

Sociology

Advanced GCE A2 H581

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H181

Report on the Units

January 2010

HX81/MS/R/10J

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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Any enquiries about publications should be addressed to:

OCR Publications
PO Box 5050
Annesley
NOTTINGHAM
NG15 0DL

Telephone: 0870 770 6622
Facsimile: 01223 552610
E-mail: publications@ocr.org.uk

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Chief Examiner's Report

H181

This was the second year for the new AS sociology specification and both G671 and G672 saw an increase in entries. For G672, many of the entries were from re-sit candidates from the previous summer examination series. Overall there continues to be a large variation in the performance of candidates; those who attained high marks were able to demonstrate that they understood, interpreted and evaluated sociological evidence with clarity and accuracy, using a range of sociological knowledge in the form of theories, studies, concepts and contemporary examples. On the other hand, low achieving candidates had a very basic understanding of sociological evidence, tending to rely instead on anecdotal and asociological material. The term 'sociological evidence' refers to concepts, studies, data, theories, and contemporary examples and candidates are encouraged to use a range of these in order to demonstrate they have a wide-ranging knowledge and understanding. The A grade and the E grade are set at very similar levels for both the AS units, demonstrating that candidates respond to both units in a similar way. Certainly, the detailed reports included in this document suggest that, across both examination papers, candidates seem to struggle most with the skill of interpretation and application. This skill is often about responding to the specific question or context, and given that candidates cannot prepare themselves for the exact nature of the questions, this is a skill area which is challenging.

H581

This was the first examination season for the A2 papers and candidates responded to the new exam style questions in a very positive way. The vast majority of candidates answered all questions, or all question parts and the impression was that they were generally very well prepared for these examinations. G674 had a very small entry, which reflects the preferred order of most centres of teaching the content of unit G673 first, leaving the social inequality and difference unit until the end. The A2 examination papers are very different to each other: G673 requires two unstructured essay questions on one or more substantive topic areas; G674 is a structured examination paper, combining sociological research methods with social inequality and difference. They are, however, weighted equally at 50 per cent each of the A2 course.

There follows a report on each of the two units from this session, with some suggested teaching tips for teachers, focusing particularly on the skills needed to achieve success in this specification. Teachers are encouraged to read the relevant sections and to attend INSET courses during the autumn term to gain further feedback should they require it.

G671 Exploring Socialisation, Culture and Identity

General Comments

This session saw a wide range of candidate performance both between and within individual centres. There were very few rubric errors and the vast majority of candidates attempted to answer all four questions which indicates that the questions were clear and accessible to all. Most candidates allocated the use of time effectively, spending the longest on question 4 which is worth just over half marks of the whole paper. However, some candidates did experience timing issues; most commonly by spending too much time on question 1 which should be allocated approximately five minutes, or by spending too long on question 4 at the expense of the other three questions. There was also a clear centre effect on this paper. Candidates who had been prepared well, even those who were clearly of weaker ability, managed to pick up marks on all questions, by following the requirements and using sociological evidence appropriately. However, some centres did not seem to have adequately prepared their candidates either by having very little understanding of the pre-release material or armed with very little sociological knowledge for questions 1, 2 and 3.

On the whole there was a clear difference between the high and low achieving responses. At the top end, there was a range of sociological evidence contained in all answers. Such responses included relevant and detailed explanations including sociological studies, concepts and theories where appropriate. The lower achieving responses were often unable to provide sociological knowledge and understanding and their answers became very anecdotal and common sense like. Candidates must be encouraged to back up their answers with sociological evidence; be it concepts, studies, relevant contemporary examples or theory. For example, in question 2, those candidates who discussed peer group influence in terms of anti-school subcultures and referencing the work of Sewell, Mac an Ghail, and / or Willis, scored significantly more highly than those who wrote about feeling pressured into smoking and drinking alcohol.

It is worth clarifying the role of the pre-release material for this paper. The pre-release material will always be directly related to question 4 as the instructions in this question includes the directive "Using the pre-release material and your wider sociological knowledge". If candidates wish to draw upon any aspects of the pre-release material for answering questions 1, 2 and 3 this will be credited, where relevant and accurate. For example, some candidates included reference to the Archer study when answering question 3 on social class identity. It should also be stated, however, that should candidates only rely on the pre-release material, they will not score highly as their knowledge will be narrow and basic.

In terms of assessment objectives, Knowledge and Understanding (AO1) seems to be the strongest area; strong responses were able to offer a whole range of sociological knowledge, mainly in the form of concepts and studies, but sometimes making relevant use of contemporary examples and theory. AO2a (Interpretation and analysis) seemed to be the most difficult skill area for candidates; whilst many have been trained to evaluate evidence and arguments, they are less successful at interpreting knowledge and applying it to the specific question or context. For example, in question 3, candidates were able to offer good explanations of the different social classes but often failed to link this specifically to class identity.

Teaching tip: Devise a mark sheet, based on the published mark schemes that you can attach to your students work so that they are aware of being marked according to the three separate assessment objectives.

Comments on Individual Questions

Question 1

In general this question was answered poorly with very few able to achieve full marks. Many candidates had no idea as to what popular culture was and offered very generalised answers about culture or British culture or youth culture. Where candidates did have some knowledge and understanding, they often went no further than saying it was the 'culture of the masses'. Whilst this is accurate, it does not allow for full marks as such a response does not demonstrate a full wide-ranging and detailed definition. The few candidates who did attain full definition marks often included references to mass culture, consumption and / or contrasts with high culture. The majority of candidates who knew what popular culture was were able to offer accurate examples such as football, TV soaps, popular music although some examples were very generalised (for example sports, music, TV) and many didn't offer any explanation as to why their chosen example was an example of popular culture. A small number of candidates wrote far too much for this question and this usually had a knock-on effect later on in the paper, particularly with not having enough time for question 4.

Teaching tip: Question 1 is always a concept question taken from the specification content. Ensure that your students have detailed definitions and examples for each one. You could do a classroom display with them all on.

