

**A LEVEL**

**Examiners' report**

# **SOCIOLOGY**

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**H580**

For first teaching in 2015

**H580/02 Summer 2024 series**

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## 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.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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## Paper 2 series overview

The paper was differentiated effectively, the full range of the mark scheme was used, and many candidates attempted all set questions on the paper.

Some candidates were able to score exceptionally high and it was pleasing to see a number achieving over 100 marks, suggesting that the paper enabled candidates to apply their knowledge and skills in sociology in the best possible way.

Time continues to be a constraint, and, in some cases, candidates ran out of time leaving partially answered essays or missing out a short response question. In addition, some candidates did not number questions clearly, accurately or labelled additional answer booklets, this can make it challenging for examiners to identify where one question ends and another begins. As previously stated in examiners reports, paragraphing can also be a strength, candidates who use connectives and separate paragraphs to explain each knowledge point are more likely to fully develop an idea, whereas those who write in one continual chunk are more likely to jump between ideas which are more likely to be undeveloped or underdeveloped due to switching between knowledge points.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consistent and accurate use of sociological evidence used explicitly to support their knowledge point</li> <li>• depth of understanding/explanation of sociological evidence</li> <li>• explicit engagement with the use of Source material (Section A) to support knowledge points</li> <li>• clearly structured answers, using connectives and paragraphs</li> <li>• clear focus on the specifics of the question.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inaccurate or no use of sociological evidence</li> <li>• misinterpreting questions, not focusing on the specifics of the question</li> <li>• dropping in sociological evidence without explaining the relevance</li> <li>• in Section A, continually copying out the question or Source title</li> <li>• repetition of ideas, rather than developing them</li> <li>• illegible handwriting, examiners unable to decipher sentences and or meaning.</li> </ul>

## Section A overview

This section contains four compulsory questions which refer to either Source A or B. In Questions 3 and 4, to reach the higher mark bands, candidates are expected to use methodological evidence and/or perspectives such as validity and reliability. As discussed in previous reports there is no requirement to refer to alternative methodologies or sociological studies.

### Question 1

- 1 Summarise **two** conclusions which could be made about income inequalities in the UK using the data in **Source A**. [4]

Most candidates were able to accurately summarise two conclusions. To achieve full marks, good answers typically made some kind of comparison such as between the income of different groups or between the different types of income within one group, sometimes commenting on the fact that lowest group received more income from benefits and the highest group paid more in tax. Good answers quoted data from the source accurately to support each of their conclusions.

Candidates who were less successful typically did not back up their conclusions with accurate data. In some cases, data was simply absent, while in others, data was inaccurate. For example, many candidates suggested that the original income of the bottom 20% was under £20,000. While some approximation was accepted this is a long way from the figure on the chart which is probably nearer £4,000.

Some candidates confused income and wealth, for example, stating that the top group had the most wealth rather than the most income.

### Explanations of Inequality

There is no requirement in this question to offer sociological reasons and/or evidence as to why there are income inequalities. Some candidates focused on reasons why income inequalities exist from a Marxist perspective for example, rather than focusing on summarising evidence in the source.

### Assessment for learning



Use short source extracts as plenaries to reinforce learning from the lesson. For example, when studying functionalism and education, use an extract on GCSE results and social class, in pairs, summarise two conclusions linking to a Question 1 on the exam paper. This prepares them for Question 1 style questions, but then asks them to take it further (preparation for further questions), for example candidates could explain how this supports or disagrees with the functionalist perspective of education. This would help to then develop a wider range of skills.

## Exemplar 1

1		One conclusion is that the bottom 20% of the population own the least original <del>in some</del> income compared to the top 20%. For example, the bottom 20% earn around £5,000 of original <del>net</del> income whilst the top 20% earn around £119,000 of original income.
		Another conclusion is that out of all of the groups, everyone earns the most in gross income. For example in the <del>the</del> 3rd group, they earn £40,000 in gross income and roughly £32,000 in net and original income. In the 2nd group, they earn roughly £29,000 in gross, but £19,000 in original and £22,000 in net income.

In Exemplar 1, the candidate has clearly identified two conclusions and supported each conclusion with clear and accurate evidence from the source.

A clear full mark answer.

## Question 2

- 2 With reference to **Source B**, explain **two** reasons why sociologists might conduct interviews with groups. [6]

In this question, candidates need to identify two reasons why sociologists might conduct interviews with groups and then support their answer with evidence from Source B.

