candidates made good use of references to recent sociological studies of gender inequality. Some high quality answers used post-modernist theory to challenge the notion that gender inequality remains a major feature of modern industrial societies.



SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/12

Essay

General comments

The standard of analysis and assessment in the answers continues to improve. There were fewer examples this session of responses that demonstrate knowledge without providing any criticism or evaluation. It was also pleasing to note that a high number of the candidates made good use of relevant examples from sociological studies to illustrate their answers. Some of the responses could have gained more marks had better use been made of recent contributions to sociological theory, particularly the post-modernist perspective. For the **Section B** questions, the links between theoretical perspectives and methods might have been explored more fully in order to gain higher marks.

There were no common misinterpretations of the questions. **Questions 1** and **4** attracted the most answers. There were comparatively few answers to **Questions 5** and **6**. Most candidates appeared able to write two answers fully in the time available. There were no common rubric errors.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Answers at the lower end of the mark range often addressed the question by discussing the nature versus nurture debate. These answers were too tangential to the question to merit more than a few marks. Better answers were based on a sound descriptive account of the positivist perspective in sociology. Answers that were confined to an outline of the positivist position were awarded marks in the middle of the range. To gain further marks, it was necessary to assess the positivist perspective. There were some good answers that contrasted positivism with the interpretivist approach. Some candidates also made good use of the realist perspective in assessing the idea that sociology can and should be based on the principles and methods of the natural sciences. The distinction between 'can' and 'should' in the question wording was often discussed to good effect in answers that achieved high marks.

Question 2

There was some misunderstanding in relation to this question. Quite a few candidates wrongly interpreted the question as an opportunity to discuss the importance of socialisation in general in shaping human behaviour. Such answers were awarded a few marks, but to gain further credit the focus needed to be on the social construction of the concept of childhood specifically. Better answers explained what is meant by the social construction of the concept of childhood through references to appropriate studies, such as the work of Philip Aries. Historical and/or cultural variations in patterns of childhood were used to develop sound descriptive responses to the question. The best answers also included an assessment of the idea that the concept of childhood is socially constructed. This was often delivered through a critical analysis of the strength of the historical evidence used in studies such as those by Aries. The notion that there may be universal features of childhood, linked to biological and psychological determinants, was also explored in some high quality answers.

Question 3

Some answers confused participant observation studies with longitudinal surveys. Many candidates appeared to be unaware that longitudinal surveys are usually conducted in order to collect quantitative data. There were some weak answers that demonstrated a basic understanding of the nature of longitudinal research, but offered very little detail about the strengths and limitations of that research method. Better answers discussed a range of practical and theoretical strengths and limitations of longitudinal surveys. Good answers often included relevant links to the main theoretical perspectives, particularly the positivist and interpretivist positions. Some candidates also made good use of references to examples of longitudinal surveys as a way of illustrating important points in their answers. High quality answers demonstrated

subtlety in the conclusions reached, often noting that the value of longitudinal surveys may vary to some extent depending on the subject studied, the theoretical perspective adopted, and the relationship with any other methods that may be involved in the particular study.

Question 4

Some answers addressed this question in terms of the debate about whether sociology can be a science. The discussion in these cases often focused on the value of quantitative versus qualitative data. This type of tangential response to the question gained some marks, but the lack of any discussion of official statistics specifically meant that high marks could not be awarded. Better answers described a range of strengths and limitations of official statistics. Some candidates made good use of examples of the use of official statistics in specific sociological studies, such as Durkheim's study of suicide, as a way of illustrating important points in their answers. Good answers covered both theoretical and practical aspects of the use of official statistics. High quality answers featured balanced and well-reasoned conclusions about the usefulness of official statistics in sociological research.

Question 5

There were some answers to this question that demonstrated little awareness of the relevant sociological debates about the nature of economic and political power in modern industrial societies. Answers that offered a simple outline of Marx's theory of class, with no further development in relation to the question, gained a few marks. Better answers were based on an appropriate theoretical framework, such as a discussion of Marxist contributions to analysis of power or an outline of the managerial revolution theory. Good answers focused on the importance of property ownership specifically in understanding the nature of power today. The best answers included a sustained assessment of the idea that property is no longer an important source of economic and political power. The assessment was often delivered through reference to post-modernist theories or through use of the ideas of thinkers such as Dahrendorf, Daniel Bell and James Burnham.

Question 6

At the lower end of the mark range, answers were often confined to a few simple observations about the forms of inequality experienced by many ethnic minority groups. Better answers focused on the relationship between racism and poverty. Some answers concentrated too much on discussing explanations of poverty in general. Good answers linked the material on poverty directly to issues concerning the impact of racism in understanding the deprivation that characterises life for many ethnic minority groups. The best answers included an assessment of different factors, including racism, which might explain the poverty experienced by many ethnic minority groups. The analysis was often supported with references to relevant sociological studies. Some candidates also made very good use of references to post-modernist theories.

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/13

Essay

General comments

The standard of analysis and assessment in the answers continues to improve. There were fewer examples this session of responses that demonstrate knowledge without providing any criticism or evaluation. It was also pleasing to note that a high number of the candidates made good use of relevant examples from sociological studies to illustrate their answers. Some of the responses could have gained more marks had better use been made of recent contributions to sociological theory, particularly the post-modernist perspective. For the **Section B** questions, the links between theoretical perspectives and methods might have been explored more fully in order to gain higher marks.