Question 2

A number of candidates answered this question very well and backed up their points with explicit and relevant sociological evidence, usually focused around peer group pressure, anti-school subcultures and / or gender identities. Such responses were able to back up their points with examples of sociological studies and concepts. Some responses chose to focus their answers around a particular identity; for example, how does the peer group influence the development of gender identities. On the whole, these type of responses were generally good and were more likely to contain references to sociological studies. Weaker responses answered this with little sociological knowledge, often giving not much more than 'peer group pressure' and the notion of 'fitting in'. This was often followed by anecdotal examples, such as pressure for young people to smoke, drink and wear the right clothes. A significant minority of candidates failed to distinguish between two separate ways and some failed to focus on peer group influence; instead using examples from education or the media. AO2a was also weak on this question as many responses failed to adequately link their knowledge of the peer group as an agency of socialisation to the notion of influencing individuals. A final characteristic of weaker responses was to assess the extent to which the peer group is an important agency of socialisation. There are no evaluation marks awarded for this question so such responses were wasting time by doing this.

Teaching tip: As a revision activity, encourage your students to be able to cite at least two studies for each agency of socialisation.

Question 3

This seemed to be the most difficult question for candidates in terms of providing relevant evidence to illustrate their answer. There were many sweeping generalisations and stereotypes, such as the working class having no parenting skills or the upper classes drinking only champagne! Many responses were, therefore, anecdotal and consequently scored very few marks. Some answers included some strongly theoretical knowledge of Marxism, yet many of these failed to link this back to the issue of identity. Some candidates did not interpret the question accurately, answering how various agencies of socialisation influence social class, rather than how social class influences identity. In order to score highly in AO2a marks, candidates needed to explicitly link their knowledge of class to the specific question of how class shapes individuals' identities. The stronger candidates had clearly been prepared for a question on class identity and were able to conceptually explain elements of the three main social classes and linking it to areas such as the family or education. For example, some good use was made of Bordieu's 'cultural capital' concept and Macintosh and Mooney's ideas of 'social closure' amongst the upper class. A number of candidates failed to include any evaluation points and it must be remembered that there are four marks available for evaluation. Stronger responses tended to include explicit evaluation points, for example, a postmodernist critique of the centrality of social class to individuals identities.

Question 4

There was a wide range of responses to this question. A key differentiator in marking this question was candidates use of the key concepts as highlighted in the specification - validity, reliability, representativeness and generalisability. Some weaker responses did not explicitly use these concepts and therefore achieved marks at the bottom of level 2. Others did attempt to use the concepts but were very confused, partial or undeveloped. To reach level 3 of the mark scheme for both AO1 and AO2b, responses needed to address the key concepts in an accurate, wide-ranging and developed way. The high achieving responses tended to systematically explain each method, offering a range of strengths and weaknesses and including key concepts. Another characteristic of strong responses was the discussion of aspects of the wider research process, for example, sampling, access, longitudinal research, ethics and the impact of these. Many candidates made good use of theory in their responses, linking Archer et al's research design to the Interpretivist tradition and offering a Positivist critique. It is clear that some students had only a basic understanding of the pre-release material; for example, stating that semi-structured interviews contain quantitative data, or that the sampling method was stratified. Teachers need to ensure that they spend some time teaching the content of the pre-release material in preparation for the exam. One real problem is in the number of candidates who waste time copying out the pre-release material and, once again, it should be reminded that this is stimulus material, not source material. The philosophy behind the pre-release material is to give candidates the opportunity to look at some real research in depth but the exam question will always require them to go wider than this; to address research issues, methods, process and concepts and using the pre release as an illustrative example. It must also be noted that twelve marks are awarded for AO2a and in the is question it is about how well the candidate contextualises their responses. The majority of students offer very generalised answers or just throw in the words 'young people' or 'school failures'. To score highly in this skill area, candidates need to be asking themselves "What is the problem/advantage of using this method for studying THIS particular group (young school failures) on THIS particular topic (identity).

G672 Topics in Socialisation, Culture and Identity

General Comments

Scripts seen this session seemed to cover a wider variety, compared to January 2009, with coverage of the range of mark bands, and with a significant number achieving the top of level three. Overall, there seemed to be a noticeably higher number of better responses than last January session.

The Family was by far the most popular option, followed by Youth, Religion and Health. An overwhelming majority of candidates chose to answer both Family questions and only a very small number of candidates opted for Health. There were a small number of scripts with rubric errors which typically answered only one question. Generally candidates used their time appropriately, producing approximately three quarters of a side of A4 for part (a) and at least two sides for part (b). Some candidates spent too long on part (a) answers and produced responses that were longer than those for their part (b) answers. Few appeared to run out of time on the second part (b) question.

Most candidates performed quite well on part (a) questions, with the majority reaching marks in level 3 of the mark scheme. The most common issues that prevented them from achieving level 4 were:

- Candidates failing to make use of sociological theories, concepts and/or contemporary evidence to develop their answer and demonstrate sociological knowledge and understanding.
- Candidates failing to fully explain their two points, often simply identifying and giving only a brief explanation.
- Candidates identifying more than two points
- Candidates identifying and explaining only one valid point
- Candidates identifying two points that overlap to such a degree that they can only be treated as one point.
- Candidates including explanations that had little relevance to the point identified
- Candidates using time inappropriately on material not required by the question, for example, by including criticisms or evidence against their explanations.

Teachers' Tip: To achieve the top band marks for part (a) questions, two points need to be identified and then explained using relevant sociological evidence including theories, concepts and contemporary evidence. It is important that candidates be encouraged to select points that will enable them to show a range of knowledge and understanding. In part (a) questions, candidates need to identify two clear and distinct factors with explanations that do not overlap. Using a separate paragraph for each point identified and explained is a useful way for candidates to be clear that they have offered two different points. Candidates should be encouraged to write between $\frac{3}{4}$ to one side of a page on a part (a) answer.

