

Examiners' report

A LEVEL

SOCIOLOGY

OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in Sociology

H580

For first teaching in 2015

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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 responses 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 [Teach Cambridge](#).

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Paper 3 series overview

Paper 3 comprises two sections: Section A (compulsory), which includes two source-based questions and one extended response; and Section B, offering a choice of three optional topic areas, each with three associated questions.

Overall, most candidates demonstrated a sound understanding of the range and depth required across the three assessment objectives. The paper includes a variety of question formats, from short source-based tasks to extended essay responses. There were very few instances of unanswered questions, with most candidates attempting all items on the paper. Time management was generally effective, with many candidates choosing to begin with the higher tariff questions, which is entirely acceptable. However, some candidates allocated disproportionate time and effort to lower tariff questions, particularly Question 2, producing responses with more content than necessary.

A small number of candidates continued to include unnecessary elements such as introductions that restated the question, and summative conclusions. These features do not attract marks and should be actively discouraged to enable more efficient use of examination time.

Evaluation continues to be the most challenging skill for many candidates. While most can identify alternative views and support them with evidence, responses are frequently descriptive rather than evaluative. Centres are advised to focus on developing evaluative skills further, ensuring that candidates can move beyond description to engage critically with competing perspectives and build well-reasoned arguments. Strengthening this skill will be key to future examination success.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• had clear awareness of the assessment objectives, responding appropriately to the demands of AO1, AO2, and AO3 • applied effective relevant sociological theories, concepts, and evidence, including the integration of contemporary examples where appropriate to enhance their arguments • had insightful interpretations and used source material to support and develop their responses • had strategic time management, ensuring that all questions were fully addressed with sufficient depth and balance • had comprehensive range and depth of knowledge, with responses demonstrating an understanding of both breadth and detail in relation to the topic areas • evaluated well-developed points, offering critical engagement with theoretical perspectives.	• over-relied on recycling source material without interpreting or integrating it meaningfully into their responses • included anecdotal responses • lacked focus on the specific demands of the question, often leading to generic or tangential answers • tended to present unsubstantiated or assertive points without appropriate theoretical support • had insufficient depth in extended responses, particularly in relation to the development of points and evaluation • included lengthy introductions or summative conclusions, which added little analytical value and detracted from time available for more focused discussion.

Section A overview

This section comprised three compulsory questions, with Questions 1 and 2 requiring candidates to engage with and interpret the provided source material. In general, candidates performed confidently on these tasks, with many able to use the source effectively to support their responses.

However, Question 3 presented greater challenges for several candidates. There was a noticeable misunderstanding or lack of awareness regarding the sociological concept of cultural defence. As a result, many responses to this question were either vague, irrelevant, or based on incorrect assumptions. Centres are advised to ensure that candidates are familiar with key concepts, such as cultural defence, and can apply them accurately within the appropriate theoretical context.

Candidates generally performed well on Questions 1 and 2, demonstrating a clear awareness of the relevant assessment criteria. Many made effective use of the source material, with a noticeable reduction in simple recycling of the content compared to previous series. Centres are encouraged to continue training candidates to read both questions carefully before responding, as the material in each source may be relevant across questions.

However, a few responses remained overly dependent on the sources, leading to answers that lacked clarity in directly addressing the question. Overly source-driven responses tend to be less successful; therefore, it is essential that candidates are taught how to interpret and apply source material appropriately. Stronger responses were those that integrated sociological knowledge and contemporary examples effectively, while remaining focused and analytical.

Question 1*

- 1*** With reference to the source(s) and your wider sociological knowledge, explain how digital social networks have affected people's social capital. **[9]**

This question was generally well answered, provided candidates had a clear understanding of the concepts of social capital and social networks. Higher-performing candidates successfully made conceptual links between the two, drawing on material from the source and applying relevant sociological knowledge. Most candidates demonstrated a secure understanding of digital networks, frequently supporting their responses with contemporary examples. However, a few candidates relied on older, pre-digital studies, which limited the relevance and currency of their analysis.