There were no common misinterpretations of the questions. **Questions 1** and **4** attracted the most answers. There were comparatively few answers to **Questions 5** and **6**. Most candidates appeared able to write two answers fully in the time available. There were no common rubric errors.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Answers at the lower end of the mark range often addressed the question by discussing the nature versus nurture debate. These answers were too tangential to the question to merit more than a few marks. Better answers were based on a sound descriptive account of the positivist perspective in sociology. Answers that were confined to an outline of the positivist position were awarded marks in the middle of the range. To gain further marks, it was necessary to assess the positivist perspective. There were some good answers that contrasted positivism with the interpretivist approach. Some candidates also made good use of the realist perspective in assessing the idea that sociology can and should be based on the principles and methods of the natural sciences. The distinction between 'can' and 'should' in the question wording was often discussed to good effect in answers that achieved high marks.

Question 2

There was some misunderstanding in relation to this question. Quite a few candidates wrongly interpreted the question as an opportunity to discuss the importance of socialisation in general in shaping human behaviour. Such answers were awarded a few marks, but to gain further credit the focus needed to be on the social construction of the concept of childhood specifically. Better answers explained what is meant by the social construction of the concept of childhood through references to appropriate studies, such as the work of Philip Aries. Historical and/or cultural variations in patterns of childhood were used to develop sound descriptive responses to the question. The best answers also included an assessment of the idea that the concept of childhood is socially constructed. This was often delivered through a critical analysis of the strength of the historical evidence used in studies such as those by Aries. The notion that there may be universal features of childhood, linked to biological and psychological determinants, was also explored in some high quality answers.

Question 3

Some answers confused participant observation studies with longitudinal surveys. Many candidates appeared to be unaware that longitudinal surveys are usually conducted in order to collect quantitative data. There were some weak answers that demonstrated a basic understanding of the nature of longitudinal research, but offered very little detail about the strengths and limitations of that research method. Better answers discussed a range of practical and theoretical strengths and limitations of longitudinal surveys. Good answers often included relevant links to the main theoretical perspectives, particularly the positivist and interpretivist positions. Some candidates also made good use of references to examples of longitudinal

surveys as a way of illustrating important points in their answers. High quality answers demonstrated subtlety in the conclusions reached, often noting that the value of longitudinal surveys may vary to some extent depending on the subject studied, the theoretical perspective adopted, and the relationship with any other methods that may be involved in the particular study.

Question 4

Some answers addressed this question in terms of the debate about whether sociology can be a science. The discussion in these cases often focused on the value of quantitative versus qualitative data. This type of tangential response to the question gained some marks, but the lack of any discussion of official statistics specifically meant that high marks could not be awarded. Better answers described a range of strengths and limitations of official statistics. Some candidates made good use of examples of the use of official statistics in specific sociological studies, such as Durkheim's study of suicide, as a way of illustrating important points in their answers. Good answers covered both theoretical and practical aspects of the use of official statistics. High quality answers featured balanced and well-reasoned conclusions about the usefulness of official statistics in sociological research.

Question 5

There were some answers to this question that demonstrated little awareness of the relevant sociological debates about the nature of economic and political power in modern industrial societies. Answers that offered a simple outline of Marx's theory of class, with no further development in relation to the question, gained a few marks. Better answers were based on an appropriate theoretical framework, such as a discussion of Marxist contributions to analysis of power or an outline of the managerial revolution theory. Good answers focused on the importance of property ownership specifically in understanding the nature of power today. The best answers included a sustained assessment of the idea that property is no longer an important source of economic and political power. The assessment was often delivered through reference to post-modernist theories or through use of the ideas of thinkers such as Dahrendorf, Daniel Bell and James Burnham.

Question 6

At the lower end of the mark range, answers were often confined to a few simple observations about the forms of inequality experienced by many ethnic minority groups. Better answers focused on the relationship between racism and poverty. Some answers concentrated too much on discussing explanations of poverty in general. Good answers linked the material on poverty directly to issues concerning the impact of racism in understanding the deprivation that characterises life for many ethnic minority groups. The best answers included an assessment of different factors, including racism, which might explain the poverty experienced by many ethnic minority groups. The analysis was often supported with references to relevant sociological studies. Some candidates also made very good use of references to post-modernist theories.

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/21
Data Response

General comments

Some of the candidates produced answers of a very high standard, combining a thorough knowledge of the relevant subject matter with good analytical skills and intelligent use of appropriate sociological examples. There were a lot of answers that gained credit for demonstrating knowledge and understanding, but lost the opportunity to gain further marks by omitting to provide analysis and assessment in relation to the part (d) questions. Good answers often included references to relevant sociological studies. There were some responses that made excellent use of arguments and ideas from the post-modernist perspective. Exploring the links between empirical evidence and theoretical perspectives is one way that candidates can gain further marks in the part (c) and (d) questions.

