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Examiners' report

SOCIOLOGY

H580

For first teaching in 2015

H580/03 Summer 2024 series

Contents

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Paper 3 series overview

Paper 3 comprises Section A, which is compulsory, with 2 sources and 3 questions, and Section B which contains 3 options with 3 questions in each. The paper is demanding, with several different question styles, sources, and extended responses.

Candidates who performed well in the compulsory Section A on Globalisation and the Digital Social World showed engagement with the questions and a good understanding of their requirements. All three questions caused confusion for some candidates in different ways, detailed below. The sources were utilised well by many and helped some to focus their responses. However, some used content from the sources indiscriminately, either recycling whole sections or using sentences from the sources which did not have any clear link to the point being made. More successful responses included a range of sociological studies and contemporary examples to support points made and maintained good focus on the questions. As in previous series, centres are advised to encourage candidates to read Questions 1 and 2 before starting their answers, since the sources contain points which are relevant to both, and some candidates were clearly distracted by parts of the sources which were not relevant to the question they were tackling, which led to confusion.

In Section B, the three options provided similar challenges for candidates, in that some of the questions were quite narrow in focus. In all Section B questions, a range of developed points is needed, and there is an expectation that detailed and accurate knowledge and understanding of sociological evidence will be demonstrated. In the 20- and 40-mark questions an extended response is expected, with explicit and direct evaluation of the main view which goes beyond the juxtaposition of alternative views. Candidates who did well were able to clearly select and present relevant and accurate sociological knowledge in a way which demonstrated full understanding. There was a tendency this year for some candidates to present very general responses, perhaps pre-prepared, which did not really engage with the specific demands of the question set.

It was still common for technique to impact on marks given in some cases. Some candidates are still presenting long introductions, which define terms such as globalisation, crime or deviance. As mentioned in previous reports, a brief introduction which identifies the view in the question and the debate surrounding it can provide useful focus, but in general, introductions gain no credit. Similarly, summative conclusions which repeat all the views already discussed add little if anything to the overall marks. A fully critical conclusion which makes a judgement, can be creditable in the higher tariff essays, but only gains full credit if it introduces a new idea or angle on the debate.

Most candidates seemed prepared to present evaluation in the longer essays, although some still left it out in Question 2. Most evaluated by using alternative theories or views to challenge the view in the question. However, although fewer candidates presented juxtaposed views which had no evaluative link to the view in the question, alternative views were still often just descriptive, and lacked direct focus on how the alternative view differs from and criticises the view in the question. Evaluation is clearly a skill which many candidates struggle with.

> **Evaluation**
>
> Centres should encourage candidates to highlight the differences between the theories they are presenting and show why and how an alternative view would disagree with the view in the question.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• allocated their time effectively, completing all questions in appropriate detail • structured their responses to focus on the question set and used good technique • selected and fully explained relevant sociological theories and studies and included an appropriate range of point • included well developed and focused evaluation points where relevant.	• demonstrated a lack of knowledge, relying on common-sense based points • showed confusion relating to the questions set and the knowledge required • lacked focus on the question set, instead presenting generalised responses or irrelevant material.

Section A overview

This section caused problems for some candidates. Many showed a lack of understanding of the specific terms used in Questions 1 and 3 and some also misinterpreted the focus of Question 2. Candidates who were well-prepared often used relevant contemporary examples and sociological studies to support their points and question technique appeared to be better this year, with most candidates understanding where to include evaluation and how to use the sources.

Question 1*

1*   With reference to the source(s) and your wider sociological knowledge, explain media convergence.   [9]

The term 'media convergence' is on the specification, and yet there was clearly a lack of familiarity with the term, with many candidates just assuming it meant the spread of digital media. The sources, especially Source A, seemed to help some candidates to focus their answers, but the lack of understanding became evident in the scattergun approach of some who recycled large quantities of source material in the hope that some of this may prove relevant. Often such candidates focused on surveillance and anonymity online, led by Source B, without recognising that this was more relevant to Question 2. As mentioned, it would be helpful to candidates if they read both Questions 1 and 2 before starting their answers, and identified which parts of the sources were most relevant to each.