On part (b) questions weaker answers tended to suffer from the following problems:

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- Candidates had insufficient sociological knowledge and responses were mainly anecdotal or drawn from common sense. Better candidates made use of sociological theories, concepts and/or studies.
- Some candidates produced answers that were well informed sociologically but they used material that was of only marginal relevance to the question on the paper.
- Candidates failed to interpret and apply sociological data, for example statistics and findings of sociological studies or examples from current events or broader social trends.
- Candidates selected relevant data but did not apply it to the question, leaving a list-like response that did not answer the question sufficiently
- Candidates produced one-sided answers that only considered evidence agreeing or disagreeing with the view.
- Candidates produced balanced answers but these simply juxtaposed arguments or evidence with little explicit evaluation. Better candidates offered critical comments, weighed up arguments and evidence and drew a reasoned conclusion about the view.
- A number of candidates wrote part (b) answers that were little longer or even shorter than their part (a) answers. Candidates should be aware that part (b) requires a response that is at least twice as long as part (a), reflecting the marks allocated.

The skill of knowledge and understanding was the one where candidates were most able to achieve the top mark band. To do this they needed to include a wide-ranging and detailed knowledge and understanding of sociological evidence and clearly present knowledge of counter arguments.

Teachers' Tip: To achieve the highest marks in the skill of knowledge and understanding candidates need to include sociological evidence i.e. theories, studies, concepts and/or accurate contemporary evidence on various sides of the argument. They need to show a detailed understanding and so must learn as much about the evidence as they can to be able to write about it in an informed way. Teachers should aim to select teaching material that will best facilitate this process.

The skill of interpretation and application seemed challenging to a number of candidates, some of whom were able to produce responses with sound knowledge and understanding of relevant concepts, studies etc. but which were not applied effectively to the question. Some simply listed evidence without reference to the question while some responses were characterised by their superficial, anecdotal approach. For example, responses to question 1(b) often had good knowledge and understanding of diversity, but didn't link this explicitly to postmodernism.

Teachers' Tip: To achieve the highest marks in the skill of interpretation and application candidates need to select and apply different types of data including theories, concepts and/or contemporary evidence on various sides of the argument. Candidates should aim to identify the most relevant data and then show how this relates to the question, highlighting patterns and trends, supported with evidence where appropriate. Using phrases like 'This study shows that...' can encourage application to the question.

The skill of analysis and evaluation is a testing area for candidates. Analysis involves breaking down an argument to gain a clearer understanding. This is an essential stage in the evaluation process. Most candidates offered some evaluative comments. However, a large number of candidates evaluated by juxtaposing arguments and theories without any exploration of strengths and weaknesses of evidence. A sustained evaluative approach throughout the answer should be aimed for, with candidates adopting an evaluative tone from their introductory

paragraph onwards. Some candidates produced responses that only gained marks for evaluation in the concluding sentences whilst others evaluated only one side of the view.

Teachers' Tip: Candidates should be encouraged to write in a way that shows that they have engaged with the views involved in the question and which shows they have got to grips with these views. This process produces an in-depth understanding of sociological data that will then enable candidates to construct a clear set of arguments and an evaluation of these arguments. A sustained evaluative approach can be demonstrated by candidates writing an evaluative introduction, making some pertinent evaluative points about studies, theories and ideas, and summarising the different views in relation to the question. The candidate should aim to evaluate specific sociological arguments from more than one side of the view, based on the available evidence, methods and explanations. Candidates could be encouraged to use key evaluative terms that signal that they are evaluating the evidence or the argument at that point e.g. 'however', 'on the other hand', 'conversely', 'on the contrary', 'in contrast'.

Overall, candidates fulfilled the requirements in terms of quality of written communication, producing work written in continuous prose and with clarity of expression, although there were a noticeable number of candidates with significant spelling, punctuation and grammar errors.

Comments on Individual Questions

OPTION 1 - Sociology of the Family

Question 1

(a) Nearly all candidates succeeded in identifying two reasons but the depth of explanation in many candidates' answers was more limited. The most commonly cited explanations were changing role of women, increase in cohabitation and secularisation. Other factors cited were changing expectations of marriage, the growth of singlehood, improved contraception and the high cost of marriage. A significant number of candidates discussed the increase in divorce but many failed to explain how this had led to a decline in marriage, better answers on this theme pointed to fears of divorce acting as a deterrent to marriage. Very few candidates produced fully developed answers using concepts, theories and/or studies but the best answers tended to be on changing role of women often using research by Sharpe on changing women's attitudes and Wilkinson's concept of 'genderquake'. Some candidates also referred to concepts such as confluent love (Giddens) and individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim).

(b) Answers to this question tended to be either narrow but with a fair amount of detail or broad but rather unsubstantiated. The former category often focused almost exclusively on gender issues with some focusing entirely on debates about conjugal roles with only passing reference to parents and children. Some answers looked in detail at research on fatherhood citing studies such as Dermott, Thompson and the EOC but neglected other aspects of change. Other candidates looked briefly at a range of issues such as child centredness, single-parent and reconstituted families, changing gender roles, social policy issues and child protection but failed to develop their points or offer substantive sociological evidence. Better answers covered a range of issues and supported them with evidence such as Postman, Furedi, Phillips, Grundy & Henretta and the 'sandwich generation'. Some candidates ignored the last 30 years and focused on broader historical changes, sometimes claiming that 30 years ago children were sent out to work at an early age (up chimneys!) and were treated as mini-adults. In general, answers on this question were stronger on knowledge and understanding but evaluation was weaker in the majority of scripts with many candidates struggling to offer counter-arguments.

Question 2

(a) Most candidates were able to identify two characteristics, though a small number of candidates offered two points which were virtually identical, for example citing Murdock's 4 functions and then Parsons' 2 essential functions as different characteristics. Weaker answers often contained little explanation, for example citing a division of gender roles and then simply explaining that the father was the breadwinner and the mother was the homemaker. Typically, such responses failed to explain the characteristics as they related explicitly to the nuclear family as opposed to other family types. Better responses developed the point, e.g. by using concepts such as instrumental and expressive roles and evidence from functionalism and/or feminism in support. Other characteristics identified related to family structure, the importance of children and socialisation and the notion of the ideological norm/cereal packet family.