There were no rubric errors and candidates generally seemed to make good use of their time in the examination.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) Most answers provided a clear definition of what sociologists mean by the term 'socially constructed'. Some candidates confused the concept of social construction with that of socialisation.
- (b) There were a lot of good answers that referred to both practical and ethical problems associated with laboratory research. A few candidates confused laboratory experiments with participant observation studies.
- (c) There were some answers to this question that discussed different sociological research methods rather than focusing on science as such. Better answers recognised that the question offered the opportunity to consider the contributions of those who have written about the social and philosophical influences on the practice of science, including Kuhn, Popper, Lynch, Keat and Urry, and Lakatos. Good answers often included references to the post-modernist critique of science. The realist perspective was also frequently mentioned in well-informed responses.
- (d) There were some responses to this question that simply noted one or two features of the positivist perspective, with no references to the interpretivist critique. Some answers included tangential material on the ideas of Kuhn and Popper. Better answers demonstrated a sound understanding of the positivist perspective and drew useful comparisons with the interpretivist perspective. Good answers included an assessment of the interpretivist critique of positivism, drawing sound conclusions about the relative merits of the two perspectives.

Question 2

- (a) A few candidates confused 'validity' with reliability. There were many good answers that rightly noted that 'validity' refers to the extent to which a research study reveals the truth or measures what the researcher intended.
- (b) Good answers focused on the problems of gaining access to study a group. Problems such as gaining the trust of the group and fitting in with the culture of those under study were frequently mentioned in good answers. Some candidates wrongly interpreted the question as an invitation to discuss the difficulties of carrying out participant observation in general.



- (c) Answers to this question at the lower end of the mark range were usually short and confined to just a few simple points about the main characteristics of participant observation studies. Better answers identified the features of participant observation that particularly appeal to those in the interpretivist perspective. Good answers made competent use of appropriate sociological concepts, such as interaction, validity, and verstehen.
- (d) There were some answers at the lower end of the mark range that comprised only a basic definition of what participant observation involves. Better answers identified several strengths and limitations of participant observation. Good answers went beyond an assessment of participant observation in general, to focus on the overt approach specifically. The best answers included a balanced conclusion about the merits of overt participant observation compared with the covert approach.

Question 3

- (a) A few candidates confused the idea of gender division with biological differences between males and females. There were a lot of good answers that correctly noted that gender divisions refer to the segregation of work roles between males and females.
- (b) There were a lot of answers that gained marks for identifying two reasons why women earn less than men. Good answers described each reason in sufficient detail to merit full marks.
- (c) There were some answers that simply expressed personal opinions about the value of female employees. Better answers drew on relevant sociological concepts and evidence to discuss the reasons why women are less well represented than men in top positions in employment. The concept of the 'glass ceiling' was well used in many answers. Good answers also often featured references to relevant feminist theories.
- (d) Answers at the lower end of the mark range were often confined to describing the main forms of gender inequality in modern industrial societies, with no references to feminist theory as such. Better answers included a discussion of relevant feminist concepts and ideas, such as patriarchy and the dual burden. Good answers often distinguished between different strands of feminist theory. Answers that gained high marks included an assessment of the strengths and limitations of feminist explanations of gender inequality.

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/22
Data Response

General comments

The overall level of performance was of a similar standard to that achieved for this paper in other recent exam sessions. Some of the candidates demonstrated considerable in-depth knowledge and understanding of the relevant topic areas and were able to offer analysis and evaluation of appropriate sociological explanations and theory. Other candidates gained high marks for knowledge and understanding, but needed to offer appropriate analysis and assessment in relation to the part (d) questions in order to gain further marks. There were some weak scripts where the answers contained material that was irrelevant to the question set. In general, the candidates would benefit from developing further the skills of interpreting the questions accurately and selecting appropriate material on which to base their responses.

There were no rubric errors and candidates generally seemed to make good use of their time in the examination.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) There were a lot of answers that gained one mark by noting that 'value consensus' refers to an agreement between members of society. Answers that gained full marks also stated that the agreement refers to a set of values or beliefs that play an important role in maintaining the cohesiveness of society.
- (b) Some answers to this question lacked examples of specific sanctions and were confined to defining formal and informal sanctions. Many of the candidates were able to identify two examples of social sanctions, but needed to describe the nature of these sanctions in greater detail to gain full marks. Good answers identified two sanctions and described accurately the context in which these sanctions might be applied.
- (c) There were some answers that described the process of socialisation in general rather than focusing on children specifically. Better answers drew on material from theories and studies that consider directly the ways in which children acquire the norms and values of society. The best answers included references to the work of G H Mead, Cooley, Piaget and Oakley.
- (d) Most answers to this question demonstrated some understanding of the Marxist theory of social order. Answers at the lower end of the mark range often comprised just one or two basic points about the Marxist theory. Better answers showed a deeper understanding of the Marxist perspective. Good answers also included an assessment that considered the strengths and limitations of the Marxist approach. The assessment often took the form of a comparison with other theories of social order, including the functionalist and the interactionist.

Question 2

- (a) There were a lot of answers worth one mark that recognised that 'researcher effect' refers to a situation in which the values of the sociologists influence the outcome of the research process. Better answers noted that 'researcher effect' occurs where the responses of the research subjects are influenced by the presence of the researcher.
- (b) Some answers gained no marks because the advantages they identified applied to all types of interviews. To gain marks, the answers had to focus on advantages specific to *structured* interviews.



- (c) Many of the candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the interpretivist perspective. There were some answers that were confined to a few simple points about questionnaires. Better answers provided a more detailed and accurate account of the limitations of questionnaires. Good answers combined a summary of the limitations of questionnaires with a clear understanding of the characteristics that make interpretivists sceptical about the value of questionnaires as a research method in sociology.
- (d) There were some answers that went no further than describing different types of questionnaire. Other answers at the lower end of the mark range were confined to simply listing a few practical strengths and limitations of questionnaires in general. Better answers considered both practical and theoretical issues. Good answers kept the focus on postal questionnaires, noting several advantages and drawbacks of using this method of administering questionnaires. High quality answers often included references to the links between the use of questionnaires and different sociological perspectives.