Those candidates who did understand the term often scored well, with the most successful responses focusing separately on technological convergence, relating to content converging onto one device, and on economic convergence, relating to the smaller number of companies who now dominate digital media. There were sections in the sources which related to each of these, although candidates often used them indiscriminately, without really considering whether they had picked the most relevant part to support the point they were trying to make. Those who showed a good understanding were usually able to support points made with sociological evidence, including sociologists such as Boyle or Cornford and Robins, concepts such as platform imperialism and/or examples such as FAANG (Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google) and the different social media platforms they own and examples of the range of functions that can be carried out on a smartphone or watch. Since the question was potentially narrow, we accepted responses which referred to positive and negative impacts of media convergence, rather than just describing what media convergence means. However, these needed to stay focused to be credited, and responses which simply described various impacts of digital media, with no clear link to convergence, were not credited.

Exemplar 1

1		

Within Source A, it states how "multi-media and multi-functional devices" have become "embedded into our everyday" lives which explains how media convergence has led to [~~unification of~~] easier access of a range of media. For example, Boyle discusses how previously media was accessed through varying devices but how media convergence has led to it now all being accessible through one device, most typically a mobile phone. Therefore, the Source explains how media convergence has led to the creation of multi-functional devices that allow access to a range of media.

Within Source B, it explains how "inter-connected devices" have "made it easier to collect data about our everyday lives" which explains how media convergence has led to the surveillance of people's internet use. For example, Fuchs discusses 'Big Data Capitalism' in which people's data has been commodified to be bought and sold by major corporations and governments as a way for the ruling class to survey [~~out~~] the lower classes. Therefore, the Source explains how media convergence has led to the interconnection of devices and therefore more easily accessible data.

Exemplar 1 is a full mark response to this question. It demonstrates a clear understanding of the term, makes two clear points supported with evidence and selects appropriate parts from the sources to link to each point. Although, in the second point, the candidate refers to surveillance, which would be seen as more relevant to Question 2, they do stay focused on media convergence, by referring to interconnected devices, showing this as a negative impact of media convergence, so they gained full credit.

Question 2

2   With reference to the source(s) and your wider sociological knowledge, evaluate the view that the digital revolution has increased opportunities to monitor personal information.   **[10]**

Most candidates understood the debate required for this question, finding help from the sources, and realising that it was about companies and governments monitoring individuals and their data when they go online. Many of those who understood this produced excellent responses, utilising examples such as Edward Snowden's whistleblowing report into US Government surveillance of individuals, and the scandal involving Cambridge Analytica's misuse of Facebook data. Other approaches used Marxist ideas about surveillance and control, including Fuchs, Bagdikian and Cornford and Robins, and ideas from Foucault about increased surveillance, even though these were not always focused on digital technology. Some effectively used examples such as tracking cookies and algorithms leading to targeted advertising.

In evaluation, many candidates picked up on the point made in Source B about privacy and anonymity online, linking it to the Dark Web, human trafficking, anonymity in virtual communities and ideas about cyborgs. Others focused on the ability to reject cookies and enhance privacy settings to keep data safe, end-to-end encryptions on some apps such as WhatsApp, and the use of VPNs.

However, some candidates misinterpreted the question, assuming it meant individual's ability to monitor their own information, or that of others, such as keeping up with friends. Although this was not the intended focus of the question, such responses were credited if explained well, and such candidates often used Bjorkland's ideas about creating an autobiography, and examples of sharing and tracking information across different apps. Another issue for some candidates was that instead of engaging with a debate relating to the view in the question regarding increased opportunities, they created their own debate about whether surveillance is a good or a bad thing. This usually meant they could not be fully credited since they lacked focus on the question.