(b) Surprisingly few candidates were able to show any detail in their understanding of postmodernism. Weaker answers often hardly referred to it and simply outlined other theories of the family. Some candidates assumed that anyone who was critical of the nuclear family or the ideology of familism was a postmodernist, citing writer such as Barrett and McIntosh and Giddens as postmodernists. The best answers made use of concepts such as fluidity, choice and the declining influence of tradition on personal relationships. Some also referred to a breakdown in the importance of traditional identities such as class, gender and ethnicity and role of the media and consumption in contemporary personal life. Better responses tended to cite studies such as Stacey, Pakulski and Waters, Weeks, Giddens and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, though few candidates were able to distinguish between theories of reflexive modernity and theories of postmodernity. Most candidates had some understanding of family diversity; weaker responses often only referred to one or two examples for example lone parent families. Better answers made use of material on same sex relationships, reconstituted families, beanpole families and class, gender and ethnic diversity. Many candidates struggled to evaluate postmodernism, sometimes producing lengthy summaries of functionalist and New Right arguments and simply stating that they were in favour of the nuclear family. Better responses used this kind of material to highlight the alleged problems of diversity e.g. Murray and Dennis and Erdos's work on lone parent families. Some candidates also pointed to the continuity of traditional family forms e.g. using Chester on neo-conventional families, feminists on patriarchy or material on the persistence of traditional structures based on class or ethnicity.

Question 3

(a) Very few scripts seen. Some candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of two different ways of defining health and typically referred to those drawn from bio-medical and social constructionist approaches. There were also some strong answers that cited positive and negative views of health. Others struggled to distinguish between two different definitions and simply outlined issues affecting health.

(b) Very few scripts seen. A significant number of candidates who answered this question were unclear in their understanding of structural factors and simply outlined what they knew about gender inequalities in health in general. A small number of candidates were able to distinguish between different explanations and could, as a result, produce a response that included an evaluation based on an analysis of the different explanations. Very few answers, however, used a wide range of supporting evidence and so failed to reach the level 4 mark band.

Question 4

(a) Very few scripts seen. Responses to this question tended to be quite poorly organised with only a generalised outline that did not identify distinct ways. In such cases, candidates listed related issues and some offered supporting evidence. Better answers typically identified

labelling and racism as their two ways and supported these with examples. Very few candidates used studies to develop an explanation in their answer.

(b) Very few scripts seen. Most candidates showed a clear understanding of the question and typically used examples of discriminatory practices to support the view in the question. Better answers offered a more in depth discussion and drew on the work of Oliver, Shakespeare etc as supporting evidence. Counter arguments tended to be neglected or less developed and a number of candidates did were only awarded A&E marks from level 2.

Overall, answers to health questions tended to lack empirical data.

Question 5

(a) Few scripts seen. Weaker candidates tended to confuse NAM and NRMs and produced inaccurate responses. Better answers focused on features such as concern with spirituality rather than religion, use of non-scientific healing therapies and commitment to ecology.

(b) Few scripts seen. There were a number of strong responses that demonstrated wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of relevant theory. Weaker answers typically focused on one or two theories of religion e.g. functionalism and Marxism with little supportive evidence or evaluation. Better answers included material on religion's role in social change e.g. Weber, neo-Marxism and as a conservative force citing functionalism and Marxism. Fundamentalism and feminism was also included in some answers. The best responses made some attempt to explicitly evaluate the different approaches while weaker ones simply juxtaposed different explanations.

Question 6

(a) Few scripts seen. Better responses pointed to factors that might make older people more religious e.g. proximity to death and more time for religious activities, though few answers were well developed. Some candidates got sidetracked into discussion of how class, gender and/or ethnicity affected religion and failed to fully address the question. A few stronger answers cited empirical evidence on children's religiosity and the influence of secularisation.

(b) Few scripts seen. There were some very good responses that engaged well with the question and drew on a wide range of supporting evidence for both sides of the discussion. Such answers were often well informed conceptually and empirically and typically referred to disengagement, disenchantment, spiritual shopping, Bruce, Wilson etc. in support and religious revival, religious fundamentalism, Davie, Heelas etc in opposition to the view. Weaker answers tended to be more one-sided or lacked sociological evidence to support arguments.

Question 7

(a) A range of responses was seen. Weaker answers tended to either briefly identify two features such as dress and rebelliousness with an example of a youth style used to illustrate. It seemed that some candidates had little real understanding of the concept of 'spectacular youth subcultures' and simply referred to what they knew about youth subcultures in general. Some such answers were quite lengthy but tended to be descriptive of specific youth subcultures rather than to explain features of spectacular youth subcultures. The best answers were characterised by more conceptual and theoretical approaches e.g. using concepts such as resistance, magical solutions, bricolage, exaggeration etc.

(b) Answers to this question were well differentiated. Weaker response tended to be both common-sensical and unsociological or only considered one or two explanations with little depth of explanation. Some candidates focused on more general theories of youth subculture rather than specifically on explanations of youth and deviance. Some candidates were very

knowledgeable and produced lengthy summaries of different explanations but these were sometimes list like and lacking in analysis and evaluation. The best answers combined a variety of explanations with references to sociological studies and offered sustained and explicit evaluation. A very broad range of explanations was covered in different answers including functionalist e.g. Eisenstadt, CCCS, left realist (Lea and Young), labelling (Becker), edgework, status frustration, Messerschmidt's work on masculinity among others.

Question 8

(a) There were some very strong answers to this question with candidates drawing on a variety of studies such as Mac an Ghail, Shain, Archer, Sewell, Jackson, Willis and Mirza. Some of the better answers were more conceptual and made use of concepts such as resistance, status frustration and labelling. Quite a few candidates pointed to factors such as class, gender and ethnicity as a basis for anti-school subcultures. There were also a surprising number of quite poorly answered responses. While most candidates were able to point to two reasons, many answers were rather vague on, for example, peer pressure and status and only superficially explained the reasons.