While the majority engaged appropriately with the source material, some responses were limited by the simple recycling of content without further development. A small minority of candidates either made minimal reference to the sources or did not use them altogether, which restricted their ability to access the higher mark bands. Additionally, a few candidates misinterpreted the term social capital, treating it as synonymous with the act of socialising via digital platforms, which led to less effective responses.

Stronger responses typically made two well-developed points and supported these with sociological and contemporary evidence. Common references included Bourdieu's theory of capital, Granovetter's concept of the strength of weak ties, Miller, and examples such as LinkedIn. A minority of candidates explored the potential negative impacts of digital social networks on social capital, drawing effectively on sources such as Turkle's *Alone Together*. Several candidates also made appropriate use of Castells, as referenced in the source.

As seen in previous series, some candidates continued to conflate the two sources and the first two questions, using evidence interchangeably. This approach met with mixed success, depending on how clearly the material was applied to the specific demands of each question.

Question 2

- 2 With reference to the source(s) and your wider sociological knowledge, evaluate the view that digital forms of communication have reduced social class inequality. [10]

This question was clearly worded, and most candidates were able to demonstrate their understanding through effective use of the source material alongside relevant sociological knowledge. Most responses included two developed points that both supported and critiqued the premise of the question. A common and appropriate line of argument focused on how digital forms of communication have increased access to information, which in turn may translate into acquired power, thereby challenging traditional social class inequalities.

However, some candidates did not directly engage with the issue of social class and instead focused on other forms of inequality, most commonly gender and ethnicity. While these topics are relevant in broader sociological discussions, they were not creditable in this context unless clearly linked to social class. More successful responses considered the intersectionality of class with other dimensions, applying sociological evidence appropriately. Weaker responses, however, tended to drift away from the central focus of the question.

Many candidates drew on Castells, as provided in the source, with several extending their analysis beyond simple repetition to form more developed arguments. Widely used studies included Merten and D'Haens, Van Dijk, Helsper, and Cornford and Robins. Contemporary examples, such as Rupert Murdoch, TikTok, and Instagram, were effectively cited as platforms that can help individuals to monetise content and thus potentially reduce social class disparities.

It should be noted that a few candidates continue to over-reference the source material. Centres are reminded that only one explicit reference to the source is required to access the two marks available for source use. Excessive or repetitive references do not attract additional credit and may limit time available for analysis and evaluation.

Question 3

- 3** Evaluate the view that the global use of digital forms of communication has increased cultural defence. **[16]**

This question presented a challenge for several candidates, primarily due to a misunderstanding of the concept of cultural defence, despite its explicit inclusion in the specification. Some candidates incorrectly interpreted cultural defence as general protest against social inequalities, such as patriarchy or environmental degradation, rather than as a collective response aimed at resisting homogenising cultural forces in the context of globalisation and digital communication.

Many candidates drew on a wide range of relevant sociological studies, some of which could credibly support both sides of the debate. Success varied depending on the extent to which the evidence was explicitly linked to the concept of digital forms of communication and their role in cultural defence. A notable number of responses simply listed sociological studies or examples without directly addressing the question, which limited their analytical depth and relevance.

Stronger responses included two developed points in support of the view and three evaluative points challenging it, in line with the demands of AO1 and AO3. Frequently cited evidence included McLuhan's Global Village, Hall, The Great Firewall of China, North Korea's media controls, Bollywood, and the Awa tribe, all of which were effectively used to explore how digital communication may either promote or resist global cultural homogenisation. Other notable theorists included Howard, Mohammadi, Giddens, and examples of reverse colonisation such as the Mexicanisation of California. Some candidates also used the concept of cultural defence to critique Ritzer's theory of McDonaldisation, supported by references to Croteau and Hoynes, Kirkpatrick, and concepts such as homogenisation and glocalisation. Challenges to the cultural defence argument were frequently supported with examples of cultural imperialism, Americanisation and Seabrook's, and English as the dominant language on the internet.

