

Examiners' report

AS LEVEL

SOCIOLOGY

**OCR Level 3 Advanced Subsidiary GCE
in Sociology**

H180

For first teaching in 2015

H180/02 Summer 2025 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 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 2 series overview

Candidates were able to access the majority of questions. There were some non-responses to questions, but this was minimal and tended to be mainly around Question 2. Most candidates were able to demonstrate at least some relevant knowledge and understanding of the specifics of each question, with some being able to apply sociological evidence in an accurate and developed manner. The structure of responses varied, although there was a clear trend of more candidates using connectives to signpost AO1 and AO3 arguments. There are still some examples where these are embedded within contrasting points creating undeveloped knowledge points or juxtaposing points.

Candidates tended to answer Section A first and to spend more time on this section, while leaving less time to meet the requirements of Section B. This often resulted in Question 6 responses having one or two AO1 and AO3 points with little depth of explanation.

Handwriting was an issue for a minority of candidates. Illegible handwriting can limit the examiners' ability to ascertain accurate sociological evidence and their ability to understand the candidate's analysis.

Key point call out

Highlight the use of connectives during extended answer skill sessions. Use signposting techniques such as 'in contrast to', 'an alternative explanation', followed by how these contrast or criticise the previous point.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- used sociological and methodological evidence - clearly structured answers - focused on the specifics of the question - used connectives.	- did not use time well which more frequently impacted on Section B - did not use or used inaccurately sociological or methodological evidence - misinterpreted or did not read the specifics of the question - did not refer to the source in Section A or simply lifting material rather than using it to support a knowledge point.

Section A overview

This section contains four compulsory questions which refer to either Source A or B. Candidates are expected to refer to material within the source to support their answers. In Questions 3 and 4, to reach the higher mark levels, candidates will need to use methodological evidence and/or perspectives such as interpretivism/positivism or validity/ reliability.

Some candidates continue to refer to alternative methodologies or sociological research; there is no requirement to do this in Section A. In addition, some candidates are still confusing interpretivism/positivism and/or validity/reliability, or simply ending a paragraph by simply stating 'therefore positivists prefer this method' which demonstrates little understanding of the perspective.

Question 1

- 1 Using data from **Source A**, describe **two** conclusions on the comparison of attainment between students eligible for free school meals, and those not eligible for free school meals. **[4]**

Answers to Question 1 showed clear differentiation, with the full range of marks being applied. Some candidates were able to accurately compare data from the bar chart and reach two clear conclusions supported by evidence.

A number of candidates misunderstood the source and thought it was the number of children eligible/not eligible for free school meals. Also, some candidates tried to explain why these inequalities exist rather than just give the required two conclusions with supporting data from the source.

Those who answered this question well, used signposting techniques such as 'one conclusion is ...' and 'this is shown through ...'.

Candidates do not need to write long responses to this question, nor do they need to explain why these patterns and trends may be occurring.

To achieve full marks in this question, candidates need two clear conclusions supported by data from the Source.

Misconception



No additional information beyond the source is required. Explanations beyond the source material on why certain patterns or trends may be occurring is not creditable in this type of data question.

Assessment for learning



For starter or plenary activities, present a piece of data to the class and ask them to identify one or two conclusions within a specific time frame. This activity could be expanded to a pair task, where students switch conclusions and are then asked to provide data to support the conclusion.

Exemplar 1

1		One conclusion of the the a comparison in
		educational achievement is that those on FSM
		had lower attainment when compared to
		their peers who had higher attainment. For
		example, about 47% of children aged 11
		who were FSM achieved an acceptable level of
		ability in reading, writing and maths whereas
		62% around 69% of children who were not
		eligible a for FSM received that, showing a
		higher educational attainment amongst those
		who aren't eligible

In Exemplar 1, the candidate has clearly stated a conclusion on overall attainment between FSM and non-FSM students and then provided a comparison of statistics between the two groups to support their answer. This is an example of a fully developed conclusion and gains full marks.

Question 2*

2* With reference to **Source B** explain why sociologists might use quota sampling in order to obtain a sample when carrying out research. [9]

In this question, candidates need to give two developed explanations or three underdeveloped explanations with some use of methodological evidence for the higher mark band levels. Candidates could have referred to representativeness, generalisability or made links to the scientific nature of this sampling technique.

This question generated a mixed response. Some candidates demonstrated a lack of understanding of quota sampling and instead focused on how this was used to obtain data rather than a sample or that this was a random sampling technique. A number also focused on the disadvantages of quota sampling which did not answer the specifics of the question.

Misconception



Candidates were under the misconception that a sampling technique is a research method and is a way of collecting data.

Question 3*

- 3* With reference to **Source A**, explain the limitations of using quantitative data to study social inequalities in relation to educational attainment.

[12]

In this question, candidates need to fully develop three reasons why using quantitative data can be limiting and then support their ideas with evidence from Source A. Each reason should demonstrate accurate use of methodological concepts and/or methodological perspectives.

Some candidates did not focus on the specifics of the question and discussed strengths of quantitative data rather than focusing on limitations as outlined in the question. Some also demonstrated confusion between validity/reliability and positivism/interpretivism.

Overall, the question was generally answered well with most candidates able to identify at least two limitations of using quantitative data, using methodological concepts such as reliability and positivism.