The technique for this 'mini essay' required two points on each side of the debate, and at least one reference to one of the sources. There were still many candidates who did not include any evaluation, losing all 4 AO3 marks, although this seemed to be fewer than in previous series.

Question 3

3 Evaluate the view that globalisation has led to a homogenised culture. **[16]**

The debate about whether developments in digital communications have led to cultural homogenisation, or, alternatively, hybridity or defence, is a key part of this topic, many candidates appeared to be unprepared for this. A clear understanding of the meaning of the term 'homogenised culture' was lacking in many responses, with some candidates writing at length about definitions of globalisation and missing the focus of the question. Those who did recognise that a homogenised culture related to sameness most commonly referred to ideas of Americanisation or Westernisation to support the view, with some supporting this with Fenton or Seabrook and linking to the term cultural imperialism, and others linking to Friedman. However, more commonly candidates attempted to apply McLuhan and ideas about globalisation creating a global village. This is not directly relevant to cultural homogenisation, and was used with varying degrees of success, with some just writing about becoming more connected, thus not really engaging with homogenisation, but others taking this further to show how it could result in cultural sameness, and thus gaining more credit. Another commonly used, and misused, source of evidence was Ritzer and McDonaldisation. Only a tiny minority of candidates understood the concept of McDonaldisation correctly. This suggests that this term is being taught incorrectly across many centres. However, if McDonaldisation was used, albeit incorrectly, to show that global culture and big brands are creating a homogenised culture, this was given credit.

In evaluation, the best responses referred to alternatives to homogenisation, often referring to Hall's identification of cultural hybridity and cultural resistance or defence. Examples were often well used to illustrate these processes, and glocalisation, linked to Robertson or Martell, was also often successfully used with examples including Bollywood, variations in McDonald's menus based on cultural differences and so on. References to Giddens' ideas on reverse colonisation and Mohammadi's rejection of homogenisation as too simplistic were also frequently seen. However, there was a lot of confusion for many candidates, with some assuming that hybridity and homogenisation were the same thing, and others attempting to use reverse colonisation as an example of homogenisation, and then evaluating this with Americanisation. Some candidates misunderstood the question completely, and instead of focusing on culture, wrote at length about identities or relationships. This is clearly a debate within this topic which some centres would do well to focus more time on.

Centres should prepare candidates for the technique required by this question due to the distribution of marks across the assessment objectives. Three points of evaluation challenging the view in the question are required to reach the top band for AO3, although two points on knowledge supporting the view is enough for full marks for AO1. Although many candidates did use this technique, there were a significant number who either just gave two points on either side, or did not evaluate at all, losing a number of marks.

Misconception

? McDonaldisation does not refer to the spread of multi-national companies such as McDonald's around the world. Ritzer's concept refers to the spread of rational business practices embodied by McDonald's, including calculability, predictability, efficiency and control. These ideas can be applied to digital technology and social media, but this concept is clearly being mistaught or misunderstood by many centres and candidates.

Section B overview

There were few, if any, rubric errors and most candidates appeared to select and stick to the option for which they had been prepared. Most candidates seemed to understand the requirement for evaluation in the 20- and 40-mark essays, although a few also included evaluation in the 10-mark question, suggesting that they were not clear on the appropriate question technique. Juxtaposition, instead of developed evaluation, was sometimes a problem, and was particularly seen this year in Questions 6 and 9.

Crime and deviance was, as in previous series, by far the most popular option, with Education second. However, Religion, belief and faith is clearly chosen by several centres, although after an increase last year, the number seemed smaller this year.

Most candidates appeared to understand the questions on their chosen option, though there were issues with some questions, detailed below.