A few candidates effectively incorporated contemporary examples, such as the English Defence League (EDL), racial tensions following the Stockport attacks, and the cultural discourse surrounding Brexit. These were creditable where they were clearly linked to the concept of cultural defence and digital communication.

However, some candidates introduced postmodernist perspectives relating to identity and fluidity as evaluation. While theoretically informed, these were not directly relevant to the specific question and were not creditable. In addition, a proportion of responses addressed globalisation more broadly, without anchoring their discussion in the use of digital forms of communication, which limited the focus and specificity required.

Encouragingly, there was evidence of improved awareness of AO3 weighting, with many candidates offering three evaluative points in response to the question. Nonetheless, candidates should continue to be discouraged from including generic introductions and conclusions, which do not contribute to the assessment objectives and take up valuable examination time.

Misconception



This question revealed a common misunderstanding of the term *cultural defence*. Many candidates either omitted the concept entirely or misapplied it, indicating a lack of clarity about its sociological meaning.

Centres are encouraged to reinforce that *cultural defence* refers to a collective response by groups seeking to protect and reinforce their cultural identity, often in the face of perceived threat or marginalisation.

To improve future performance, students should be equipped with clear definitions and examples of key concepts and encouraged to apply them within relevant theoretical and evaluative frameworks.

Exemplar 1

		Cultural defence is the idea that individuals
		use social media as a means to protect and
		defend their traditional culture as opposed
		to allow it to be homogenised and westernised.
		Mohammedali argues that westernisation of culture
		has led to many changes in other traditional
		cultures but in a modern world is now exaggerated.
		For example, in the start of the popularisation of
		digital communication the media was very
		western dominated and only included western
		ideas and culture, however in a modern society
		Digital forms of communication has been used to
		protect cultures, creating websites and programs
		aimed to reinforce traditional cultures, for example,
		ISIS made a website to portray their traditional
		culture, showing an example of cultural defence
		increasing through the use of digital communication.

Exemplar 1 demonstrates a clear and accurate understanding of the concept of *cultural defence*, appropriately defining it as a response to cultural homogenisation. This is effectively supported through reference to Mohammedali, indicating sound sociological knowledge. The candidate develops their argument by explaining how websites and digital platforms have been used to preserve cultural identity in the face of Western-dominated digital communication. The response remains focused on the specific demands of the question throughout and substantiates its argument with well-selected and relevant sociological material. Overall, this constitutes a fully developed and analytically sound point that meets the assessment objectives with confidence.

Section B overview

As in previous examination series, Crime and Deviance remained the most popular option in Section B, with evidence suggesting an increase in candidate entries for this topic. The 20- and 40-mark questions within the crime option proved challenging for some candidates. In contrast, candidates who opted for the Education and Religion topics generally produced more focused and well-developed responses, demonstrating a secure grasp of relevant concepts and the ability to apply sociological knowledge effectively to the questions set.

The most selected optional topic remained Crime and Deviance, followed by Education and Religion. There appeared to be a decline in the number of candidates selecting Education, with a corresponding increase in those choosing Crime and Deviance. Most candidates showed an appropriate understanding of the depth and breadth required, particularly in the 20- and 40-mark questions. However, the recurring inclusion of introductions and summative conclusions, which do not contribute to the assessment objectives, remains an area for improvement.

It was encouraging to note an increase in the use of critical conclusions, where candidates added new material in support of their evaluation and debate. The highest-performing candidates demonstrated the ability to select and apply relevant sociological evidence effectively, while also engaging explicitly with the demands of the question through sustained evaluation. In contrast, some responses simply presented alternative perspectives without addressing or critiquing the view posed by the question, resulting in juxtaposition rather than critical engagement.

Question 4*

OPTION 1

Crime and deviance

4* In what ways are patterns of crime related to age?