For AO1, candidates were able to use their knowledge of interviews and apply this to group situations and although not explicitly on the specification in the form of 'group interviews', candidates demonstrated their ability to use their knowledge and apply it to this situation. There were also several points in the source which addressed this and could be used by candidates. Some of the most frequent reasons were:

To achieve rapport because people would feel more relaxed and open up in a group (application: the use of co-researchers meant that subjects felt comfortable being interviewed by other local residents who were from the same age group).

To achieve validity/verstehen because in a group people would relax and reveal their true feelings (application: people opened up about quite personal issues such as tensions between the 'born and bred' and the incomers).

To provide themes which could guide questioning in subsequent individual interviews (application: examples to show how living in the area had changed over time and perceptions of community life).

To achieve a larger and more representative sample because several people could be included in each interview (application: Fifty-eight people were covered in seven interviews).

Most candidates who focused on interviews within a group situation were able to cite two reasons, but a significant number of candidates did not achieve AO2 marks on one or both points because they did not use material from the source to support one or both points. For AO2, candidates either copied parts of the question or the title of the source rather than engaging with the material itself. In some instances, there was no reference to the source. Answers which achieved high marks included discussing the number of participants in each group, ability to use the themes and issues from the groups in the individual interviews, or noting specific issues that were discussed in the group demonstrating levels of rapport and comfort in their discussions.

### Structure

There is no requirement in this question for lengthy explanations. The best structure would be to correctly identify one reason (this could be one sentence) and then use the source to support the reason.

There is no requirement to include additional sociological knowledge to explain the reason.

## Exemplar 2

2	<p>One reason sociologists may conduct group interviews is so that they feel more natural and comfortable as there were around 8 people in each interview and thus no one person would feel targeted, increasing the amount of response given.</p> <p>Another reason sociologists may conduct group interviews is to further guide research, as the "themes and issues" identified via these group interviews was developed to help create the next interviews, which means what they're <sup>questions</sup> asking will be a more valid depiction of the actual issues these older people are facing.</p>
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In Exemplar 2, the candidate has clearly identified two reasons why sociologists might conduct interviews with groups.

The candidate uses a clear structure, explicitly identifying each reason and supporting each reason with clear information from the source.

A clear full mark answer.



### Question 3

- 3 With reference to **Source A**, explain **two** strengths of using official statistics to study income inequalities in the UK.

[10]

In this question, candidates are required to explain two strengths of official statistics. To achieve full marks, each strength should be fully developed and supported with methodological concepts or theory. For AO2, each strength should be supported with evidence from Source A.

For AO3, this question produced a range of answers with many achieving Level 2 or higher. The most common answers tended to focus on the advantages of quantitative data in terms of precise measures of income, ability to clearly map data on graphs and charts and the ability to find correlations. Good examples of this type of answer tended to apply concepts such as quantifiable data and positivist theory. Some candidates also referred to the objective nature of official statistics, though these often did not explain why official statistics might be seen as objective apart from the fact that they came from the government. Those who did not achieve Level 4 in many instances was due to concepts being simply 'dropped in' and not clearly applied. Some candidates spent too much time defining concepts rather than explaining why official statistics might be reliable, representative, etc. The best answers used concepts but explained how official statistics might be strong on such measures. For example, in relation to reliability, candidates referred to how official statistics were collected by trained statisticians, using standardised methods often on an annual basis. In relation to representativeness, they showed an appreciation of the ability of ONS to achieve large sample sizes because they had the resources to carry out large-scale surveys or even access data provided by all citizens such as tax records.

For AO2, application of the source was often not well developed on this question. Some candidates simply stated this requirement of the question by mentioning that data came from the ONS or that it was good to use graphs unlike source B. Better applications explored how ONS data was collected or cited data from the chart to illustrate the kind of conclusions which could be drawn from official statistics.

#### Misconception



There is no requirement to offer alternative views in this question. If the question asks for strengths, then only strengths need to be discussed. Some candidates discussed weaknesses which were not rewarded in this question. In some series, the question will ask for two weaknesses, or one strength and one weakness. Candidates need to focus on the specifics of the question.

## Question 4\*

- 4\*** Using **Source B** and your wider sociological knowledge, explain and evaluate the use of semi-structured interviews with individuals to gather qualitative data on older people in gentrifying neighbourhoods. **[25]**

For top of Level 4 in this question, AO1 requires four developed strengths and/or weaknesses, fully developed with the use of methodological concepts and theory. There should be clear and explicit application of the source material in at least four knowledge points. And for AO3, there should be two developed strengths and two developed weaknesses.