Question 3

- (a) Many answers correctly noted that 'ascribed status' refers to a status that is inherited at birth, though some answers left implicit the meaning of the term 'status'. Good answers defined both the notion of ascription and that of status.
- (b) Most answers to this question identified correctly two ways of achieving upward social mobility. A few candidates incorrectly thought that ascribed status is a way of achieving upward social mobility.
- (c) There were some answers that defined different types of social mobility with no direct links to the question. Better answers considered factors like educational opportunity, job markets, political ideology and levels of discrimination as potential influences affecting why some societies experience higher levels of social mobility than other societies.
- (d) Most answers demonstrated some understanding of the concept of meritocracy. There were some answers that offered only personal opinion about the extent to which meritocracy exists in modern industrial societies. Better answers examined some of the relevant sociological evidence about, for example, rates of social mobility, the distribution of income and wealth, and social exclusion. There were some good answers that also included references to appropriate theoretical critiques of the meritocracy thesis. High quality answers delivered balanced and well-supported conclusions about the extent to which meritocracy exists in modern industrial societies.



SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/23
Data Response

General comments

The overall level of performance was of a similar standard to that achieved for this paper in other recent exam sessions. Some of the candidates demonstrated considerable in-depth knowledge and understanding of the relevant topic areas and were able to offer analysis and evaluation of appropriate sociological explanations and theory. Other candidates gained high marks for knowledge and understanding, but needed to offer appropriate analysis and assessment in relation to the part **(d)** questions in order to gain further marks. There were some weak scripts where the answers contained material that was irrelevant to the question set. In general, the candidates would benefit from developing further the skills of interpreting the questions accurately and selecting appropriate material on which to base their responses.

There were no rubric errors and candidates generally seemed to make good use of their time in the examination.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) There were a lot of answers that gained one mark by noting that 'value consensus' refers to an agreement between members of society. Answers that gained full marks also stated that the agreement refers to a set of values or beliefs that play an important role in maintaining the cohesiveness of society.
- (b) Some answers to this question lacked examples of specific sanctions and were confined to defining formal and informal sanctions. Many of the candidates were able to identify two examples of social sanctions, but needed to describe the nature of these sanctions in greater detail to gain full marks. Good answers identified two sanctions and described accurately the context in which these sanctions might be applied.
- (c) There were some answers that described the process of socialisation in general rather than focusing on children specifically. Better answers drew on material from theories and studies that consider directly the ways in which children acquire the norms and values of society. The best answers included references to the work of G H Mead, Cooley, Piaget and Oakley.
- (d) Most answers to this question demonstrated some understanding of the Marxist theory of social order. Answers at the lower end of the mark range often comprised just one or two basic points about the Marxist theory. Better answers showed a deeper understanding of the Marxist perspective. Good answers also included an assessment that considered the strengths and limitations of the Marxist approach. The assessment often took the form of a comparison with other theories of social order, including the functionalist and the interactionist.

Question 2

- (a) There were a lot of answers worth one mark that recognised that 'researcher effect' refers to a situation in which the values of the sociologists influence the outcome of the research process. Better answers noted that 'researcher effect' occurs where the responses of the research subjects are influenced by the presence of the researcher.
- (b) Some answers gained no marks because the advantages they identified applied to all types of interviews. To gain marks, the answers had to focus on advantages specific to *structured* interviews.



- (c) Many of the candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the interpretivist perspective. There were some answers that were confined to a few simple points about questionnaires. Better answers provided a more detailed and accurate account of the limitations of questionnaires. Good answers combined a summary of the limitations of questionnaires with a clear understanding of the characteristics that make interpretivists sceptical about the value of questionnaires as a research method in sociology.
- (d) There were some answers that went no further than describing different types of questionnaire. Other answers at the lower end of the mark range were confined to simply listing a few practical strengths and limitations of questionnaires in general. Better answers considered both practical and theoretical issues. Good answers kept the focus on postal questionnaires, noting several advantages and drawbacks of using this method of administering questionnaires. High quality answers often included references to the links between the use of questionnaires and different sociological perspectives.

Question 3

- (a) Many answers correctly noted that 'ascribed status' refers to a status that is inherited at birth, though some answers left implicit the meaning of the term 'status'. Good answers defined both the notion of ascription and that of status.
- (b) Most answers to this question identified correctly two ways of achieving upward social mobility. A few candidates incorrectly thought that ascribed status is a way of achieving upward social mobility.
- (c) There were some answers that defined different types of social mobility with no direct links to the question. Better answers considered factors like educational opportunity, job markets, political ideology and levels of discrimination as potential influences affecting why some societies experience higher levels of social mobility than other societies.
- (d) Most answers demonstrated some understanding of the concept of meritocracy. There were some answers that offered only personal opinion about the extent to which meritocracy exists in modern industrial societies. Better answers examined some of the relevant sociological evidence about, for example, rates of social mobility, the distribution of income and wealth, and social exclusion. There were some good answers that also included references to appropriate theoretical critiques of the meritocracy thesis. High quality answers delivered balanced and well-supported conclusions about the extent to which meritocracy exists in modern industrial societies.