[10]

This question was generally well answered, with most candidates successfully providing the required three developed points necessary to access the top level. This marks a notable improvement from previous series, where many candidates limited their responses to two explanations, thereby capping their marks.

Most candidates engaged appropriately with the demands of the question, focusing on the concept of 'patterns' in relation to crime and victimisation. The strongest responses followed a clear structure: identifying a specific pattern, offering a sociological explanation supported by evidence, and applying that evidence to the question for further analytical development. A frequent and effective approach was to explore age-related patterns in offending or victimisation, which often aligned well with the requirements of the question, even when not explicitly intended.

Less successful responses tended to describe age-related patterns without linking them analytically to the notion of 'patterns' in crime and victimisation. Such answers, while factually relevant, were not creditable as fully developed due to their lack of explanatory depth. A number of candidates also included inaccurate or imprecise statistical data. Centres are reminded of the importance of ensuring that candidates are equipped with accurate and up-to-date statistical knowledge, as incorrect data can undermine the credibility of a response.

Weaker responses often included broad generalisations about crime types and victim groups, lacking specificity or sociological depth. Many focused on the prevalence of youth crime and the underrepresentation of older individuals in crime statistics. In contrast, stronger responses examined specific types of crime and victimisation by age group, providing a more nuanced exploration of patterns.

The most effective responses drew on a range of relevant sociological studies and theories, including those by Hirschi, Merton, Cohen, Katz, Lyng, and McVie. These studies were well integrated into arguments and used to substantiate points, enhancing both the analytical and evaluative quality of the responses.

Question 5*

5* Assess neo-Marxist and radical approaches to understanding crime and deviance.

[20]

This question proved challenging for several candidates, many of whom demonstrated a limited understanding of neo-Marxism and radical approaches to crime and deviance. The term '*radical*' was frequently interpreted too broadly, leading to inaccurate or unfocused responses. Some candidates incorrectly included right-wing perspectives, such as those of Murray and Hernstein, which were not creditable in this context. A significant minority also conflated neo-Marxism with traditional Marxism, relying heavily on classical Marxist theories and studies without acknowledging the distinctions between the two approaches.

The outcomes for this question were polarised. The strongest responses demonstrated clear understanding of neo-Marxist theory, evaluating key thinkers such as Taylor, Walton and Young, Hall, Gilroy, and Chambliss. These candidates successfully applied evidence and theories to evaluate the question, often contrasting neo-Marxist views with more traditional Marxist interpretations, such as those of Box and Gordon.

Across the cohort, 'radical' was broadly interpreted to include Marxism, neo-Marxism, radical feminism, Interactionism, and Left Realism. Broader critical approaches were credited where appropriate, including references to Becker and radical feminist perspectives, provided they were explicitly applied to crime and deviance and clearly linked to a radical critique of mainstream criminology.

In summary, this question highlighted a need for greater clarity in teaching the distinct features of neo-Marxism, and for helping candidates to distinguish between various critical or radical perspectives within the sociology of crime and deviance.

Misconception



Many candidates were confused by neo-Marxism and radical criminology. Centres are strongly advised to ensure that all students are familiar with the full range of theoretical perspectives on crime and deviance, including the distinctions and overlaps between traditional Marxism, neo-Marxism, and radical criminology. A secure understanding of key theorists (e.g., Taylor, Walton and Young), concepts (e.g., fully social theory of deviance), and their evaluative strengths and limitations is essential to accessing the higher mark bands. Ensuring that students can differentiate between these perspectives and apply them effectively will support greater success in both AO1 knowledge and AO3 evaluation.