Question 4*

OPTION 1

Crime and deviance

4*   In what ways can middle-class criminals avoid detection and punishment?   **[10]**

There were several approaches to this question, and most candidates were able to score well. The most popular points made included a focus on why white-collar crime is less visible and not socially constructed as crime, often using Croall or Gordon. This was sometimes separated from a more general Marxist point about crimes of the powerful often being described as 'avoidable killings' rather than murder, and so being taken less seriously, often supported by Box, Tombs or Snider. The better responses used examples to support such points. Other common points were made relating to the police and media focus on working-class crimes, and the view of the 'typical criminal', and how this allowed middle-class criminals to escape detection. Commonly used sociological evidence for such points included Cicourel, Chambliss (saints and roughnecks), and studies relating to labelling of working-class crime, such as S. Cohen. Most candidates were able to successfully apply such evidence to address the question about the middle-class escaping attention due to such stereotyping. Some also made a link to ethnicity and crime here, and if they clearly explained how ethnicity and social class are often linked, they were credited. Less successful responses stuck to very common-sense based ideas about bribing the police or about connections and status, but most candidates were able to gain some marks.

Question 5*

5* Assess the view that left-wing solutions to crime are effective. **[20]**

Most candidates knew some left-wing solutions to crime and were able to explain and evaluate these in varying levels of detail. The most popular solutions included multi-agency working, consensual policing, rehabilitation and restorative justice, although these were often merely named rather than described in any detail. Specific examples of initiatives to promote rehabilitation, for example, were rarely seen. However, some candidates wrote well about measures designed to prevent crime by improving social inclusion and equality, including examples such as educational initiatives including examples such as SureStart Centres and the Perry pre-school project. Such ideas were often also linked to left realist explanations for crime, such as relative deprivation and marginalisation, and good links were made to explain why such solutions may be effective. This was less well done for other left-wing solutions. Many used Braithwaite's ideas on reintegrative versus disintegrative shaming, although this was often presented as a policy in its own right, instead of being linked to restorative justice or rehabilitation policies. Some appeared slightly confused by the wording of the question and presented strengths and weaknesses of such policies in terms of their effectiveness without explaining what the policies entailed.

Evaluation usually came from making a contrast with right-wing policies. The most successful responses contrasted similar policies to highlight the difference in approach to prevention or punishment, for example, and were engaged with showing why the right-wing approach may be seen as more effective. Less effective were those who picked right-wing policies at random to describe, when these bore no relation to the left-wing policies just discussed. For example, if discussing rehabilitation and restorative justice as left-wing punishment policies, it would be more relevant to use right-wing punishment policies to challenge these, rather than prevention-focused policies such as situational crime prevention which are not directly comparable.

A minority of candidates confused left-wing and right-wing, either completely, or in places, suggesting a lack of understanding of the two approaches.

Assessment for learning

It is a good idea to split solutions to crime into prevention, punishment and policing/control (3 Ps), for both left-wing and right-wing approaches, and to help students to contrast the two approaches under each of these headings. When evaluating in essays, the appropriate policies are then more likely to be chosen, which would make evaluation more relevant and focused.

Exemplar 2

Another left wing solution to crime is 'restorative justice'. This is developed again by Braithwaite, who argues this is an effective solution to crime. This method includes building a relationship between the criminal and the victim in hoping to address the victims concerns and achieve a sense of justice. It also aims to prevent re offending. This is arguably an effective solution to crime as Shapman found that 85% of victims who took part in restorative justice programmes, felt they achieved a sense of resolution. Therefore, this left wing solution to crime is arguably effective.

However, Right wing solutions around criticise the effectiveness

of left wing solution's as they argue that harsher punishments need to be taken. For example, in the USA, there is a 'three strikes and your out rule' which means once you have been in prison three times, you are denied parol. Arguably, right realists would see this as a more effective solution to crime as it ~~increase the prison population poly~~ aims to ~~reposition by~~ reduce the number of re offenders and catch the 'real criminals'.