(b) Most candidates showed at least a good understanding of this question and there were a fair number of very well informed responses exhibiting high-level responses on all three skills. The majority were able to point to the way in which females had been excluded from traditional research. Better answers were able to cite examples e.g. the work of the CCCS and to discuss feminist critiques. Many candidates then used material such as McRobbie and Garber's work on bedroom subcultures in evaluation, highlighting the existence of research on girls. Better answers often also looked at more recent research on girls in subcultures e.g. Shain, Blackman, Jackson, and Lincoln etc. Some candidates also drew on postmodern arguments e.g. Polhemus and Bennett to argue that issues of gender (along with class and ethnicity) were of less significance among contemporary youth. Generally the skill of evaluation was clearly exhibited in this question although some candidates offered only a narrow and brief discussion. Some candidates also struggled to organise their response and listed all that they knew and felt relevant in some way but failed to really engage with the question.

G673 Power and Control

General Comments

Most candidates performed to a good standard and displayed a wide ranging knowledge base with a sound understanding of studies and concepts. The majority of candidates were able to apply this knowledge to the options they had selected although sometimes this tended towards a generalised approach to the topic rather than to the specifics of the question set. This particularly applied to the application of theory to the questions where many candidates displayed a general understanding of theories but did not explain how the theory related to the particular question.

This generalised knowledge was also in evidence with the application of historical knowledge and understanding which added very little to the analysis of the particular issues relating to the question. This historical knowledge was particularly present in responses to questions on education where developments in the 1940s were often described in considerable detail but with a lack of application to the demands of the particular question. Differences within perspectives still caused problems for some candidates in this session with Marxism and feminism being common examples of the failure to acknowledge developments and differences within broad perspectives. Where a particular perspective or explanation was highlighted in the question, some candidates referred to any sociologist they could remember and related them to the perspective. This was most noticeable in question 1 on interactionism.

Some candidates were able to describe a very wide range of studies and writers but often this detracted from their analysis of this material given the time constraints of the exam. This meant that they did not achieve as highly as their knowledge deserved as they were not able to explain the significance of the material selected in sufficient depth. Candidates should be encouraged to consider exactly why they are including a particular study in relation to the actual question set.

There was less entirely tangential material in this session with most candidates applying their knowledge and understanding to the question. A minority of candidates missed key words or phrases in the question, however, and therefore only addressed the specifics of the question now and again. This was particularly true in question 6 where developments since 1988 were discussed but issues relating to equality of opportunity were only briefly addressed by some candidates. This suggests an element of 'question spotting' where pre-rehearsed material was applied regardless of the demands of the question. Many candidates, however, were able to apply their material to the specifics of the question in a sustained way.

Interpretation and application was a weaker skill area for most candidates although stronger responses continually related theories, concepts and studies to the question. Candidates should be encouraged to consider the material they have included in terms of how it relates to the question. Reflection in terms of asking themselves 'so?', 'therefore?' 'how does this answer the question?' should be encouraged.

Interpretation of concepts in relation to contemporary examples/events was stronger in this session demonstrating the ability to relate sociological knowledge to current events. Sometimes, however, this tended towards over-long anecdotes which were not sourced in any way. When media sources are used they should be identified clearly rather than 'I watched a programme on the television which showed...'

Often local knowledge was displayed which demonstrated a thoughtful application of material to the question. This can be helpful in drawing out social policy differences, for example between England and Wales. However, often the examples were not sourced and became impressionistic.

There remains a tendency for candidates to use relevant material in terms of statistical evidence but to fail to source the evidence. This was particularly the case in relation to question 4 on social class inequalities.

Evaluation and analysis was the weakest skill area which was often entirely based on the juxtaposition of theories or studies. Key words and phrases were utilised more often, for example, 'however', 'on the other hand' 'an alternative view is suggested by....' but it was not always clear what the nature of the evaluation was. Candidates should be encouraged to consider the precise criticism being made when stating that someone disagrees with a concept/theory/study. Methodological evaluation, in particular tended to be imprecise with a common tendency to state that a particular study lacked validity and/or reliability with no explanation as to why this was the case. These concepts were sometimes used incorrectly. It should be noted that compared to unit 2536 on the legacy specification, greater weighting is given to these AO2b (evaluation and analysis) marks and candidates need to be thoroughly prepared in using explicit evaluation.

The responses of some candidates were unbalanced with more material failing to address the specifics of the question than material which did. Sometimes this material could have been utilised to evaluate but was not explicitly used in this way and therefore became tangential.

Positive evaluation was more evident this session with stronger responses indicating how more recent studies support a more dated theory or concept or study.

Candidates should be encouraged to evaluate throughout their responses rather than the, still too common, leaving of evaluation to the end of essays. Weaker responses tended towards assertion and opinion in terms of evaluation with a lack of supporting evidence or theory.

Stronger responses used their conclusions to suggest further areas for research, and to demonstrate possible gaps in sociological knowledge or the dated nature of sociological explanations given contemporary trends or events.

The planning of essays continues to improve with fewer lengthy plans which use up valuable time. Many plans were coherent and logical with evidence that candidates were referring back to them and using them to structure their essays.

Some introductions were too long and generalised again using up valuable time in establishing historical contexts or attempting to define terms which were not central to the question or which are rather obvious.

The length of some introductions created problems for some candidates who otherwise demonstrated a sound knowledge which they were able to apply to the question but then ran out of time. This was particularly evident in over-long descriptions of the difference between crime and deviance in questions 1, 2 and 3.

Candidates should continue to be encouraged to proof-read their essays as many simple errors could be eradicated, for example confusing right and left realism in question 3 when often it appeared to be merely a slip of the pen!

Most candidates appeared to have utilised the full hour and a half and there were very few rubric errors. Some rubric errors were present with candidates either attempting three questions or only one.

The most popular questions were, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, with a large majority of candidates attempting these options, namely Education or Crime and Deviance.

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Some responses were very unbalanced, usually with very wide-ranging answers to the first questions and then followed by brief responses to the second question.

Candidates should be encouraged to practice writing essays under examination timescales to ensure they do justice to both questions attempted.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

Generally well answered with most candidates focussing on labelling and crime / deviance, relating this to concepts such as 'master status', self-fulfilling prophecy and subcultures. Few candidates discussed interactionism beyond labelling, however, many candidates focussed on the problematic nature of the official statistics on crime.