Exemplar 2

5	One radical approach to understanding crime and deviance is through understanding that crime it is a reaction to capitalist ideology. Hebdige The CCCS in Birmingham. Hebdige and P. Cohen observed the characteristics of spectacular youth cultures, for example MODs and Rockers, in their dress styles and also backgrounds. With many coming from working class backgrounds, they concluded that their deviance from mainstream norms and values was anterior expression of resistance against capitalist systems and ideologies, for example consumerism. This shows that crime and deviance is a form of cultural resistance to capitalism, rather than an However, a subcultural theorist would argue crime and deviance could be explained as a product of subscription to subterranean values. Maffia notes found that young people are likely to be in and out of crime due to peer pressure from deviant subcultures which causes them to act against what is seen as the socially acceptable, for example petty theft or underage drinking. This explains the gives a more nuanced explanation as it is applicable to all social class youth subcultures, rather than just working class.
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Exemplar 2 presents a clear and well-developed neo-Marxist explanation of crime and deviance, drawing effectively on the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), particularly Hebdige, alongside Cohen's study of spectacular youth subcultures.

The response is conceptually strong throughout, offering detailed analysis of how subcultures deviate from dominant norms and values, which adds analytical depth. The candidate maintains a clear line of argument and explicitly links back to the question in the final sentence, ensuring the response remains focused and relevant throughout.

This exemplar is particularly valuable in demonstrating what constitutes a fully developed AO1 response, as it not only provides accurate theoretical explanation but also applies it coherently within the context of neo-Marxist perspectives on crime and deviance.

Question 6*

6* Evaluate social policies aimed at reducing crime.

[40]

This question proved challenging for many candidates, largely due to its broad and evaluative nature, which required careful selection and development of material. The most successful responses compared left- and right-wing approaches to crime reduction, engaging in explicit evaluation. However, a substantial number of candidates struggled to construct fully developed points based on individual policies.

For example, less successful responses often cited policies such as CCTV without further explanation, application, or critique. In such cases, the lack of development weakened the AO1 and AO2 elements of the response. Some candidates presented policies but did not directly evaluate them, which led to juxtaposed alternatives rather than integrated comparisons.

A significant minority of candidates offered descriptive accounts of left- and right-wing policies as AO1 content, which sometimes strengthened the knowledge component, but left little scope for effective evaluation, ultimately limiting performance in AO3. The best responses identified specific crime reduction strategies, such as situational crime prevention, and developed these by discussing techniques like target hardening. For instance, reference to Clarke's work, supported by concrete examples such as aluminium coin boxes on telephones, and car locks, were often effectively used. These were then evaluated using arguments around crime displacement, which provided relevant and creditworthy critique.

While most candidates appeared aware of the required range and balance of points, many responses lacked structure, often shifting between AO1 and AO3 in a disorganised fashion. This led to superficial analysis and limited expansion of ideas. A minority attempted to use theoretical frameworks (e.g. Functionalism, Marxism) to address the question; the effectiveness of this approach depended heavily on how well theories were anchored to specific policies.

Commonly cited policies and strategies included target hardening, Broken Windows theory, zero-tolerance policing, consensual policing, military-style policing, restorative justice, multi-agency approaches, and reintegrative versus. disintegrative shaming. These provided a strong foundation when clearly explained and evaluated.

Assessment for learning



It is advisable for candidates to categorise crime reduction policies into key areas such as prevention, punishment, and control, as this provides a clearer analytical framework for structuring their responses. Additionally, it is important that candidates can distinguish between left- and right-wing policy approaches, and to evaluate these perspectives in relation to one another. This comparative approach strengthens AO3 by encouraging critical engagement, rather than the juxtaposition of unrelated ideas, and supports the development of well-structured, conceptually informed arguments.

Question 7*

OPTION 2

Education

7* In what ways are patterns of educational achievement related to ethnicity?

[10]

This question was generally well answered, with most candidates able to identify and explain three patterns of educational achievement related to ethnicity. The majority demonstrated a sound understanding of the topic and were able to support their responses with relevant sociological knowledge.

However, a few candidates made vague references to broad categories such as 'ethnic minorities' without specifying particular ethnic groups. This lack of precision often resulted in inaccurate or ambiguous responses, which limited the ability to access the higher mark bands.