For AO2, some made no attempt to reference the source, with a number simply lifting rather than engaging with the source material. Those that used the source effectively were able to actively engage with the source material using it to support their knowledge points.

Key point – read the question carefully

Reading the question carefully is essential. Question 3 can refer to only limitations or strengths or a limitation and strength. If, as in this year's question, only limitations are required, no credit can be given for strengths.

Exemplar 2

3	A	one limitation of using quantitative data to study social inequalities in relation to educational attainment is that the researcher cannot experience <i>verstehen</i> with the participants. in the source it shows that 41 percent of students eligible for free school meals achieved an acceptable pass in english and maths GCSE compared to 69 percent of those not eligible. By using statistics to compile a graph, <i>interpretivists</i> like <i>weber</i> would argue that the researcher cannot find meanings behind why students on free school meals achieve lower results than those not eligible. this is because without experiencing <i>verstehen</i> , the researcher cannot put themselves 'into the shoes of the participants'. Therefore the research lacks validity as they do not know the reasons why individuals on FSM perform lower. this is a limitation
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		when studying social inequalities in relation to educational
		achievement because without bonding with the participants
		they do not know if it is really the free school means
		which impact the students and abilities.

In Exemplar 2, the candidate has identified verstehen as a limitation. This is then linked to the source material. The candidate then explains how this type of data cannot find true meaning using a range of methodological concepts to support the idea.

This is a clearly developed knowledge point and would attract 4 marks for this part of the answer.

Question 4*

- 4* Using **Source B** and your wider sociological knowledge, explain and evaluate the use of online questionnaires to investigate public opinion about gender equality across the world. [20]

In this question, to achieve Level 4, AO1 requires three developed strengths and/or weaknesses, fully developed with the use of methodological perspectives and concepts. For AO2, 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.

There were very few non-responses to this question. Those who answered well were able to present two strengths and two weaknesses of the use of online questionnaires. Candidates at this level were able to use a range of methodological evidence such as validity/reliability, positivism/interpretivism and rapport/verstehen. At times, evidence was used at surface level, with little or no linkage to the knowledge point being discussed. Linkages to the online aspect of the question were generally done well, with many candidates linking this to the time period within the source stating that this was a strength of the method due to the environmental and health restrictions in place during the research period.

For AO2, some candidates did not refer to the source throughout their answer. Many of these only did so at surface level, using lip service only towards the source.

Key point – structuring answers

When planning this style of question with students, signposting techniques such as 'one strength' or 'a weakness' can assist with structure and focus during examinations. Break each paragraph into sections such as 'a strength is ...', why is this a strength, how the source can support this knowledge point, and use methodological perspectives or concepts to support their answer.

Exemplar 3

4	* please see introduction towards the end, thank you. One advantage of using online questionnaires is that it is practical. But Positivists would argue using online questionnaires is cost effective and less time consuming. They would also argue it gives people less accessibility to become involved in sociological research. For example, in the source it is revealed that 17 countries were involved - a total of 17160 respondents, showing using online questionnaires is was a very practical option as individuals could fill the form wherever they were. Also, they were able to answer in there local language.
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In Exemplar 3, the candidate has identified 'practical' as a strength. They support this answer with positivism, explaining how it is less time consuming and link to the source material in relation to size of the sample. The candidate notes accessibility and language to develop their answer.

This is a fully developed strength.

Section B overview

Both Question 5 and 6 were able to illustrate differentiation of ability. It was clear that a number of candidates did not leave ample time to answer these questions in depth.

To achieve Level 3 and above, candidates must use sociological evidence to support their answers. To award Level 4, examiners are looking at the depth of knowledge points and the supporting evidence.

Question 5*

5* Outline **two** ways in which gender inequalities in UK society have decreased.

[10]

In this question, candidates need to discuss two ways, each supported by two pieces of evidence, explained in depth. Many candidates only presented two pieces of evidence, some with little explanation to support each 'way'.

At the lower end, candidates often used no evidence or inaccurate evidence. Alternatively, some answers were generalised and showed little sociological evidence. In some cases, candidates were discussing how inequalities were increasing which was not creditable.

At the higher end, candidates were able to develop at least three pieces of sociological evidence or to offer a wider range of underdeveloped sociological evidence. Common themes were legislation such as the Equal Pay Act and Sex Discrimination Act, employment rates and levels of education.

Misconception



Candidates are not required to evaluate in this question.

Assessment for learning



Use this style of question for knowledge check and writing development. At the end of a lesson, students could write one way and provide an explanation of two pieces of sociological knowledge to demonstrate understanding of the learning. Alternatively, use as a round robin activity; one student writes the way, the next describes one piece of evidence and the third the second piece of evidence – and so fully developing one way.

Question 6*

6* Assess functionalist explanations of social inequality.

[20]

In this question, to achieve Level 4, candidates need to write three fully developed paragraphs for the statement in the question and three evaluating the statement, all need to be supported with sociological evidence. It was clear that many students did not leave ample time to address this question which resulted in one or two paragraphs supporting and/or evaluating the statement.

There was a mixed response to this question. Social class dominated responses in regard to social inequality with few addressing ethnicity for example. At the lower end, candidates were unable to accurately identify and/or describe functionalist views such as meritocracy. Some were confused between Functionalism and Marxism.

For AO3, there was a tendency towards juxtaposition with some responses simple describing explanations of social inequality rather than evaluating and analysing functionalist explanations.

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