In Exemplar 2, these two paragraphs were both just enough to be credited as developed, but both could be improved further. The first outlines a left-wing solution, focusing on restorative justice, linked to Braithwaite and supporting with evidence from Shapland (they write Shapman but we accept who they mean). There is obviously more they could have written, but for a 20-mark essay this was just detailed enough. Then they evaluate this – there is a linking sentence and then they explain right-wing punishment solutions – these are directly comparable to the point on restorative justice, so it was a well selected right-wing comparison. This could have been made more directly evaluative, explaining exactly why right-wing theories would see these harsher punishments as more effective than restorative justice, but it was just about engaged enough to be credited as developed for AO3. These paragraphs could be used with students to rewrite and improve further.

Question 6*

6*   Evaluate the view that the main cause of crime and deviance is labelling.   **[40]**

This was a narrow question, so a lenient approach was taken in terms of allowing a range of interactionist and neo-Marxist ideas, and also those who applied labelling to ethnicity, social class, age and gender. Most were able to explain Becker's ideas on labelling, the self-fulfilling prophecy, master status and a deviant career, but with varying degrees of detail and accuracy, and some linked the former ideas more to education than to crime and deviance. Other popular sociologists included: Lemert, with ideas on primary and secondary deviance, although these were not always well explained or linked to labelling; Cicourel, often including ideas on typifications and negotiations of justice; Chambliss, with his study on the Saints and the Roughnecks, and various studies on deviance amplification and moral panics, linked to labelling, including Young, S. Cohen and Hall. Less successful responses tried to link labelling to explanations which do not refer to it, for example suggesting that the working-class boys Albert Cohen discusses are labelled, causing them status frustration, or that Chares Murray would argue that the underclass are labelled, showing confusion between different explanations.

In evaluation, a range of alternative explanations were used, which needed to be fully linked back to challenge labelling to gain full credit. Most commonly, Merton's Strain theory, subcultural explanations and Marxist explanations were used as alternatives to challenge labelling. Some direct criticisms were also seen, including the failure to explain the original reason for the deviance, failure to explain criminality which is not labelled (e.g. white-collar crime), labelling being too deterministic or being too sympathetic to the criminal, were also seen, and if detail and examples were used these could be fully credited. Many candidates used functionalist views about crime being functional for society as evaluation, but this is not focused on a cause of crime and deviance, so is not relevant as a challenge to the view in the question. Similarly, those who tried to use feminist arguments about why females do not commit crime or apply Adler's ideas to suggest that female liberation is a main cause of crime were not creditable. Candidates should be encouraged to focus on the question and plan the evidence they choose to apply rather than just list all the theories they can remember in a question like this.

Assessment for learning

When reviewing the various theoretical views on crime and deviance, encourage students to group them into those who are explaining why crime is committed and those who are focused more on the role of crime, how it is viewed or how it is changing. Practice selecting the most appropriate material to use to evaluate each view on crime and how it can be used to directly challenge the selected view.

Question 7*

OPTION 2

Education

7*   In what ways have educational policies since 1988 increased competition between schools? **[10]**

This question was generally well done by most candidates, although the focus on *how* the policies chosen increased competition between schools was sometimes implicit or unclear. The most common approach was to select three different policies and explain how they linked to increased competition. Popular policies included league tables, Ofsted and formula funding. These policies were often linked to New Right concepts such as marketisation and parentocracy and were generally well explained and focused. Less commonly chosen policies included academisation, specialist schools and the national curriculum, but all were used and applied successfully by some candidates. Less relevant policies which were sometimes chosen included pupil premium, EMA and EAZs which candidates struggled to convincingly link these to increased competition between schools, sometimes losing focus and referring to reducing inequalities instead.