The strongest responses followed a clear structure: they identified a specific pattern of achievement linked to a named ethnic group and then supported this with appropriate sociological studies or data. Many candidates effectively used statistical evidence, particularly relating to GCSE attainment levels, which was mostly accurate and well applied to the question.

Popular studies cited included Mirza, Archer and Francis, and Gillborn and Youdell. These were used successfully to explain patterns such as the underachievement of Black Caribbean students, the high achievement of Chinese and Indian students, and the role of teacher expectations, institutional racism, and stereotyping.

Overall, the question allowed candidates to demonstrate both knowledge and application. Centres should continue to encourage precise use of terminology and ethnic categories, along with accurate evidence, to maximise performance in questions of this nature.

Question 8*

8* Assess the view that educational policies since 1988 have focused on raising standards in schools.

[20]

This question was generally well answered, with many candidates able to identify three post-1988 education policies and provide relevant evaluation. Most responses demonstrated a clear understanding of the impact of policy on raising educational attainment, with many candidates engaging critically with the material.

However, a significant minority of candidates misrepresented policies to the wrong government or time, which limited their ability to access the top mark bands. While elements of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) were accepted and credited individually, this was dependent on the depth and accuracy of development. A small number of responses included pre-1988 policies, such as the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), which were not creditable.

Where candidates discussed manifestations of earlier policies (e.g. grammar schools), these were accepted only when it was made clear that the reference was to their reintroduction or adaptation in the post-1988 period. Proposed policies, such as the Advanced British Standard, were also credited where it was clear they had reached the white paper stage.

The most successful responses followed a clear structure: they identified a policy, explained how it was intended to raise standards, and offered critical evaluation. Effective evaluation often questioned the impact or unintended consequences of the policy or argued that the policy's focus was elsewhere, such as on reducing inequality or increasing parental choice rather than directly improving attainment.

Commonly cited and effectively used policies included marketisation strategies, the Education Reform Act, OFSTED, the National Curriculum, league tables, academies and the Pupil Premium.

Less successful responses tended to use studies or policies that were not specifically focused on raising attainment, and attempted to apply them retrospectively to the question, which weakened the response.

Centres are advised to continue emphasising the importance of accurate attribution, clarity on timeframes, and a critical understanding of policy intent and outcomes to help candidates fully meet the demands of questions in this area.

Question 9*

9* Evaluate Marxist views on the ways in which education prepares individuals for work.

[40]

This question was generally well answered, with most candidates producing structured and coherent essay responses. The majority demonstrated a clear awareness of the required range and depth across the assessment objectives.

To support the Marxist perspective, popular sociological studies included Bowles and Gintis, Althusser, Bourdieu and Willis, which were often well applied to the question. Stronger responses remained focused on the issue of education as preparation for work, clearly linking theory and evidence to the specific demands of the question.

Less successful responses tended to rely on generic Marxist arguments about inequality and ideology, often resulting in a lack of specificity and early exhaustion of AO1 material. These answers typically drifted into broad discussions of class-based inequality without sufficiently addressing the concept of education as preparation for the workplace, thereby limiting their relevance and depth.

Many candidates offered evaluation through the functionalist concept of role allocation, acknowledging its relevance to work preparation from a consensual perspective, in contrast to the conflict-based Marxist view. However, some candidates struggled to fully contextualise these contrasting theoretical approaches, leading to conceptual confusion in parts of their evaluation.

Feminist perspectives also featured prominently as evaluative material. These were often effectively used to argue that patriarchal ideology plays a more central role than class conflict in shaping the education system, providing a valuable alternative explanation to the Marxist view.

Overall, the best responses combined accurate theoretical knowledge, focused application to the question, and balanced evaluation using contrasting perspectives. Centres are encouraged to continue developing candidates' ability to apply theory to specific contexts and to distinguish clearly between theoretical standpoints in evaluative writing.