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/31

Essay 2

General comments

The standard of answers continues to be maintained at the top end of the mark range but there was a noticeable tendency for many candidates to gain marks in the middle range. These candidates would do better if they included some reference to sociological research in their essays. Many candidates struggled with some of the concepts and once again there was evidence of misreading of questions, with candidates seeking to answer the question that they had wanted rather than the one set. This was disappointing, as in the majority of cases the candidates showed that they had the required knowledge but had not organised their answer in such a way that the information was directed towards the question.

In order to improve the level of performance, some candidates could organise their time more efficiently. When asked for two examples, giving three gains no extra benefit other than allowing for one to be wrong and therefore still having two potential correct answers. Also, this time, more candidates ran the identification and description of their two examples together, making it very difficult to know where to award the marks. It is much clearer to say 'one example...another example' or even to number the answers. Some answers were very long for the number of marks available: candidates need to keep answers for this part of the paper concise.

In terms of the extended essay required for **(b)**, a large number of candidates this year opted to open their answer with a paragraph which outlined what they were going to say. While this is a very admirable technique for writing answers when preparing for examinations, in the actual examination this gains the candidate no extra marks. Other answers would have been strengthened if candidates had made clearer use of the key words in the questions, such as 'dominant', 'valued' and 'usefulness'.

The other notable difference in the answers this year was in the questions attempted. As usual the first four sections were the most popular and, although every question on the examination paper was answered by some candidates, virtually no one answered from **Section E**, Work and Leisure, and very few answered from **Section F**, Mass Media.

There were a small number of rubric errors but some candidates who displayed a sound sociological knowledge for two answers then struggled to produce a convincing answer for their third. Some candidates also answered both questions from **Section A** of the paper. Some candidates who were running out of time went straight into the essay, leaving part **(a)** to the end. This is rarely a sound strategy, as it is more straightforward to score some marks quickly on a focused definition and examples than to reach the higher bands in an essay.

However, there is a growing tendency for an increasing number of candidates to display a sound knowledge of both feminist and post-modernist theories.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

As usual, **section A** was answered by the majority of candidates and, especially in the knowledge required for the essay, there was evidence of Centres having prepared candidates well, particularly with more contemporary information.

Question 1

This was answered by about one-third of the candidates who opted to answer on families and households and the majority had a good understanding of the topic.

- (a) (i) Nearly all candidates had a very good understanding of this concept, including the fact that it can be, but does not have to be, families. A few answers defined families as households or groups of people sharing a home and a very small number described houses or household goods.
- (ii) Identifying features of communes proved to be more challenging. Many clearly did not know what one was and there were many descriptions of different types of families or communities. A few used specific examples, such as the Oneida community and others the Kibbutz. Better answers featured shared norms and values or the way in which communes work together. Some answers were very long for the number of marks available. Other candidates left it blank.
- (b) This essay was well answered by most candidates but there was some evidence of candidates who had not read the question clearly and were answering a question about how nuclear families emerged or whether they were the best families to be brought up in. One point for Centres to note for future reference is that when a question, such as this, specifies 'modern industrial societies', this is what answers should prioritise. Although it may be appropriate to make passing references to historic communities, many answers covered pages with the work of Laslett, Anderson and Meade and descriptions of the Nayer society. More developed answers focused on modern industrial societies, included useful and appropriate examples indicating diversity and used the Rappaports to advantage.

Question 2

This question was popular.

- (a) (i) Gender was a well-understood concept which clearly referred to social roles, but some candidates did not link it clearly with the way societies shape these roles. A number of candidates confused gender with sex.
- (ii) Most candidates answered this clearly but some candidates with good knowledge were confused and explained how it was changing rather than why it was changing, another example of misreading the question. Nearly all candidates gave two reasons but some did not develop their explanation clearly enough for 3 marks. However, it was good to see that a number of candidates gave examples that explained why male roles are changing as well as female ones. Use of the decline in traditional masculinities was excellent.
- (b) Essays about the changing value of marriage were mostly dealt with well or excellently. A few candidates got side-tracked into who is to be blamed for any changes in the value of marriage and the supposed dysfunctional consequences of these changes, and some confused family and marriage. More limited answers confined themselves to listing reasons why marriages are failing. Again, the question referred to modern industrial societies but some candidates began their answers with Fredrick Engels and primitive communism. However, many answers were detailed and not only looked at several key factors but were also supported by reference to the work of Parsons, Fletcher, Hart and Chester.

Section B

This was a popular section of the paper.

Question 3

Very few candidates opted to answer this question.

- (a) (i) This concept was not well understood by most candidates and some who answered this question left this section blank.
- (ii) It followed that if the concept was not understood then candidates would struggle with finding examples. However, there were a number who were able to quote finding jobs in family firms, even if they had not attempted the definition in the first part.
- (b) Candidates who chose this question understood the requirements of this essay and there were a number of excellent examples that showed how education could be both an avenue to social mobility and a barrier to it. The very best of the answers gave detailed evaluation of the evidence

that was presented, including the Oxford mobility study, Bowles and Gintis, Davies and Moore and Althusser. A number of answers included little that was up to date and having more information of this kind would improve marks.

Question 4

This was a popular question.

