SOCIOLOGY

Paper 2251/12

Research Methods, Identity and Inequality

Key messages

- In **Question 1(a)(ii)** and **(a)(iii)** the same technique should be used for answering both questions. Firstly, identify an element from *within the source itself* and, secondly, *clearly* explain why it is useful **1(a)(ii)** or problematic **1(a)(iii)** for studying or understanding *the topic in the question*. When using words like validity, representativeness or reliability ensure these are explained fully by reference to the source material.

- In **Question 1(e)** the justifications for methods, samples and evidence was often done better than the description of them. Candidates should try to describe their chosen methods *in some detail*. This may mean, for example, specifying the type of questions to be used or exactly how an observation will be conducted.

- In **Question 1(b)** and option **Question (b)**, where candidates are asked to identify/state something or to give examples, an extended response is not required. A word/phrase or sentence will suffice.

- In extended **Question 1(d)** and option **Questions 2/3 (e)** and **(f)** it is helpful if arguments are written in paragraph form. Within each paragraph the point should be developed by reference to explanation and evidence. The latter includes examples, sociological studies, sociological theory or empirical evidence such as statistics.

- **Question 1(c)**, **1(d)**, and **1(e)** all require knowledge of the strengths and limitations of particular research methods and approaches. Avoid making generic points such as 'people may lie' which could apply to almost any research method. Ordinarily such points are not creditworthy unless properly contextualised by reference to the method or aspect of methodology being discussed. For example 'people may lie' would achieve no credit. What would gain credit would be to say *if a respondent is interviewed on the subject of racial prejudice by someone of from an ethnic minority, they may give a socially desirable answer, i.e., lie in order to maintain a good relationship in the interview situation*. Similarly, answers that assert that a research method is *cheap* or *expensive* or *time-consuming* are often best avoided as they can be hard to contextualise.

- In option **Questions 2/3 (e)** candidates are instructed to include three developed points. All points should be 'for' the view; no credit will be given for evaluation.

General comments

This was the first assessment opportunity for the revised 2025 syllabus. Candidate responses showed that they were prepared for the demands of the both the content of the new syllabus and the new assessment structure. Candidates appeared to benefit from the new guidance given in the bulleted instructions in **Question 1(d)**, **1(e)** and option **Questions (e)** and **(f)**. All candidates completed the compulsory **Question 1** on Research Methods. Candidates then answered one of the optional questions, with a more or less even split between **Question 2** on Identity: Self and Society and **Question 3** on Social Stratification and Inequality. Candidates were able to utilise different skills, such as analysing and evaluating source material, defining sociological concepts, designing and justifying a research design and explaining and evaluating sociological views or arguments. Overall, some good quality responses were in evidence across all sections of the paper, demonstrating a positive engagement with the questions and the three assessment objectives. There were relatively few non-responses or timing issues and almost no rubric errors.

Question 1 'Research Methods' proved to be a good test of candidates' knowledge of key research concepts and methods. There was a good level of engagement and understanding of the source material on population aged under 25 in selected countries and the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology used in gathering the data. Responses showed a generally sound understanding of participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Knowledge and understanding of sampling choices could be better. Analysis and

interpretation of the source material was generally good. Many candidate responses made clear and confident use of methodological terms.

The 'Identity: Self and Society' option was slightly more popular than 'Social Stratification and Inequality'. In both option questions most candidates showed sound and, in some cases, excellent knowledge and understanding of the key theories, concepts and arguments within the topics. New aspects of the syllabus were generally well understood, including migration, ecological issues and the impact of the internet on identities and societies. The full range of marks was seen by examiners. Some responses showed real insight and sophistication in their grasp of the question and handling of sociological evidence. Many candidates achieved high marks in **Question (c)** and **(d)** by explaining three elements, for example three push factors that may cause people to migrate to another country. In terms of quality, some candidates were well organised and marshalled evidence very effectively in option **Question (e)**, though some mistakenly engaged in evaluation for which there is no credit. In **Question (f)**, some responses lacked range and/or were not sufficiently sociologically developed. A number of the extended responses for option **Questions (e)** and **(f)** were also not organised into paragraphs and tended towards the narrative and description, thereby only achieving limited marks. There were few list-like and/or one-sided answers.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 Research methods

(a) (i) An excellent response here with almost all the candidates correctly identifying India, Pakistan or the USA as two countries where there had been an increase in the number of people aged under 25 between 1975 and 2015. A few candidates misinterpreted the data in the chart, and incorrectly identified China.