Some candidates failed to address interactionism in any depth and wrote at length about other approaches without linking these to the question or using other perspectives to evaluate interactionism.

It was pleasing to note some contemporary examples of classic interactionist focus, such as Fawbert's research into hoodies as a moral panic.

Question 2

This was a popular question, although many candidates only examined gender in relation to female offending. The main perspective examined was feminism, although differences within feminism were rarely discussed.

Some weaker responses failed to engage with gender and tended towards generalised accounts of crime relating to social class, ethnicity and age.

There were some excellent responses, however, which fully engaged with the question and were able to discuss a range of issues, for example comparing the 'chivalry thesis' with other perspectives relating to the treatment of female offenders.

Candidates should be reminded that an essay on gender relating to crime does not mean female crime only.

Question 3

This question produced a variety of responses, weaker answers frequently showing confusion between left and right realism. Policies were often not well understood and were simply listed with no analysis or evaluation. For example ASBOs were often mentioned but with no discussion beyond their success/failure expressed as assertion. This was a common trend in this question where studies supporting or questioning particular policies were often lacking.

Debates around policies of early intervention and/or prevention were often not articulated. Stronger responses demonstrated an impressive knowledge of some newer policies such as restorative justice.

Question 4

Many candidates had a sound understanding of social class inequalities and interactionism discussing classic key studies of Becker, Keddie, Rosenthal and Jacobson and Hargreaves.

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Some candidates, however, wrote generalised accounts of explanations for social class inequalities not focussing on interactionism. Other candidates claimed any sociologist as being an interactionist in an attempt to answer the question!

Evaluation tended to be quite weak in many responses with juxtaposition of different approaches and studies rather than direct evaluative points.

Question 5

A range of responses was seen. Weaker responses did not engage clearly with the issue of vocational education. Most candidates interpreted this question as Marxist theory of the role of education. Those candidates who did this, whilst focusing on vocational education and the idea of exploitation often scored highly, recognising for example, that Marxists such as Bowles and Gintis regard all education as vocational in a sense.

Many candidates responded with very generalised discussions around exploitation, discussing Marxist and Functionalist views but without real application to vocational education.

Many dated initiatives were covered such as TVEI but few candidates seemed to have knowledge of more recent initiatives such as modern apprenticeships.

Question 6

A significant number of candidates wrote at length about changes prior to 1988, focussing on the 1944 Act and the Tripartite system. 'Comprehensivisation' was often discussed as a post-1988 initiative!

There was considerable confusion between equal opportunities and equality with candidates often using these terms interchangeably. Some responses failed to directly address the issue of equality of opportunity.

Many candidates were aware of the issues, however, and were able to outline and evaluate policies but often without reference to evidence / statistics.

Stronger responses were very detailed and often explicitly discussed changes since 1988 in relation to the drive towards improved standards and contrasting this with equality of opportunity.

Question 7

Some candidates failed to discuss males in relation to gender stereotypes and issues around 'masculinity' were often not well understood.

The wording of the question was often overlooked with a tendency to focus on gender stereotyping rather than the argument that the mass media 'no longer reinforce gender stereotypes'.

Weaker responses tended towards assertion and anecdote with many contemporary examples of gender stereotyping but a lack of studies/evidence.

However, stronger responses displayed an impressive knowledge of a range of studies and theories related to the question.

Question 8

This was not a very popular question and candidates who did attempt it frequently wrote little about pluralism but focussed on other perspectives, particularly Marxism. There was often a lack of empirical evidence to support the points being made. Most responses focussed on television and newspapers with little discussion about the Internet.

Stronger responses demonstrated a sound knowledge of pluralism and alternative perspectives with the utilisation of key concepts such as horizontal and vertical segregation.

Question 9

Most candidates had a sound knowledge of different models of media effect but often this was not discussed in relation to issues of direct or indirect effect.

Sometimes there was an overuse of anecdotes unsupported by studies/evidence. Many candidates failed to distinguish between approaches within a particular perspective and this was frequently apparent in relation to Marxism.

As in question 8 there was little discussion about the Internet compared to the emphasis given to television and newspapers.

In evaluation, the stronger responses questioned the 'directness' of media effects and linked this to other theories, such as pluralism, postmodernism and neo-marxism.

Question 10

This was not a popular question although there were some very strong responses with a clear understanding on new social movements displayed. There was often a focus on the distinction between old social movements relating to economic interests, such as trade unions and new social movements relating to environmental issues. Particular NSMs were discussed in depth to demonstrate the expression of cultural values.

Weaker responses tended to write generalised accounts of NSMs without reference to either cultural values or economic interests.

Question 11

This was also not a popular question. Stronger responses focussed on issues around the decline in membership of political parties, changing voting patterns and examples of direct action.

The distinction between indirect and direct political action was often well understood and stronger responses were theoretically focussed.

Weaker responses were generalised and sometimes anecdotal without really engaging with the question.

Question 12

This was also not a popular question although generally well answered with a focus on theoretical perspectives relating to the distribution of power.

Weaker responses tended to be assertive with a lack of empirical evidence.

G674 Exploring Social Inequality and Difference

General Comments

Candidates were entered for this paper for the GCE A2 Exploring Social Inequality and Difference module for the first time this session. It is pleasing to report that the standards attained were generally very good; candidates and centres are to be congratulated on their achievements.

The paper is designed to test candidates' knowledge and understanding of social inequality and difference, as well as the connections between sociological theory and methodology. The latter is set within a contemporary research context described in Source Material.

The paper is synoptic and linked to the core themes of power, social inequality, socialisation, culture and identity. In addition the paper tests candidates' ability to interpret and evaluate sociological theory, evidence and research.

From the evidence of the scripts, the source material and questions were easy to comprehend and understood well by candidates of all abilities. The vast majority of candidates were able to respond to the questions appropriately and demonstrate positive achievement. The paper also differentiated successfully.

In Section B, Question 3 on social inequality was far more popular than Question 4 on age inequality.

Candidates seemed to have sufficient time for the tasks. The vast majority completed all of the questions within the time allocated. There were very few rubric errors; only a very few candidates incorrectly attempted both of the optional questions.

