General

Many students for this particular series provided thoughtful, well-focused responses to the questions, and there were few scripts where questions were left unanswered. Indeed, some really excellent answers were seen, demonstrating fine knowledge and understanding of social processes, structures and issues in modern multicultural Britain. There is clearly a lot of very good quality sociology teaching and learning happening, and both students and their teachers are to be congratulated for their endeavours. Encouragingly, the quality of written communication was generally of a good standard. It was also pleasing to see very few rubric errors for this series.

The following are some areas for improvement that teachers may wish to consider when giving advice to their students regarding 41901

- There is no need for students to answer item-based questions in full sentences if a single word or phrase will suffice, nor is it necessary for them to repeat the question in their response.
- Teachers are encouraged to reiterate to students the importance of knowing and understanding key sociological concepts relating to the three topics associated with this Unit. To assist, schools and colleges should consult the glossary for each topic. This can be found in the teaching and learning resources (teaching guidance) section of the AQA GCSE Sociology web page.
- Students should aim to avoid presenting irrelevant information and instead only include sociological material which adds substance to the particular issue they are debating. Of concern was the number of students who appeared to re-write pre-learned essays on certain topics. These were often not focused on the questions and as a result few marks were obtained. Certain students presented inaccurate and irrelevant accounts of what a Marxist or a functionalist might say about a particular issue.
- When attempting the questions worth five marks, it is worth students considering the allocation of marks for these, by ensuring that explanations are clear and fully developed. It may be an idea to possibly respond to these questions by producing two distinct, albeit concise paragraphs in order to ensure both aspects of the questions are covered appropriately. Some students just deal with the ‘describe’ element of the question, omitting the coverage of the ‘and explain’ part in their response.
- Students should endeavour to support points made by reference to contemporary evidence or events. Too often answers to questions relating to the education and families topics lack recent sociological information.
- Certain students appeared to lack knowledge and understanding of certain parts of the Studying Society topic content. It is essential that the central terms and concepts outlined in this section of the specification are addressed as they underpin the whole AQA GCSE Sociology course.
- As was the case in previous series, answers to questions 07-09 were often underdeveloped, with some students displaying a general lack of knowledge of research issues, as well as not focusing on the research topic they had been asked to consider. Teachers are encouraged to spend time with their students in preparation for this part of the examination paper, as in order to access the top mark band, students are required to address the part of the question which states ‘for your investigation’, which in the case on this examination was an investigation into pupil behaviour in British schools.
Topic 1 – Studying Society

Question 01

The vast majority of students answered this question correctly.

Question 02

Very few students were unable to identify observation as the research method used by the sociologist. Some elaborated unnecessarily for this one-mark question.

Question 03

Many students clearly and concisely presented an appropriate advantage and disadvantage. Some however, whilst being able to give a suitable disadvantage, such as citing the length of time it would take, had difficulty providing an applicable advantage, and thus achieved just a single mark out of the two available.

Question 04

The majority of students were able to partially describe the work of journalists compared to sociologists, but only a few were able to clearly compare the two in the context of investigating pupil behaviour in British schools. A number of students focused on just one approach, limiting their score for this question as a consequence.

Question 05

Most students managed to provide at least a partial explanation, with some using the source material from which to base their answer. A considerable amount though focused on gender roles or gender socialisation rather than gender role models. Stronger responses presented excellent supporting examples to illustrate their clear understanding.

Question 06

Responses to this question were variable in quality. Most knew the difference between qualitative and quantitative data, and some students provided very good, detailed answers which linked the use of qualitative data to researching standards in schools. However, a sizable minority confused qualitative and quantitative data, whilst others answered in vague terms, for instance talking about how qualitative was ‘better’. Many did not link their answer to researching standards in schools.

Question 07

Most students were able to identify an appropriate primary research method, with postal questionnaires and overt observation being the most commonly selected, and then go on to outline the advantages of using their stated method. However, the fourth available mark was often missed by students writing a more general account of the advantage of their chosen method. Noticeably few linked their responses to the issue under investigation. Some went down the route of criticising other methods rather than pointing out the merits of their chosen method.
Question 08

Although the majority of students answered this question appropriately in terms of focusing on ethical considerations, there are still a significant number of students who answer in terms of ethnic groups rather than ethics. Pleasingly, however, many were able to provide relevant material, with many students scoring well for this question by showing a really good understanding of ethical issue issues in research. Most students were able to identify an ethical issue and explain how their stated ethical issue would be dealt with. Better responses focused their response on the actual scenario, offering a specific strategy for overcoming the issue.

Question 09

Overall, this question was reasonably well answered, although a significant number of students wrote about research methods rather than sampling methods. A number of students confused ‘systematic’ and ‘stratified’ sampling, most displayed good knowledge of sampling types, and stronger responses were not only able to compare different sampling methods, but also focused their comparison around a sociological investigation into pupil behaviour in British schools. As in questions 07 and 08, it was disappointing for examiners to note the number of students who did not base their answer around the issue under investigation.

Topic 2 – Education

Question 10

This question posed few problems for students, with virtually all providing the correct answer.

Question 11

Almost all students answered this correctly, referring to the Item and by stating 45 per cent.

Question 12

Overall, this question was answered well, with many students able to cite two appropriate reasons why a parent may choose to educate their children at home.