Question 8*

8*   Assess the view that the role of education is to produce an obedient workforce.   **[20]**

Although this question was intended to focus on Marxist views on the role of education, many candidates applied functionalism, including Durkheim, Parsons and Davis and Moore, as a sociological view agreeing that the role of education is to produce an obedient workforce. Some candidates made this work and were fully credited for applying this material, if they focused on the question – usually by linking conformity to obedience. Many candidates, however, chose to apply Marxist sociologists such as Bowles and Gintis and Althusser, and this was also a successful approach. Paul Willis' study 'Learning to Labour' was variously used to either support or refute the view in the question, and again, both approaches were successful for some candidates. Candidates who did less well on this question struggled to engage with the idea of an obedient workforce, producing seemingly pre-prepared responses about the role of education, or about vocationalism, and struggling to make these fit with the question.

Functionalist views were sometimes successfully used in evaluation, as were Social Democratic views such as Halsey, and feminists, arguing that the role of education was to reinforce patriarchy rather than to create an obedient workforce. Such alternative views needed to be evaluatively linked to directly challenge the view in the question, or at the very least, contrasted at the beginning and end of the point.

Assessment for learning

Create, or get students to create, example questions which do not specifically mention the name of a theory, such as this one in Question 8. Encourage students to practice interpreting and 'decoding' such questions, and working out which theories would support, and which would refute the view. This will avoid panic in exams, when students are faced with a 'view' rather than a named theory.

Question 9*

9* Evaluate the view that material factors are the main cause of differences in educational achievement. **[40]**

It was clear that some candidates had been prepared for an out-of-school factors versus in-school factors, debate, and the narrow focus on material factors led some to struggle to find enough relevant knowledge in support of the view in the question. Most were able to present some relevant evidence, with Smith and Noble, Blandon and Gregg, Howard, Platt, Flaherty and Callender and Jackson proving to be the most used sociologists. Less successful responses listed material factors but were unable to support this with sociological evidence. Evidence related to the digital divide was also seen, with some candidates using evidence from Section A, including Helsper and the digital underclass, and Mertens and D'Haenens. This was fully creditable if linked to the impact on educational achievement, and some made good links to the Covid-19 pandemic in relation to this. Some tried to link material factors to other factors, for example, using Bourdieu and linking economic capital to cultural capital, or using labelling by referring to pupils being labelled for being poorly dressed, for example. This was sometimes successful, but some candidates lost focus on the relevance of material factors and ended up merely juxtaposing alternative explanations.

Some less successful responses struggled to understand what material factors meant and related it to parental attitude or pupil subcultures in responses which were very confused. Others wrote very little on material factors but wrote at length on various other explanations for differences in achievement, often just juxtaposing these with each other, with no focus on the question. The nature of the question allowed alternative explanations based on gender or ethnicity to be used, but to be credited as evaluation, they needed to be clearly linked to challenge the importance of material factors to explain differences in educational achievement.

Exemplar 3

9

One way in which material factors are the main cause of differences in educational achievement of different between classes is through the threat of debt. For example, Callendar and Jackson discuss the 'fear of debt' in which working class students are 4x less likely to apply to university over fears of not being able to pay back student loan. Therefore, material factors are the main cause of ~~contribute to~~ class differential achievement as working class students are put off from gaining higher qualifications such as degrees.

However, inside of school factors are in reality the main cause of differences in educational achievement of different classes due to labelling. For example, Becker discusses how the middle class students are most likely to be labelled the 'ideal pupils' which can develop into a self-fulfilling prophecy in which these middle class students live up to their label. Therefore, a reason as to why inside factors such as labelling are the main cause of class differential achievement as they aid the development of middle class students

Moreover, material factors are the main cause of differences in educational achievement between ethnic groups as it means a lack of resources. For example, Smith and Noble discuss 'Financial Barriers to learning' in which lower class families can't afford textbooks or computers or even independent desk space which correlates to 'ethnic minorities as sociologist Palmer found 50% of BAME ~~students~~ households are low-income families. Therefore, material factors are the main cause of ethnic differential achievement as ethnic minorities are more likely to lack educational resources.