This question overall was answered well. Most candidates were able to offer at least strengths and two weaknesses of using semi-structured interviews. Many candidates also seemed to be aware of the need to use theory and concepts to answer the question but, as with Question 3, these were sometimes just 'dropped in' rather than fully developed and applied as part of the point.

Good candidates typically referred to the following as strengths:

Validity/verstehen – The ability of semi-structured interviews to encourage respondents to open up and give detailed truthful responses (application: respondents opened up about sensitive issues such as tensions in the community and house prices).

Rapport – Use of co-researchers from the community in the same age range helped respondents to feel comfortable and trusting in the interview process (application: 18 co-researchers aged between 58 and 74 were 'better able to achieve rapport with those they interviewed').

Representativeness – Although the sample was relatively small, drawing co-researchers and respondents from 'a range of networks' and 'trying to select a diverse sample' helped to increase representativeness.

Interpretivism – Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to understand the meanings and social reality of individuals (respondents opened up about 'feelings of exclusion').

Flexibility of semi-structured interviews – Open questions guided by broad themes (application: 'interviewers were not required to ask exactly the same questions in every interview').

Ethics – SS interviews could be seen as ethical because respondents would be asked for informed consent and given anonymity (this was harder to support from the source as there is no specific discussion of ethics).

In terms of weaknesses good answers tended to refer to the following:

Reliability – difficulty of collecting data in a consistent manner (application: interviewers were not required to ask the same questions in every interview).

Representativeness/generalisability – Sample was relatively small because SS interviews are time consuming (application: sample size only 30 individual interviews), finding's may not be generalisable to other gentrifying communities (application: research only carried out in Chorlton).

Interviewer bias/social desirability – Interviewers may have influenced respondents by style of questioning or respondents may have given answers which were seen as socially acceptable (application: co-researchers and respondents were drawn from same community and age range and may have known each other).

Positivism – Issues surrounding lack of quantitative data (application of the research yielded qualitative data including quotes but did not provide quantitative data, lack of objectivity) (researchers may have been known to participants), lack of value freedom (co-researchers may have had an agenda or fixed opinions).

Ethics – Possibility of psychological pressure/harm (application: respondents were old/vulnerable, some issues were sensitive, and some may have been reluctant to withdraw or withhold consent).

Candidates who focused on practical issues often did not score well in terms of development as their answers usually lacked any theoretical or conceptual elements.

One misconception of a significant number of candidates was that semi-structured interviews involved open and closed questions and that they collected quantitative and qualitative data. This was despite the question referring to qualitative data and the source stating that they 'used open questions to collect qualitative data'.

Some candidates also focused on group interviews, this question asked candidates to evaluate the use of semi-structured interviews and thus, group interviews did not answer the question.

## Structure

Structure can be key to success in this question.

Create blank plans for students to practice writing their answers in. Use four boxes (two strengths and two weaknesses), each box could have a sentence starter such as 'one strength is' followed by 'this is a strength because', 'the source supports this'. Therefore, this research is 'due to'.

## Key point call out

Candidates should focus on two strengths and two weaknesses.

Clearly signpost a new knowledge point, use a new paragraph for each strength and weakness.

Engage with the source, make sure it is relevant and supports the knowledge point being discussed, explain how it supports the strength or weakness being discussed.

## Section B overview

This section requires candidates to use a wide range of sociological evidence which needs to be fully developed to achieve Level 4. Overall, candidates were able to access both questions and to include sociological evidence.

Most candidates understood the requirements for Questions 5 and 6, with many applying clear structure to their answers. There was a full range of responses, with some answers illustrating difficulty in accessing the question, in particular the New Right perspective and some extremely strong responses, which scored very highly.

### Question 5\*

5\* Outline ways in which social class can influence a person's life chances.

[20]

To achieve Level 4, candidates need to identify at least two areas where social class can influence a person's life chances and then develop four knowledge points supported by sociological evidence.

Candidates were differentiated on this question more by the level of development of their points than the range. Most candidates seemed to be aware of the need to cover at least four issues relating to social class and life chances in their answer with only a minority covering three points or less.

A common problem was that candidates discussed social class inequalities in general and did not focus on life chances, for example many provided quite detailed evidence of inequalities in areas such as income and wealth or poverty without linking this to life chances. Some candidates attempted to produce theoretical answers, for example using Marxism or dual labour market theory but again focused on these as explanations of class inequality rather than how they might explain life chances.

Some candidates also used material which was partially or wholly irrelevant, for example functionalist theory which denies that social class does influence life chances. Candidates also provided evidence which largely related to gender or ethnic inequalities but tried to give it some relevance by referring to working class women or working-class ethnic minorities, but these responses typically had a poor focus on social class.