Exemplar 3

9	B	One area of the marxist view in which education prepares individuals for work is that education's role is to emphasise class inequalities and push w/c boys down the same path as their fathers. Willis discusses this and says that education's role is to ensure reinstate class inequalities which causes working class boys to adopt a lad culture in order to follow in their fathers footsteps. This shows how marxists feel education prepares working class boys for work as the lad culture they adopt infiltrates an anti-school culture, forcing the lads down a manual labour path with limited educational opportunities. due to that the teachers in education not pushing them because of the lad culture subculture they adopted. However, a point that would disagree with the previous marxist view of how education prepares individuals for the workplace is the feminist view that education's main purpose is to prepare students for a patriarchal work workplace. Kelly and Colley discuss this and state that education through a lack of female study role models in science and gender preferences when selecting subjects, causes female pupils to conform to more traditionally feminine
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		Subjects like literacy and language, leading to
		them being socialised perfectly to accept patriarchy
		in the workplace. This therefore disagrees with
		the marxist view and shows the feminist view
		of how education prepares individuals for the
		workplace by showing how the educational
		systems structure forces pupils into patriarchal
		gender roles that suit a patriarchal workplace.

Exemplar 3 demonstrates two clear and creditable fully developed points within the first two paragraphs. The candidate begins by outlining a Marxist explanation of how education prepares individuals for the workplace, drawing on Willis's study to argue that education reinforces social class inequalities. While this point meets the criteria for development, it could be further strengthened by incorporating more explicit conceptual language, such as references to ideological state apparatus or false class consciousness, to deepen the theoretical analysis.

The candidate follows this with a well-structured evaluation, clearly signposted by a negative connective and an evaluative linking sentence. Here, a feminist critique is introduced, arguing that education does not only prepare individuals for capitalist exploitation, but also for a patriarchal workplace structure. The use of Kelly and Colley provides relevant and effective supporting evidence, illustrating how subject choices for girls contribute to the reproduction of gendered occupational roles.

Importantly, the candidate maintains a focused narrative by linking back to the question at the end of the paragraph. This is good practice and should be encouraged, as it helps maintain an evaluative tone and ensures responses remain tightly aligned with the specific demands of the question. This exemplar effectively demonstrates how to balance AO1 and AO3, using theory, evidence and evaluation, to build a coherent and focused argument.

Question 10*

OPTION 3

Religion, belief and faith

10* In what ways are patterns of religiosity related to social class?

[10]

This question was generally well answered, with many candidates able to clearly identify patterns of religiosity in relation to social class. A common and valid approach involved discussing how the middle class are often perceived as more religiously active through participation and affiliation, whereas the working class may turn to religion for comfort and meaning, particularly in response to deprivation.

However, there was some conceptual confusion among several candidates, particularly around the distinction between religious belief and religious practice (e.g. church attendance). This occasionally resulted in responses that were less focused or analytically clear in addressing patterns of religiosity as specifically related to class.

Most candidates successfully presented the three required points, supporting their answers with a range of sociological evidence. Given the global, historical, and denominational complexity of the topic, a wide range of responses were creditable and demonstrated a good level of understanding.

Commonly cited theories and concepts included 'believing without belonging', theodicy of disprivilege, Stark and Bainbridge, Bruce's secularisation thesis, Marxist views on religion and class and the appeal of New Age Movements (NAMs) to the middle classes. Some candidates also referred to evidence from Theos and other contemporary sources to support patterns of belief and practice across class groups.

Overall, the question allowed candidates to demonstrate both breadth and depth of knowledge, and responses were generally well-structured and supported. Centres are encouraged to continue clarifying distinctions between belief, practice, and affiliation, and ensuring candidates can accurately apply theoretical perspectives to specific dimensions of class and religiosity.

Question 11*

11* Assess the view that the importance of religion is declining in contemporary society.