However, in dispute of this it is cultural factors that are the main cause of differences in educational achievement between ethnic groups. ~~the~~ For example, Driver and Ballard discuss how British-Indian parents place a great degree of emphasis on the importance of educational success, similar to Archer and Francis who discuss how British-Chinese's student identity is built on educational success, which may provide reason for DfE 2019 statistics of Chinese students having a 64.2% Attainment 8 Score compared to 39.6% for Black Caribbean Students. Therefore, cultural factors instead of material factors are the main cause of ethnic differential achievement.

Exemplar 3 starts with a knowledge paragraph, using Callender and Jackson – this was a little brief for a 40-mark essay and could have been better explained and linked to material factors, so was on the cusp between developed and underdeveloped. The next paragraph is AO3, but although it makes an evaluative link at the beginning, it is largely focused on describing the alternative explanation, in the case using Becker and labelling. There is no engagement or clear link back to fully challenge the view in the question, merely an assertion at the end that it is inside factors, so this was credited as underdeveloped. The next knowledge paragraph uses Smith and Noble and was well explained and links to ethnicity using Guy Palmer as support, so this is a developed knowledge point. The final evaluation point shown continues to focus on ethnic underachievement but offers cultural factors as an alternative. This time, the candidate does focus back on the view in the question at the end, with a sentence saying that it is cultural factors and not material factors which are the main cause. This was just enough to lift this to a developed evaluation point – although it could still have been much more directly engaged. It is worth encouraging students to make sure they engage with how any alternative view challenges the view in the question, ideally throughout their point, but at the very least they should do this at the beginning and end of the point, as this final paragraph does.

Question 10*

OPTION 3

Religion, belief and faith

10* In what ways do sects differ from other religious institutions? **[10]**

Most candidates were able to gain marks on this question, showing understanding of what sects are and making comparisons with other institutions such as churches, denominations and cults. The technique for this question, as for the other two options, is to outline three distinct 'ways'. In this question it was common to see candidates listing lots of ways all in one point, rather than separating them out and exploring each in more detail which inevitably impacted on the marks gained. The most common ways identified included being world-rejecting rather than world-accommodating or affirming, having a charismatic leader rather than a more hierarchical and bureaucratic structure, being small and often short-lived and claiming a monopoly on truth, unlike denominations. The best candidates were able to explain some of these differences and make direct comparisons to other institutions to show how they differed, and often referred to sociologists such as Troeltsch, Weber or Wallis. Examples were fully creditable as sociological evidence, and candidates often used the Branch Davidians and People's Temple. Candidates who merely listed the characteristics of sects and did not make any comparisons with other religious institutions were not fully credited, since they were not addressing the question.

Question 11*

11* Assess the view that religion is a negative force in society. **[20]**

This question caused few problems for most candidates, who recognised that Marxists and feminists were the theories most likely to agree with the view, and often used functionalists and sometimes neo-Marxists or postmodernists to challenge the view. Because it was a simple debate, with an 'either/or' approach, evaluation was usually well-focused and well developed. Some candidates struggled to include detail in their knowledge paragraphs, with a lack of named sociologists affecting the level of credit which was given. For example, many referred to feminist views and gave examples of the lack of female leaders in most religions, but fewer were able to apply feminist sociologists to support these arguments, such as Daly or de Beauvoir. Similarly, some candidates wrote repetitive paragraphs about Marx's ideas but did not apply other Marxist sociologists, such as Althusser, to widen their debate, or expand on Marx's ideas to create clearly separate points. Ideas from Weber and Gramsci were sometimes used to support the view and sometimes to challenge it – either approach was creditable if clearly applied. Some candidates highlighted the negative impact of religion as a catalyst for conflict, using examples, which was creditable, although usually lacking in enough sociological evidence to be fully developed.