(ii) This question required candidates to use information in Source A to explain two reasons why the data is useful for studying population change in people aged under 25. It drew a mixed response. The majority of the responses demonstrated some engagement with the source and presented at least one identified and/or developed point to show why the data is useful. Responses frequently included the data being in numerical or quantitative form, the data came from the census of each country and the fact that the data had been gathered by WHO/professional researchers. Each of these points were clearly potential benefits for studying population change and were from the source. Thus each point could achieve one mark. To achieve the second mark per point the candidate needed to unpack or explain why this aspect of the source was useful or beneficial. For example, the fact that *the source was quantitative data allows researchers to see patterns and trends in population data over time* was sufficient to score both marks. Similarly *censuses are official statistics that will have been put together by government officials who collect population data in a professional manner and thus give an accurate picture of the population under 25*. Some of the responses only referred to information from the source without developing the points, thus being limited to one mark per point. Others offering vague explanations that could not be credited, e.g. simply asserting *the data is valid/ easy to understand*, etc.

(iii) The overall response to this question was stronger than **1(a)(ii)** showing that candidates found it easier to critique the source than to recognise its utility in terms of the study of population change. In terms of possible problems with the source commonly seen answers identified the fact that the data was in quantitative form, only five countries were shown, the timeframe was only 1975–2015, the data is only for the under 25s and the data has been rounded up or down. As with **1(a)(ii)** any of these points by themselves would be awarded one mark. To achieve the second mark the candidate needed to unpack or develop the explanation in terms of why this aspect is not useful for the topic. Answers could be fairly concise. So, to say that *only five countries are shown, this is too few countries/too small a sample to be representative of the population under 25 across the world* was sufficient for both marks. Similarly *the data shown is only for the under 25s, so it is not useful in trying to understand population change as a whole as for that we would need data on those over 25 in each country* is enough for both marks. Weaker answers lacked specificity or merely restated the source. A few answers strayed too far from the source and engaged in a discussion about the source not showing birth and death rates. Such answers were not creditworthy and candidates are advised to focus on something that is an aspect of or in the source rather than on something that is not.

(b) The majority of candidates scored full marks by stating two stages in research design. Common answers included: identifying a topic, aims or hypothesis, a pilot study, identifying the target

population, sampling and choosing a method. Any task completed by sociologists during the design stage were acceptable. Answers that focused on activities conducted during the implementation of research were not creditworthy, for example conducting interviews or analysing data collected.

(c) In this question candidates were asked to explain one strength and one limitation of participant observation. It drew a fairly good response and most candidates scored at least two marks. In terms of the strengths of the method, many candidates correctly identified that participant observation can be high in validity because it yields qualitative data, allowing the researcher to take an in-depth look at a group or even achieve verstehen due to taking part in group activities in a naturalistic setting. Limitations frequently focused on the covert/overt nature of participant observations. The Hawthorne effect featured strongly here, so the idea that people may know the observation is taking place and will change their usual behaviour thereby negatively impacting validity. Others cited ethical and practical issues with covert participant observations such as researcher safety or the time and cost of extended observations. Such answers were acceptable as long as the candidate specified the overt/covert nature of the observation. Answers which simply assumed that all participant observations are either covert or overt were more problematic. Ultimately the question is about *participant* observation and ideally answers needed to focus wholly upon the consequences of the researcher being part of the group under study and undertaking their activities with them.

(d) This essay-style question asked candidates to evaluate the effectiveness of semi-structured interviews in sociological research by developing at least two arguments for and two against. Most candidates provided a two-sided answer with the required range of points and came to a conclusion. The quality of arguments varied. Most answers scored in level two (4–7 marks) due to some points being only partially rather than fully developed or explained. Most candidates mentioned the flexibility of the semi-structured format and developed that aspect in different ways. Some arguments considered the idea that the ability of the researcher to probe respondents, where needed, allowed more qualitative and in-depth information to emerge, with a positive impact on validity. Others explained that the element of standardisation in a semi-structured format allowed for some questions to be repeated in other interviews enabling comparability. On the against side of the argument many responses discussed issues related to interviewer presence, such as the interviewer effect or interviewer. Practical issues such as the interviews being time consuming and/or expensive were often not well explained; the best responses linked the ability to ask open additional questions to adding time to both the interview itself but also to the analysis of the data at the end. A few answers discussed strengths and/or limitations of other types of interviews, most commonly structured and/or unstructured without direct comparison to semi-structured interviews and this was not creditworthy.