A few candidates also did not seem to be aware that this question does not require any kind of evaluation and did not present arguments that social class did not influence life chances.

Where candidates did focus on the question, their knowledge of evidence in the areas they cited was lacking in depth or detail. Some candidates relied entirely on anecdotal evidence of common-sense ideas (for example rich people have better health chances because they can afford private health care, or the upper class engage in nepotism to make sure their children get the best jobs).

Good answers tended to identify four relevant areas and discussed evidence for each in some depth. In some cases, this might be based on a single study considered in some detail, for example Willis's 'Learning to Labour' to illustrate working life chances and education. In other cases, candidates provided shorter summaries of two or more studies but linked them together to illustrate one aspect of life chances.

Many candidates used statistics, but these were often not referenced or were sometimes of questionable accuracy. Some candidates cited ONS for all their statistics even though some were clearly from other

sources. Generally, where candidates' answers relied on one statistic (for example the proportion of MPs who had attended private schools) this was not sufficient to provide a developed point.

Good answers tended to use material on the following areas:

**Education** – Sociological studies of education, e.g. Willis, Bowles and Gintis, Reay, Mac and Ghail, etc. Bourdieu's work on cultural, economic and social capital, statistics on educational attainment and social class/free school meals, statistics on links between private education and access to elite universities and jobs.

**Social mobility** – Goldthorpe's research on relative chances of working/intermediate/service class achieving positions in the service class, Friedman's work on the class ceiling and the role of cultural and social capital.

**Poverty** – The impact of poverty on life chances, studies of material deprivation and impact on education, Murray's work on the underclass and dependency culture.

**Work and employment** – Statistics on risks of unemployment by occupation/class, dual labour market theory (where it was linked to the lesser life chances in the secondary labour market in terms of lack of training and promotion opportunities and difficulties of progressing to the secondary labour market), data on economic differences between social classes and how these impacts on life chances in terms of living standards, housing and lifestyles.

**Health** – Statistics on life expectancy, healthy life expectancy and morbidity and Marmot's work on social class and health chances. Impact of cultural and material factors on health chances and how this is related to social class.

Some candidates also drew on material from options they had studied. This varied in terms of how relevant they were able to make it to the question, but some good answers were seen on crime (where this was linked to issues such as lack of legitimate opportunity structures and how a criminal record might affect an individual's life chances). Some candidates also looked at representations of social class in the media ('chavtainment', 'poverty porn' and 'the demonisation of the working class') good answers in this area were able to apply studies to consider how working-class people might be denied opportunities because of stereotyping and discrimination resulting from media images.

### Misconception



There is no requirement to evaluate in this question. Many candidates evaluated their knowledge points which is not creditable.

## Question 6\*

6\* Evaluate New Right explanations of different types of social inequality.

[40]

To achieve top of Level 4 in this question, candidates need to write four fully developed paragraphs supporting the statement and four evaluating the statement. It was clear that some candidates did not leave ample time to answer this question which often resulted in only one or two paragraphs and in some cases only a few lines.

A small minority of candidates seemed to have little knowledge of the New Right explanation and simply summarised all they knew about other theories of social inequality.

Most candidates had at least basic knowledge of New Right approaches with Murray, Saunders, Schlafly and Sewell being the most widely cited writers. Some candidates also referred to Marsland and to Dennis and Erdos. A lot of candidates also used material based on functionalism and this was credited provided it was applied to show how it supported New Right ideas.

Most candidates tried to look at a range of different types of inequality but many of those who tried to consider age inequality struggled. Using functionalist approaches such as Cummings and Henry often lacked relevance as New Right approaches have little to say on inequalities of old age. A few candidates produced good points looking at disadvantages faced by young people, for example using Dennis and Erdos's ideas about the rise of incivility and the 'snowflake generation' as well as David Cameron's negative comments on young people's anti-social behaviour.

Evaluation on this question was variable. Many candidates had knowledge of a range of other theories but often did not use these in an evaluative way, often simply juxtaposing alternative explanations rather than using them to criticise aspects of New Right approaches. Good candidates typically used a range of other theories including Marxism, Weberian theory and feminism to offer a critique on the New Right. Some candidates also used more empirical research, e.g. Macdonald's study of young people in the Northeast or Wilkinson and Pickett's 'Spirt Level' study to counter New Right arguments. Some candidates seemed unsure about whether functionalism should be used for or against the New Right and simply offered a summary of functionalist theories without applying this to the questions. Several candidates juxtaposed alternative views of social inequality without demonstrating how it evaluated New Right explanations.

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