In evaluation, many cited functionalist accounts of religion as a force for good, reinforcing moral guidelines and creating social solidarity. If such material was well linked to directly challenge the view in the question it tended to gain full credit. Some highlighted how religion has been a positive influence in addressing inequality, referring to neo-Marxist ideas of social change, Liberation Theology in South America and examples such as the civil rights movement and Martin Luther King. Postmodernist ideas about choice, often linked to NAMs were also used as a challenge to the view in the question. Some candidates also explicitly evaluated earlier negative ideas, especially relating to feminism, for example by challenging the idea of veiling as oppressive and patriarchal, and stating that it can be seen as liberating, or by presenting more positive feminist views of religion, including the Goddess movement and ideas about matriarchal religion. More common-sense-based evaluation focused on the idea that religion can give comfort and meaning to people's lives.

Question 12*

12* Evaluate the view that religion has declined in importance.   **[40]**

This essay was challenging for some candidates, with many not seeming to recognise that it was related to the secularisation debate, focusing on whether religion is important, rather than whether its importance is declining. Some candidates tried to use theories such as Marxism or feminism to argue that religion was still important as a form of oppression, essentially repeating material used in Question 11, and not engaging with the idea of decline. This was not creditable. For example, using Marx to say that religion is still important does not work as an argument, given when Marx was writing. Functionalism and Durkheim were similarly used, with the same outcome. It is important that candidates understand the idea of religious decline as being part of the secularisation debate and not linked to theories on the role of religion, which is a separate area of the specification.

Those candidates who did understand the focus of the question often used evidence from Bruce, Voas, Wilson, Martin and Brierley, alongside statistical evidence, to support the view in the question and argue that secularisation is occurring. In evaluation, most used Davie's ideas on believing without belonging and vicarious religion. Many also referred to the rise in NAMs and NRMs, often using Heelas and Woodhead and linking to postmodernism. Some also took a more global perspective and challenged the Eurocentric nature of the secularisation argument, referring to the continued and growing importance of religion in the US and in other parts of the world and the rise of fundamentalism, and well as the resurgence of Christian denominations, such as Pentecostalism, among immigrant groups in the UK alongside growing membership of non-Christian faiths.

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Reviews of marking

If any of your students' results are not as expected, you may wish to consider one of our post-results services. For full information about the options available visit the OCR website.

Access to Scripts

We've made it easier for Exams Officers to download copies of your candidates' completed papers or 'scripts'. Your centre can use these scripts to decide whether to request a review of marking and to support teaching and learning.

Our free, on-demand service, Access to Scripts is available via our single sign-on service, My Cambridge. Step-by-step instructions are on our website.

Keep up-to-date

We send a monthly bulletin to tell you about important updates. You can also sign up for your subject specific updates. If you haven't already, sign up here.

OCR Professional Development

Attend one of our popular professional development courses to hear directly from a senior assessor or drop in to a Q&A session. Most of our courses are delivered live via an online platform, so you can attend from any location.

Please find details for all our courses for your subject on **Teach Cambridge**. You'll also find links to our online courses on NEA marking and support.

Signed up for ExamBuilder?

ExamBuilder is a free test-building platform, providing unlimited users exclusively for staff at OCR centres with an Interchange account.

Choose from a large bank of questions to build personalised tests and custom mark schemes, with the option to add custom cover pages to simulate real examinations. You can also edit and download complete past papers.

Find out more.

Active Results

Review students' exam performance with our free online results analysis tool. It is available for all GCSEs, AS and A Levels and Cambridge Nationals (examined units only).

Find out more.

You will need an Interchange account to access our digital products. If you do not have an Interchange account please contact your centre administrator (usually the Exams Officer) to request a username, or nominate an existing Interchange user in your department.

Need to get in touch?

If you ever have any questions about OCR qualifications or services (including administration, logistics and teaching) please feel free to get in touch with our customer support centre.

Call us on
01223 553998

Alternatively, you can email us on
support@ocr.org.uk

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