However it is worth noting that some centres had clearly advised candidates to attempt first questions with higher mark allocations. Whilst this strategy might help some candidates to focus attention on those parts of the paper where gaining marks is statistically more likely, an uneven allocation of time significantly different to the proportion of the marks awarded per question is not helpful. There was evidence of some candidates being penalised by giving a disproportionate amount of time to the questions with most marks at the expense of the others. As a result the overall pattern of marks awarded was likely to be skewed and reduce overall performance. There is no doubt that the best examination technique is to allocate time in proportion to the marks and not to neglect any of the four questions required by the rubric.

In general, candidates seemed to benefit from careful and thorough preparation for this examination by centres. They had clearly undertaken stimulating, well designed courses that were effective in developing the skills to be tested. In addition, examination technique was generally sound.

To improve examination technique in this paper, in general candidates should be encouraged to:

- Answer the question set, refer back to the question regularly and come to a conclusion; this especially helps candidates to demonstrate the skill of interpretation
- Use a variety of different forms of sociological evidence, which may be empirical studies, data, concepts, theory and contemporary examples
- Refer to sociological concepts, studies and theory wherever relevant
- Evaluate theories and research strategies by referring to both strengths and weaknesses
- Avoid simple assertion without evidence or argument, opinion and anecdotal evidence

Comments on Individual Questions

Question 1

The majority of candidates answered this question well, revealing a good knowledge and understanding of case studies and their uses in sociological research, drawing upon the information in the source material and their own background knowledge from across the Specification to illustrate their responses.

Most candidates understood that case studies are a detailed examination of, or research into, a specific example of a social phenomenon or group, often using a range of methods. The aim of case studies is usually to describe, understand and explain the nature and characteristics of the particular 'case' to emphasize and relate its relevance to the social phenomenon, group as a whole, or more general issues.

Usually the sample for the case study will be small and regarded as 'typical'. Detailed focus on the sample using a range of methods is generally regarded as providing high validity. Triangulation and checking of data and interpretations through different or the use of multiple methods may contribute to higher validity.

The method is most often associated with interpretive and ethnographic approaches to social research. Candidates generally referred to concepts such as:

- meanings and experiences
- interpretive
- ethnography
- verstehen – empathic understanding of beliefs, values and culture
- empathy
- rapport
- qualitative data analysis

Issues of reliability and generalising are often associated with the case study method; many candidates discussed these issues in this context. The impact of case studies on the quality of data gathered was also discussed by some candidates, referring to the issues of:

- value freedom
- objectivity
- subjectivity
- sample size
- subject and researcher biases
- respondent validation
- researcher imposition

Ethical issues were raised by many, for example of permission, access, control over the disclosure of information and confidentiality, and the potential impact on the lives of the children studied in the source material.

Candidates generally used data from the source material for illustrative purposes and/or from other sociological sources, from material associated with this unit, as well as other units in the Specification. Uses and examples usually related to sociological research, for example the work of James Patrick, Ann Oakley and Eileen Barker.

The best responses related their responses clearly and systematically to the source material, using the research by Zoya Mustafa to illustrate their answers.

Question 2

The majority of candidates answered this question very well, revealing a good knowledge and understanding of observation in sociological research and related methodological issues, drawing upon the information in the source material and their own background knowledge from across the Specification to illustrate their responses.

Observation within sociological research is generally seen as the gathering of data by directly watching and recording the behaviour of people, usually, but not exclusively, in their everyday lives and in natural settings. Observation may be open (overt) or hidden (covert), participant (direct) or non-participant (indirect).

The best responses discussed the use of observation for the research problem in the source material – that of the experience of homelessness, and its impact on aspects of social life for young people, like family relationships, education, health and leisure.

Candidates generally referred to methodological issues and concepts such as:

- interpretive approaches
- qualitative methods
- realist approaches
- empathy
- reflexivity
- subjectivity and objectivity
- target population
- sampling
- seeing reality of social life
- developing rapport
- sensitivity to disadvantage and potential exploitation
- subjects maintaining control over what they say and disclosure

Most candidates discussed at least one or two advantages and disadvantages of observation as a research method and related this to the context of the question, that of the experience of homelessness, and its impact on aspects of social life for young people.

Candidates tended to refer to methodological issues and concepts such as:

- the influence of researcher values on the quality of data gathered, its interpretation and subsequent uses
- reflexivity
- objectivity
- subjectivity
- sample size effects
- representativeness
- generalisability
- validity
- reliability
- respondent validation
- desirable responses
- observer effects
- researcher imposition
- subject and researcher biases
- fitness for purpose

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- access to sample
- gatekeepers

Ethical issues were also raised, for example of permission, access, control of information and data, confidentiality, and the potential impact on the lives of those studied.

Question 3

(a) Candidates tended to draw upon their knowledge and understanding of patterns of social class inequality from different units within the Specification. Aspects of social class inequality that were most likely to be identified and discussed were:

- education
- employment
- income and wealth
- health and welfare
- housing
- political power
- mass media
- patterns of crime and deviance

The following concepts were most frequently discussed:

- class
- upper, middle and lower classes
- status
- power
- poverty
- income and wealth
- social exclusion
- marginalization
- dual labour markets
- class and culture
- access to power and political representation

Candidates tended to refer to writers such as:

- Westergaard and Resler
- Scott
- Lansley
- Lockwood
- Goldthorpe
- Giddens
- Bourdieu
- Savage et al
- Pakulski and Waters
- Townsend

Many responses described theoretical explanations for social inequality that emphasise the importance of social class, including Marxist, neo-Marxist and Weberian. Economic, social and cultural capital arguments were offered to explain social inequality by a few. Alternative theoretical explanations of social inequality and difference were also explored and/or juxtaposed, for example functionalist, feminist and post modern. The impact on social inequality of ethnicity,

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gender and age was compared or contrasted with social class, as well as the intersection/interrelationship of these dimensions, by some candidates.

Candidates were most likely to outline theoretical evidence and make some reference to empirical studies. Some introduced relevant data and contemporary examples to good effect. The most effective responses made appropriate use of all these types of sociological evidence.