[20]

This question was generally well answered, with most candidates demonstrating a clear understanding of the assessment objectives. Most were able to present three well-developed arguments in support of the view that the importance of religion is declining. Candidates drew effectively on key theorists such as Wilson, Brierley, Bruce and Bellah, and many enhanced their responses with accurate and relevant census data from 2021, which added both contemporary relevance and empirical rigour.

Although the question did not specify a UK-only focus, many candidates appropriately adopted a global perspective. Where this was clearly articulated and applied to the debate, it allowed for a broader and more nuanced analysis of the secularisation thesis and its contested nature across different cultural and geographical contexts.

A wide range of candidates incorporated effective evaluation, frequently referencing Davie's concept of 'believing without belonging', as well as the continued presence of New Religious Movements (NRMs) and New Age Movements (NAMs). Other commonly used sources included Berger, Stark and Bainbridge, as well as discussion around the growth of Islam in the UK. These arguments were often employed to challenge the assumption that religion is disappearing, instead suggesting that it is evolving in form and function.

Several higher-level responses engaged with global critiques of secularisation, particularly the argument that it is Eurocentric and does not accurately reflect the continued significance of religion in non-Western societies. Candidates who successfully explored this perspective often referred to the growth of Pentecostalism, the enduring importance of religion among ethnic minority groups and older generations, and the role of religion in cultural defence, identity, and resistance. The rise of religious fundamentalism was also cited as evidence of ongoing or renewed religious influence in contemporary society.

Some candidates addressed the continued influence of religion within certain Western societies, such as Catholicism in Europe and Christian fundamentalism in the United States, particularly regarding church attendance and political influence.

Candidates frequently cited indicators of religious decline, including decreasing church membership and attendance, and the waning significance of religious rituals around key life events, often summarised using the phrase 'hatching, matching and dispatching'.

More evaluative and conceptually aware responses raised methodological concerns about measuring religiosity, particularly over time, and questioned the validity of secularisation metrics. Stronger answers also engaged with postmodernist perspectives, highlighting how increased individualism, consumer choice and spiritual pluralism have changed how people experience and engage with religion.

Overall, most candidates produced well-structured, theoretically informed and evidence-based essays, with many demonstrating the ability to synthesise conceptual debate with empirical data.

Assessment for learning



Although NRMs and NAMs were frequently cited as evidence of religious revival, fewer candidates critically analysed whether such movements support or undermine the idea of secularisation. This represents a potential area for development in future exam preparation. Centres are encouraged to continue supporting candidates in developing their capacity to critically evaluate theoretical perspectives, particularly when responding to broad, abstract or globally framed questions.

Question 12*

12* Evaluate the view that religion has a positive impact on society and individuals.

[40]

This question was generally well attempted by the majority of candidates. Most were able to present four clearly developed reasons explaining how religion can have a positive impact on society, drawing appropriately on a range of sociological perspectives. Functionalist, neo-Marxist and Weberian viewpoints were especially prevalent. Popular sociological studies and concepts included: Durkheim's notion of social solidarity, Parsons and Malinowski's insights into the role of religious rituals during times of stress and Weber's theory of religion as a catalyst for social change. Some candidates effectively referenced figures such as Dr Martin Luther King to illustrate this.

Evaluation was most framed through Marxist and Feminist critiques, with candidates arguing that religion may serve as a conservative force that maintains capitalist dominance and patriarchal structures. Key theoretical ideas such as religion as the 'opiate of the people', false consciousness and supporting theorists including De Beauvoir and Woodhead were frequently applied to strengthen this analysis.

A minority of candidates adopted a postmodernist critique, suggesting that religion has declined in influence in contemporary society. These responses often cited examples such as religiously motivated conflict or political unrest to challenge the idea that religion fosters social cohesion and is therefore a negative influence on society and individuals.

Overall, responses demonstrated a secure grasp of relevant theory and evidence. Centres are encouraged to continue supporting students in developing balanced arguments, integrating contemporary examples, and engaging in critical evaluation to enhance both AO1 and AO3 performance.

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