- (a) (i) The hidden curriculum was well understood, with a very small number of responses misunderstanding the concept. Many referred to Bowles and Gintis specifically but this was not necessary to gain full marks. Several obviously did understand the concept, as they went on to give good examples, however their definitions was confused. If candidates are able to read their answers through, this should enable them to avoid such problems.
- (ii) Most clearly showed how the hidden curriculum operates, usually relying on hierarchy and authority, punctuality and obedience and rules and dress codes as their answers. A few answers described what the hidden curriculum is used for in a Marxist way rather than how it operates, another example of not reading the question accurately.
- (b) This topic is well understood by candidates and they had clearly been well prepared. There were some detailed answers that covered a range of factors, including both in-school and out-of-school factors, and supported them with an impressive amount of evidence. A few answers were weakened by only looking at the importance of in-school factors and others were confusing as they referred to ethnicity and ethnic minorities as if they were different factors.

Section C

The section on religion was more popular with candidates in this session than it has been in other recent sessions.

Question 5

Few candidates answered this question.

- (a) (i) Many candidates defined this well, frequently with reference to Durkheim, although this was not necessary in order to gain full marks. Some thought it was linked to religious toleration, whilst others failed to answer this section.
- (ii) This part of the question was well answered, although some responses were weakened by the overlap between the descriptions of the examples and some candidates confused collective conscience with social solidarity.
- (b) The essay on religion and social change was answered well by most, with weaker candidates limiting their answer to the role of religion in either preventing or inhibiting social change. More developed answers not only explored the possibilities for both, usually by reference to classical structuralist theory versus social action theory, but also then evaluated the evidence used.

Question 6

Of the two questions on religion, this was the more popular one.

- (a) (i) Many candidates were firm in their understanding of the term religiosity, whilst others realised that it was linked to religion but were unsure of the context, with many arguing that religiosity means religious.
- (ii) Whatever the weaknesses in the definition, this part of the question was answered well, with candidates offering some very interesting reasons for the decline in church attendance, including that in modern societies people no longer have to pretend to believe. A few candidates identified an example but then gave no description of it.
- (b) Secularisation is a well-understood topic and Centres had prepared candidates well for this section. The very best answers, of which there were many, not only referred to both classical and more contemporary evidence and theorists in their answers, but also were confident in their application

of post-modernism. A small number of answers argued that the world was becoming more sinful, having 'lost' religion. Others used relevant statistical data, sociological theory and used the work of Bruce, Martin and Wilson with credit.

Section D

Crime and deviance remain a popular topic.

Question 7

This question was answered by most of the candidates who selected from this section.

- (a) (i) Victim study was well understood by most but a significant number stated that these were studies of victims or those who committed crime. Some answers explained why they should be done or why they are superior to other forms of study, which was not what the question was asking.
- (ii) This was a very well-understood question, with most candidates identifying non-reporting and frequently linking it to victims being afraid, and some answers were very contemporary, quoting increased surveillance influencing the statistics.
- (b) The essays given in answer to this question were very interesting and many were excellent. A few either agreed with or rejected the proposition in the question with some support but many were able to show that this is a complex issue and some answers included a sophisticated level of evaluation. A number just outlined different sociological perspectives on crime and deviance and these did gain some credit but in order to gain higher marks this knowledge must be directed towards the question as set. Some answers limited themselves to working class crime, with no reference to the crimes of the middle class.

Question 8

This question was answered by only a few candidates.

- (a) (i) Most candidates knew that this was crime committed for profit but a few stated that it is crime that is useful for society.
- (ii) The majority of candidates correctly identified one example, such as vandalism, but many then struggled to explain a convincing second example.
- (b) Candidates who opted to answer this question showed that they had a good knowledge of the range of theories about the nature of crime and deviance but only a few gave really excellent answers in which they showed evaluation of the Marxist theories and contrasted these to the work of such key thinkers as the interpretivists.

Section E

Question 9

Very few answers were submitted for this question.

- (a) (i) Most candidates identified manual workers in their definitions.
- (ii) A few candidates identified two reasons but most appeared to be guessing or showed confusion between blue- and white-collar workers.
- (b) Some candidates argued that the post-industrial society thesis was about pre-industrial society and how it changed. Many answers to this question were short. A small number were accurate and showed an understanding of the changing nature of work.

Question 10

Very few answers were submitted for this question

- (a) (i) Most candidates who answered this question left this section blank
- (ii) Some candidates thought this meant the difference between employment and self-employment. Very few were able to identify any differences accurately.
- (b) Most responses were unsupported and agreed with the proposition uncritically.

Section F

Question 11

A small number of candidates answered this question.

- (a) (i) Few candidates defined this term accurately.
- (ii) Only a few candidates were able to define the term accurately. Some interpreted the question as requiring explanations of the differences between the different perspectives, while some thought it was censorship by governments.
- (b) The majority of responses presented the difference between conflict and pluralist views. Some showed a more thorough knowledge and understanding by developing the debate, using several relevant examples and evidence of key thinkers. The best answers contained a theoretical framework with solid examples of minority groups such as the disabled.

Question 12

This was the less popular mass media question.

- (a) (i) There were few accurate definitions of hyperreality.
- (ii) Most candidates were able to identify two purposes and demonstrated clear sociological understanding.
- (b) Those answering this question gave a brief outline of Marxist and Neo-Marxist theory and contrasted this with brief overviews of alternative theories. Some excellent answers assessed Neo-Marxist theories as well as pluralist ones but the best ones compared the different Marxist interpretations.

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/32

Essay 2

General comments

The standard of answers continues to be maintained at the top end of the mark range but there was a noticeable tendency for many candidates to gain marks in the middle range. These candidates would do better if they included some reference to sociological research in their essays. Many candidates struggled with some of the concepts and once again there was evidence of misreading of questions, with candidates seeking to answer the question that they had wanted rather than the one set. This was disappointing, as in the majority of cases the candidates showed that they had the required knowledge but had not organised their answer in such a way that the information was directed towards the question.

In order to improve the level of performance, some candidates could organise their time more efficiently. When asked for two examples, giving three gains no extra benefit other than allowing for one to be wrong and therefore still having two potential correct answers. Also, this time, more candidates ran the identification and description of their two examples together, making it very difficult to know where to award the marks. It is much clearer to say 'one example...another example' or even to number the answers. Some answers were very long for the number of marks available: candidates need to keep answers for this part of the paper concise.

In terms of the extended essay required for **(b)**, a large number of candidates this year opted to open their answer with a paragraph which outlined what they were going to say. While this is a very admirable technique for writing answers when preparing for examinations, in the actual examination this gains the candidate no extra marks. Other answers would have been strengthened if candidates had made clearer use of the key words in the questions, such as 'dominant', 'valued' and 'usefulness'.

The other notable difference in the answers this year was in the questions attempted. As usual the first four sections were the most popular and, although every question on the examination paper was answered by some candidates, virtually no one answered from **Section E**, Work and Leisure, and very few answered from **Section F**, Mass Media.

There were a small number of rubric errors but some candidates who displayed a sound sociological knowledge for two answers then struggled to produce a convincing answer for their third. Some candidates also answered both questions from **Section A** of the paper. Some candidates who were running out of time went straight into the essay, leaving part **(a)** to the end. This is rarely a sound strategy, as it is more straightforward to score some marks quickly on a focused definition and examples than to reach the higher bands in an essay.

However, there is a growing tendency for an increasing number of candidates to display a sound knowledge of both feminist and post-modernist theories.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

As usual, **section A** was answered by the majority of candidates and, especially in the knowledge required for the essay, there was evidence of Centres having prepared candidates well, particularly with more contemporary information.

Question 1

This was answered by about one-third of the candidates who opted to answer on families and households and the majority had a good understanding of the topic.

- (a) (i) Nearly all candidates had a very good understanding of this concept, including the fact that it can be, but does not have to be, families. A few answers defined families as households or groups of people sharing a home and a very small number described houses or household goods.
- (ii) Identifying features of communes proved to be more challenging. Many clearly did not know what one was and there were many descriptions of different types of families or communities. A few used specific examples, such as the Oneida community and others the Kibbutz. Better answers featured shared norms and values or the way in which communes work together. Some answers were very long for the number of marks available. Other candidates left it blank.
- (b) This essay was well answered by most candidates but there was some evidence of candidates who had not read the question clearly and were answering a question about how nuclear families emerged or whether they were the best families to be brought up in. One point for Centres to note for future reference is that when a question, such as this, specifies 'modern industrial societies', this is what answers should prioritise. Although it may be appropriate to make passing references to historic communities, many answers covered pages with the work of Laslett, Anderson and Meade and descriptions of the Nayer society. More developed answers focused on modern industrial societies, included useful and appropriate examples indicating diversity and used the Rappaports to advantage.

Question 2

This question was popular.

- (a) (i) Gender was a well-understood concept which clearly referred to social roles, but some candidates did not link it clearly with the way societies shape these roles. A number of candidates confused gender with sex.
- (ii) Most candidates answered this clearly but some candidates with good knowledge were confused and explained how it was changing rather than why it was changing, another example of misreading the question. Nearly all candidates gave two reasons but some did not develop their explanation clearly enough for 3 marks. However, it was good to see that a number of candidates gave examples that explained why male roles are changing as well as female ones. Use of the decline in traditional masculinities was excellent.
- (b) Essays about the changing value of marriage were mostly dealt with well or excellently. A few candidates got side-tracked into who is to be blamed for any changes in the value of marriage and the supposed dysfunctional consequences of these changes, and some confused family and marriage. More limited answers confined themselves to listing reasons why marriages are failing. Again, the question referred to modern industrial societies but some candidates began their answers with Fredrick Engels and primitive communism. However, many answers were detailed and not only looked at several key factors but were also supported by reference to the work of Parsons, Fletcher, Hart and Chester.

Section B

This was a popular section of the paper.

Question 3

Very few candidates opted to answer this question.

- (a) (i) This concept was not well understood by most candidates and some who answered this question left this section blank.
- (ii) It followed that if the concept was not understood then candidates would struggle with finding examples. However, there were a number who were able to quote finding jobs in family firms, even if they had not attempted the definition in the first part.
- (b) Candidates who chose this question understood the requirements of this essay and there were a number of excellent examples that showed how education could be both an avenue to social mobility and a barrier to it. The very best of the answers gave detailed evaluation of the evidence

that was presented, including the Oxford mobility study, Bowles and Gintis, Davies and Moore and Althusser. A number of answers included little that was up to date and having more information of this kind would improve marks.

Question 4

This was a popular question.