Question 13

Most students were able to give a partial explanation, with many gaining a couple of marks by briefly outlining that it is to do with a lack of resources. Weaker answers just focused generally on being poor, whilst a few students talked about a school lacking resources, not home circumstances. Stronger responses referred to how particular home circumstances, such as living in damp, overcrowded accommodation, can have a detrimental effect on the child’s educational performance at school.

Question 14

A considerable amount of students answered this question well, with many describing how a comprehensive school was different to a grammar school or a private school. Some, however, did
not make a clear distinction between their two chosen types of school and how they are explicitly different from each other. Others gave examples rather than describing a type of secondary school found in Britain, whilst a few confused ‘special’ and ‘specialist’ schools. A significant minority of students referred vaguely to ‘state schools’ or confused ‘public’ (private) with ‘state’, incorrectly thinking that public schools were open to the general public.

**Question 15**

A sizable proportion of students failed to provide an acceptable response to this question, with examiners often seeing responses which were outside of the time frame (since 1993). Schools and colleges are encouraged to ensure their students are aware of contemporary government education policies and the reasons behind these changes. Despite there being many answers relating to government policies outside the time frame, such as reference to the introduction of the comprehensives, or generally talking about free education, some students were able to focus on policies under the ‘New’ Labour administration, for example Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), or, though less commonly seen, the recent introduction of the Pupil Premium by the current coalition government. With the exception of those who based their answer around EMA, students found it difficult to comment on the success or otherwise of their chosen policy.

**Question 16**

The majority of students opted for this question. Given the stimulus material, it was surprising to see so many dismissing any detailed discussion of gender, and were instead concerned to explain several other reasons for differences. Nonetheless, some excellent responses were seen which carefully considered the reasons for gender differences in educational performance, as well as discussing a variety of other factors such as social class and ethnicity. A few were able to address males and females rather than only focusing on ‘underachieving boys’. Weaker responses either did not offer any alternative reasons for differences in educational achievement (thus ‘extent’ had not addressed), or simply ignored gender completely and just pointed to other reasons at a very superficial level.

**Question 17**

Responses from students to this question varied in quality. Most considered variations along the lines of functionalist/ Marxist ‘economic functions’ as the main purpose of the education system, with examples ranging from the hidden curriculum preparing students for work, to teaching respect for superiors, as well as direct work-related options/visits/qualifications. Students gaining higher marks then described other functions as being of equal or more significance. These included schools encouraging social cohesion/solidarity and facilitating social mobility as well as an agency of secondary socialisation preparing pupils for life in adult society.

**Topic 3 – Families**

**Question 18**

The overwhelming majority answered correctly, although a few gave the incorrect amount.
Question 19

Almost all students were able to obtain the correct answer from the information presented to them.

Question 20

A wide range of appropriate responses were seen, with nuclear, lone parent and reconstituted the most popular. A significant amount of students wasted time by going on to describe at some length the family types they had already identified.

Question 21

Surprisingly few students were able to give a clear explanation, with a fair proportion providing no response or incorrectly thinking that the domestic division of labour is when there is disagreement in the home over whether to support the Labour Party. Some students thought it was the same as joint conjugal roles, whilst many failed to emphasise the dividing of work in the home.

Question 22

There were some very full answers presented to examiners in response to this question. Many students were able to describe a way in which child-parent relations have changed over the specified time period. However, a noticeable few were able to present a coherent explanation as to why the change had occurred. Responses frequently focused on a general decline in respect for elders, rarely explained in a sociological way. Causes of change were often stated before the change itself.

Question 23

Many students made good attempts at describing the functionalist approach to the family, but explanations as to how it differs from other sociological approaches were often weak. Most students used the feminist approach to reasonably good effect by way of a comparison to the functionalist approach. However, many did not show clearly enough how the approaches differed, thus failing to explicitly demonstrate the difference between the two approaches. Weaker responses just pointed out how functionalists prefer the nuclear family, with no further development, whilst the most common weak response for an alternative approach to the family being ‘feminists who don’t like the family’.

Question 24

By far the more popular of the two twelve mark questions in this topic, and generally well answered. Many students clearly knew how roles of men and women in the family had changed, citing the apparent rise of the ‘new man’, breadwinning females, increasing numbers of househusbands, joint conjugal roles, shared domestic tasks, and the symmetrical family as evidence of change. However, some students described how their roles in society had changed rather than specifically focusing on in the family home. In particular, a sizable amount failed to emphasise the change of women’s roles in the home, focusing instead on rights, votes and employment without explaining connotations for the home life. The ‘how far’ aspect of the question was attempted by most, with weaker students simply suggesting ‘it hasn’t changed much’, while stronger students contrasted with feminist perspectives, arguing that little had changed in
a patriarchal society with men typically cherry picking domestic tasks, making the major decisions, controlling the family finances and exercising power in more physical ways.

**Question 25**

Far fewer students decided to attempt this question, and responses often lacked sociological insight. In explaining that sociologists would agree that extended family members play an important role in British families, most answers commented on the usefulness of grandparents as safe, cheap and reliable child-minders, enabling young mothers to work full time. Few commented on traditional extended families found in some communities. It was disappointing too, to note the lack of answers which commented on the weakening of ties or the simple fact of geographical mobility impeding physical contact.

**Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](https://aqa.org.uk/) page of the AQA Website.

**Converting Marks into UMS marks**

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](https://www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion)