

MARK SCHEME for the May/June 2010 question paper
for the guidance of teachers

9699 SOCIOLOGY

9699/13

Paper 13 (Essay), maximum raw mark 50

This mark scheme is published as an aid to teachers and candidates, to indicate the requirements of the examination. It shows the basis on which Examiners were instructed to award marks. It does not indicate the details of the discussions that took place at an Examiners' meeting before marking began, which would have considered the acceptability of alternative answers.

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Section A

1 “The functionalist concept of value consensus is the key to understanding how social order is achieved.” Explain and assess this view. [25]

- 0–6 An answer consisting of a few general remarks about the nature of social order, with little or no linkage to the question, would meet the requirements for the lower half of the band. To go higher within the band, there needs to be some evidence that the candidate is referring to the functionalist perspective on social order, albeit the points made will be brief and possibly contain some inaccuracy.
- 7–12 Lower in this band, answers will demonstrate a simple understanding of the concept of value consensus, but may lack development both in terms of the functionalist theory and in failing to consider other perspectives on the topic of social order. Higher in the band, the account of the functionalist theory will be more detailed and the contribution of specific theorists (Durkheim, Parsons, Merton) may be discussed. Any assessment at this level will be rudimentary.
- 13–18 Answers at this level will provide a clear and accurate account of the functionalist perspective on social order. There will also be an attempt to assess the extent to which the existence of social order can be explained in terms of the concept of value consensus. Lower in the band, the assessment may be confined to a few simple analytical points, or possibly a rather basic juxtaposition of functionalist theory with the Marxist and/or interactionist perspectives on social order. To go higher in the band, however, the assessment must be more convincing. A well-explained attempt to contrast functionalist and Marxist theory that links explicitly to the question would trigger the higher part of the band.
- 19–25 Answers at this level will demonstrate a good understanding of the concept of value consensus and its strengths and limitations in explaining the existence of social order. The assessment will be explicit and sustained. While the main part of the assessment may be based on a comparison of functionalist and Marxist views of social order, there must be some further development to the analysis in order to justify a mark in the top band. This extra dimension might include, for example, the use of relevant empirical material, references to other sociological perspectives, or possibly questioning of what is meant by the term ‘social order’. At the top of the band, the assessment will be tightly constructed and draw on a range of appropriate arguments and/or evidence. Criticism of the over-deterministic nature of the functionalist and traditional Marxist explanations of social order is likely to be a feature of high quality answers.

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2 “It is inappropriate to use a scientific approach when studying human behaviour because, unlike the objects that scientists study, humans have consciousness and free will.” Explain and assess this view. [25]

0–6 Lower in the band, answers may be confined to a few vague assertions about the nature of sociology and/or science, with little development or linkage to the question. At the top end, there will be some evidence that the material used is drawn from an appropriate sociological source, though the limitations of the answer will be obvious in the lack of detail and range of points offered.

7–12 Answers at this level will demonstrate a basic awareness of the main features of the debate about the status of sociology and the links between the subject and the logic and methods of the natural sciences. However, the specific wording of the question may be addressed only indirectly through a general account of the positivist perspective. At the top of the band, there will be a clear account of the positivist position and at least a rudimentary attempt to contrast it with alternative perspectives, most likely the contribution of those in the interactionist tradition.

13–18 A sound account of the positivist versus anti-positivist debate, with limited analytical depth, would merit the lower part of the band. To reach the top of the band, the answer must in addition address the specific wording of the question i.e. by considering whether the difference in subject matter between sociology and the natural sciences is sufficient to justify the conclusion that a science of society is impossible. However, this aspect of the answer will lack depth at this level.

19–25 To trigger this band, the discussion of the positivist versus anti-positivist debate must be detailed and well informed. Answers will address the specific issues of consciousness and free will by focusing, at least in part, on the differences in subject matter between sociology and the natural sciences and by discussing the methodological and/or philosophical implications for sociology of these differences. Sophistication in the analysis may be demonstrated in many ways, including by questioning the nature of scientific method and distinguishing between the issues of whether sociology can and should emulate the methods of the natural sciences. Answers that pick up on nuances of this kind are likely to merit the top of the band.

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Section B

3 Assess the strengths and limitations of covert participant observation. [25]

- 1–6 At this level we may see answers that consist of a few basic points about participant observation studies, but with little or no direct reference to the question as set. Answers that distinguish between covert and overt observation, with no further discussion, would fit the top half of the band.
- 7–12 A sound account of participant observation as a research method, with little or no attempt to address the specific issues raised by the question, would merit the lower part of the band. Higher in the band, there will be an attempt, albeit limited, to distinguish between the respective merits of covert and overt participant observation.
- 13–18 Answers will demonstrate a good understanding of participant observation and there will be a clear focus on the covert approach specifically. Lower in the band the response will be descriptive primarily. Higher in the band there will be an attempt to assess the usefulness of covert participant observation, though the analysis may lack some sharpness and sophistication.
- 19–15 Answers at this level will include a clear and accurate account of the practical and theoretical strengths and limitations of covert participant observation. There will also be an explicit and sustained assessment of the usefulness of the covert approach. Higher in the band relevant links may be made to the main theoretical perspectives. The ethical complexity of using the covert approach might also be explored in answers that demonstrate a high level of analytical skill. References to appropriate participant observation studies would be a useful way of illustrating key points, but answers may be awarded full marks without the use of such examples.

4 “The sociologist's theoretical perspective is the most important factor influencing the choice of research method.” Explain and assess this view. [25]

- 0–6 Lower in the band, answers may be confined to a few disparate points about research methods with barely any discernible link to the question. Higher in the band, there will be some evidence that the candidate understands that this is a question about the factors that influence choice of research methods in sociology, though the points offered will be very brief and/or contain significant inaccuracy.
- 7–12 Lower in the band, the candidate will be able to explain at a basic level how choice of research method may be influenced by the theoretical approach favoured by the sociologist. Higher in the band, there will also be some limited awareness of other factors that may influence choice of research methods, such as funding, practicality, ethics, and the nature of the research topic. There may be little or no attempt to assess the issues raised by the question at this level. Catch-all answers that discuss the strengths and weaknesses of different research methods, with links to the question left mainly implicit, could score up to ten marks but no more.
- 13–18 The link between theoretical approach and choice of research methods will be explained clearly and accurately at this level. Other factors that may influence choice of methods will also be reviewed in answers that merit the top part of the band. There will be an attempt to assess whether the view expressed in the question is valid, though the analysis may lack penetration at this level.
- 19–25 As for the previous band, though now the assessment will be sustained and well informed. Candidates will demonstrate a very good understanding of why theoretical approach is an important influence on choice of research method and may illustrate their knowledge through references to several sociological perspectives. Examples from relevant studies might be used skilfully to develop the answer at this level. At the top of the band, clear and well-supported conclusions will be reached about how important theoretical approach is in influencing choice of research methods.

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Section C

5 “Weber’s writings on stratification overcome many of the weaknesses in Marx’s theory of social class.” Explain and assess this view. [25]

0–6 Answers that are confined to a few assertions about the nature of social class would fit the bottom half of the band. A slightly better response at this level would make a few isolated observations about aspects of Marx’s or Weber’s work relevant to the topic of stratification.

7–12 Knowledge of Weber’s ideas may be scant in answers at the lower end of the band. Candidates at this level are more likely to demonstrate some basic understanding of Marx’s theory of class, though they may have little else to offer by way of a response to the question. To go higher in the band, there must be at least a basic account of Weber’s view of stratification and/or an attempt to assess Marx’s theory of social class.

13–18 At this level, Weber’s view of stratification will be outlined clearly and accurately and Marx’s theory of social class may be used as a context for this account. The more the answer focuses on explaining the notion that Weber’s writings on stratification overcome many of the limitations in Marx’s theory of social class, the higher the mark that should be awarded. To reach the top of the band, there must also be an attempt to assess the view expressed in the question, though the analysis at this level may lack depth.

19–25 As for the previous band, though the assessment will be sustained and incisive. There are different forms that the assessment might take. One possibility would involve using evidence and arguments from more recent studies of social stratification to illustrate the usefulness or otherwise of Weber’s ideas. Another approach would be to defend the relevance of Marx’s analysis of social class against the arguments from the Weberian perspective, perhaps by including references to more recent contributions to Marxist theory.

6 “The poor are trapped within a culture of poverty that is passed on through different generations of the family.” Explain and assess this view. [25]

0–6 An answer that is confined to a few commonsense observations about poverty would fit the lower half of the band. At the top of the band, the candidate may demonstrate some limited sociological knowledge about poverty, but with little or no development in relation to the question.

7–12 A general discussion of the nature of poverty that has some sociological relevance, but without relating to the question directly, may fit the bottom of the band. A basic account of the culture of poverty thesis or another theory of poverty would merit a mark at the top of the band.

13–18 An accurate and detailed account of the culture of poverty thesis would justify a mark at the lower end of the band. If there were also a basic attempt to assess the culture of poverty thesis, such as through juxtaposition with one or more other theories of poverty, a mark at the top of the band would be merited.

19–25 Different theories or explanations of poverty will be discussed in some detail at this level and a concerted effort will be made to link the material to the issues raised by the question. The assessment will go beyond mere juxtaposition of contrasting theories and will be explicit and sustained. To reach the top of the band, answers must demonstrate a clear understanding that there is a tension between cultural and structural explanations of poverty, and that to see poverty primarily as a cultural phenomenon may be misconceived.