- (a) (i) The hidden curriculum was well understood, with a very small number of responses misunderstanding the concept. Many referred to Bowles and Gintis specifically but this was not necessary to gain full marks. Several obviously did understand the concept, as they went on to give good examples, however their definitions was confused. If candidates are able to read their answers through, this should enable them to avoid such problems.
- (ii) Most clearly showed how the hidden curriculum operates, usually relying on hierarchy and authority, punctuality and obedience and rules and dress codes as their answers. A few answers described what the hidden curriculum is used for in a Marxist way rather than how it operates, another example of not reading the question accurately.
- (b) This topic is well understood by candidates and they had clearly been well prepared. There were some detailed answers that covered a range of factors, including both in-school and out-of-school factors, and supported them with an impressive amount of evidence. A few answers were weakened by only looking at the importance of in-school factors and others were confusing as they referred to ethnicity and ethnic minorities as if they were different factors.

Section C

The section on religion was more popular with candidates in this session than it has been in other recent sessions.

Question 5

Few candidates answered this question.

- (a) (i) Many candidates defined this well, frequently with reference to Durkheim, although this was not necessary in order to gain full marks. Some thought it was linked to religious toleration, whilst others failed to answer this section.
- (ii) This part of the question was well answered, although some responses were weakened by the overlap between the descriptions of the examples and some candidates confused collective conscience with social solidarity.
- (b) The essay on religion and social change was answered well by most, with weaker candidates limiting their answer to the role of religion in either preventing or inhibiting social change. More developed answers not only explored the possibilities for both, usually by reference to classical structuralist theory versus social action theory, but also then evaluated the evidence used.

Question 6

Of the two questions on religion, this was the more popular one.

- (a) (i) Many candidates were firm in their understanding of the term religiosity, whilst others realised that it was linked to religion but were unsure of the context, with many arguing that religiosity means religious.
- (ii) Whatever the weaknesses in the definition, this part of the question was answered well, with candidates offering some very interesting reasons for the decline in church attendance, including that in modern societies people no longer have to pretend to believe. A few candidates identified an example but then gave no description of it.
- (b) Secularisation is a well-understood topic and Centres had prepared candidates well for this section. The very best answers, of which there were many, not only referred to both classical and more contemporary evidence and theorists in their answers, but also were confident in their application

of post-modernism. A small number of answers argued that the world was becoming more sinful, having 'lost' religion. Others used relevant statistical data, sociological theory and used the work of Bruce, Martin and Wilson with credit.

Section D

Crime and deviance remain a popular topic.

Question 7

This question was answered by most of the candidates who selected from this section.

- (a) (i) Victim study was well understood by most but a significant number stated that these were studies of victims or those who committed crime. Some answers explained why they should be done or why they are superior to other forms of study, which was not what the question was asking.
- (ii) This was a very well-understood question, with most candidates identifying non-reporting and frequently linking it to victims being afraid, and some answers were very contemporary, quoting increased surveillance influencing the statistics.
- (b) The essays given in answer to this question were very interesting and many were excellent. A few either agreed with or rejected the proposition in the question with some support but many were able to show that this is a complex issue and some answers included a sophisticated level of evaluation. A number just outlined different sociological perspectives on crime and deviance and these did gain some credit but in order to gain higher marks this knowledge must be directed towards the question as set. Some answers limited themselves to working class crime, with no reference to the crimes of the middle class.

Question 8

This question was answered by only a few candidates.

- (a) (i) Most candidates knew that this was crime committed for profit but a few stated that it is crime that is useful for society.
- (ii) The majority of candidates correctly identified one example, such as vandalism, but many then struggled to explain a convincing second example.
- (b) Candidates who opted to answer this question showed that they had a good knowledge of the range of theories about the nature of crime and deviance but only a few gave really excellent answers in which they showed evaluation of the Marxist theories and contrasted these to the work of such key thinkers as the interpretivists.

Section E

Question 9

Very few answers were submitted for this question.

- (a) (i) Most candidates identified manual workers in their definitions.
- (ii) A few candidates identified two reasons but most appeared to be guessing or showed confusion between blue- and white-collar workers.
- (b) Some candidates argued that the post-industrial society thesis was about pre-industrial society and how it changed. Many answers to this question were short. A small number were accurate and showed an understanding of the changing nature of work.

Question 10

Very few answers were submitted for this question.

- (a) (i) Most candidates who answered this question left this section blank.
- (ii) Some candidates thought this meant the difference between employment and self-employment. Very few were able to identify any differences accurately.
- (b) Most responses were unsupported and agreed with the proposition uncritically.

Section F

Question 11

A small number of candidates answered this question.

- (a) (i) Few candidates defined this term accurately.
- (ii) Only a few candidates were able to define the term accurately. Some interpreted the question as requiring explanations of the differences between the different perspectives, while some thought it was censorship by governments.
- (b) The majority of responses presented the difference between conflict and pluralist views. Some showed a more thorough knowledge and understanding by developing the debate, using several relevant examples and evidence of key thinkers. The best answers contained a theoretical framework with solid examples of minority groups such as the disabled.

Question 12

This was the less popular mass media question.

- (a) (i) There were few accurate definitions of hyperreality.
- (ii) Most candidates were able to identify two purposes and demonstrated clear sociological understanding.
- (b) Those answering this question gave a brief outline of Marxist and Neo-Marxist theory and contrasted this with brief overviews of alternative theories. Some excellent answers assessed Neo-Marxist theories as well as pluralist ones but the best ones compared the different Marxist interpretations.