Candidates gaining marks at the highest levels of response tended to describe how social class affected a range of different areas of social life supported by several different types of evidence, including empirical studies, data, concepts, theory and contemporary examples.

(b) Candidates were expected to outline and assess functionalist approaches to explaining social inequality. Most candidates were able to describe these approaches at least simply with a few relevant concepts. The best did so comprehensively in a wide ranging and detailed manner.

The following concepts tended to be identified and discussed:

- norms
- shared values
- integration
- role models
- function
- social system
- meritocracy
- role allocation and performance
- rewards
- functional prerequisites/necessities/importance
- consensus
- structure
- social order
- class
- status
- power

Candidates tended to refer to writers such as:

- Durkheim
- Parsons
- Davis and Moore
- Tumin
- Merton
- Marx
- Pukulski and Waters
- Walby
- Weber
- Giddens

Social inequalities in different aspects of social life were used to illustrate answers, such as education, employment, income and wealth, health and welfare, housing, political power, and patterns of crime and deviance.

Alternative theoretical explanations of social inequality and difference were often explored and/or juxtaposed, for example Marxist, neo-Marxist, Weberian, feminist and post modern. The impact

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on social inequality of ethnicity, gender and age was occasionally compared or contrasted with social class, as well as the intersection/interrelationship of these dimensions.

In assessing functionalist explanations of social inequality, candidates presented a range of strengths and/or weaknesses and compared this approach to other theoretical positions. The most frequent arguments included:

- emphasises social structure and consensus
- highlights social order
- useful to understand common patterns across different societies
- difficult to assess and measure functional importance
- underplays dysfunctions and inequality of opportunity
- neglects conflict, power and status
- neglects social action and interpretive approaches
- neglects gender, age and ethnicity
- postmodern critiques – fractured identities; social networks

Many candidates compared and contrasted alternative theoretical explanations, for example Marxist, neo-Marxist, feminist, Weberian and post modern. Some simply described and juxtaposed different theoretical approaches. More effective responses used alternative approaches to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of functionalism and evaluated in a sustained and explicit manner throughout. The best responses also tended to conclude the answer with a specific, clear assessment of functionalism.

Question 4

(a) Candidates tended to draw upon their knowledge and understanding of patterns of age and disadvantage in general and from different units within the specification. Candidates usually addressed the relative advantages and disadvantages of childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age. Aspects of age and disadvantage that were most likely to be identified and discussed are:

- access to education and training
- employment
- income and wealth
- health and welfare
- housing
- political power
- patterns of crime and deviance
- portrayal within and use of the media

Candidates mainly discussed differences between age groups; some focused on one age group in particular. The following concepts tended to be discussed:

- occupation and access to paid work
- education and training
- status
- power
- social exclusion
- marginalization
- leisure and culture
- youth culture
- youth transition

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- access to power and political representation
- ageism

Candidates referred to writers such as:

- Laslett
- Aries
- Townsend and Walker
- Parsons
- Vincent
- Oakley
- Hockey and James
- Jefferson
- Hebdige
- MacRobbie

Many responses described theoretical explanations for age inequality, including Marxist, neo-Marxist and Functionalist. Economic, social and cultural capital arguments were offered to explain social inequality by a few. Alternative theoretical explanations of social inequality and difference were also explored and/or juxtaposed, for example Weberian, feminist and post modern. The impact on age inequality of ethnicity, gender and social class was compared or contrasted with age, as well as the intersection/interrelationship of these dimensions, by some candidates.

Candidates were most likely to outline theoretical evidence and make some reference to empirical studies. Some introduced relevant data and contemporary examples to good effect. The most effective responses made appropriate use of all these types of sociological evidence.

Candidates gaining marks at the highest levels of response tended to describe how age affected a range of different areas of social life supported by several different types of evidence, including empirical studies, data, concepts, theory and contemporary examples.

(b) A number of different sociological approaches to explaining age inequality were outlined. Most candidates were able to describe one or two approaches at least simply with a few relevant concepts. The best described several comprehensively in a wide ranging and detailed manner.

The following concepts tended to be identified and discussed:

- Socialisation
- Transmission
- Norms and Values
- Social Roles
- Independence
- Transition
- Political economy of age
- Class
- Status
- Power
- Socio-economic differences
- Subcultures
- Identity
- Disengagement

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Candidates also referred to sociological writers such as:

- Functionalist – Parsons; Eisenstadt; Hockey and James; Cumming and Henry
- Conflict – Marx; Bond; Briggs and Coleman; Townsend; Vincent; BCCCS
- Feminist – Oakley; Firestone; Gannon; Wyness
- Interpretive – Prout and James; Hockey and James
- Postmodern approaches – Pilcher; Featherstone and Hepworth; Blaikie; Jenks; Mayall

Different theoretical explanations of age inequality and difference were explored and/or juxtaposed, usually those listed above. The impact on age inequality of ethnicity, gender and class was compared or contrasted with age by some candidates, as well as the intersection/interrelationship of these dimensions.

Candidates usually compared and evaluated different sociological explanations of age inequality, presenting a range of strengths and/or weaknesses of these approaches. The main arguments/issues tended to include:

- theory may be applied to many societies – universalistic
- emphasizes social structure and stability/social action and change
- helps us to understand changes/transitions between different stages in the life cycle
- too positive/negative a view of different ages – omits conflict/consensus perspectives
- may not recognize impact of gender, class and ethnicity
- may not analyse how people develop meaning and identities in a culturally diverse and changing society

More effective responses highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches and evaluated in a sustained and explicit manner throughout. The best responses also tended to conclude the answer with a specific, clear assessment of one or more theoretical approaches.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE Sociology H181 H581
January 2010 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
G671	Raw	100	70	62	54	46	38	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G672	Raw	100	68	61	54	47	41	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G673	Raw	100	72	62	52	42	33	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G674	Raw	100	73	64	55	46	37	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (i.e. after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
H181	200	160	140	120	100	80	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
H181	12.9	33.7	58.0	82.2	98.0	100	536

536 candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums/index.html>

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

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Facsimile: 01223 552627

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Facsimile: 01223 552553

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