(e) The research design question is a new addition to the assessment structure. It therefore posed a new challenge for candidates. The full range of marks was seen, though relatively few candidates scored in the 10–12 mark range (level 3/4). The first of the marking criteria for this question was for **Knowledge and understanding** of methods and evidence. Here successful answers provided detailed and accurate *descriptions* of the research methods chosen, with relevant sampling, along with a *description* of a suitable a piece of secondary evidence. For example, describing the types and examples of questions to be asked in an interview, the size of a sample and how access could be gained or exactly how an observation was going to be carried out. Such descriptions integrated sociological concepts such as open/closed questions, a standardised approach, rapport, qualitative/quantitative data, probing etc. Too many answers gave only a brief description of how research choices were to be implemented which meant that they were likely to score only 1 or 2 marks for Knowledge and understanding. The second marking criteria was for **Reasons for choices**, in other words for explaining why a particular method or sample was chosen, including the use of appropriate terms such as reliability, validity, representativeness and generalisability. This was often done much better than the description of methods and evidence. However, many justifications tended to be rather generic – for example a semi-structured interview was chosen to gain 'deep insight', with little explanation as to how such insight could be arrived at using this interview technique. The final marking criteria was for **Application to context** or how well the candidate was able to orient their research choices to the context of the topic of age inequality in the workplace. Many responses simply repeated the phrase inequality/workplace with little or no real engagement. The best answers *integrated* contextual insights into their descriptions and rationale for methods, sampling and secondary evidence. A few candidates engaged in evaluation, describing the disadvantages of chosen methods or evidence which was not creditworthy.

Question 2 Identity: self and society

(a) (i) The definitional question on 'the penal system' drew a mixed response. The majority of the responses demonstrated some understanding of the term though relatively few achieved full marks. The best answers made reference to an agency or formal agency of social control that enforces sanctions/punishment. Some gave the obvious example of prison. References to policing were not generally creditworthy unless sanctions such as fines were mentioned. Candidates also referred to the justice system and courts as those who pass sentence and set punishments but did not recognise that they are not responsible for administering them.

(ii) The question was answered well in general, with a large number of candidates scoring full marks for their definition of the term 'consensus', most frequently identifying it as agreement in the society/shared values in the society. The most common misunderstanding lay in confusing the term consensus with the term 'census'. Answers that scored only one mark were usually connected with the idea of agreement but needed a second element to score the second mark.

(b) This question asked candidates to give two examples of protest groups. Some gave two specific examples such as Black Lives Matter or Greta Thunberg's School strikes for climate group. Others gave more generic examples such as feminists or human rights protest groups. Both approaches were creditworthy. Answers which achieved no credit included vague references to the LGBTQ+ community, pressure groups or youth subcultures.

(c) This question asked candidates to explain three ways an individual's identity can be positively affected by social networks. In the syllabus the concept of social networks is included under the heading of 'The digital self and online identities' and it was anticipated that students would briefly explain the impact of online communities of one kind or another. For example, people who are members of Facebook can choose which aspects of their identity they wish to make public and such profiles can be edited in line with the image they wish to present. In fact, many students made no connection to the digital world at all in their answers, focusing instead on broader offline networks such as the family, peer groups or workplace connections. These are, of course, legitimate forms of social networks and hence credit was duly given. Some answers neglected to exemplify any kind of social network (either on- or offline) and made generalised comments about networks boosting self-esteem or allowing people to socialise, thereby also neglecting a substantive to the impact on identity. The best answers identified a social network, for example LinkedIn, and then explained exactly how it could positively affect identity, in this case providing contacts which may be useful in terms of the role a person plays within the workplace.

(d) The question about reasons why the media is an effective agency of socialisation drew a better response than the previous question. High scoring answers identified three different examples of media and linked them to socialisation. For instance, the news showing the consequences of deviant behaviour, celebrities as role models influencing young people in terms of norms of appearance, films teaching gender roles or the impact of social media on the values and behaviours of the young. Less strong answers talked in simple terms about meeting people online/socialising or staying in touch with relatives with little or no engagement with the effectiveness of the media as a socialising force.

(e) This question asked candidates to discuss the view that cultural identities are becoming the same all over the world. It drew a mixed response. In their answer candidates were asked to include at least three developed points with evidence. This is not a question where candidates are expected to engage in evaluation, unlike **Question 1(d)** and option **Question (f)** where there is a specific instruction to create arguments for and against. In option **Question (e)** candidates need to develop three points or arguments about the view, namely whether cultural identities are becoming the same all over the world. Any points arguing against the view, therefore, were not creditworthy. In terms of the content this is really a question about globalisation and specifically the emergence of a global culture in which cultural identities are becoming homogenised. The most successful answers focused on the idea of westernisation/Americanisation/McDonaldisation as the driving force behind the sameness of cultural identities, providing examples in support of that view. Examples of universal food/drink, music, movies, the English language and globalised clothing etc. were frequently seen. A few answers discussed attitudes and values that are becoming universal, such as more freedom and rights for women or the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, etc. Stronger responses had three clearly different and fully developed points whereas weaker responses were either narrower or less well developed. Candidates who 'bunched' their examples into a single point or perhaps two points scored in level two. Many tried to argue incorrectly that the increase of

cultural blending in multicultural societies and the emergence of hybrid cultures within a society constituted a global culture. However, such arguments fail to address the global sameness referred to in the question as hybrid differ from society to society.

(f) This proved to be a somewhat challenging question for the majority. In their answers candidates were asked to evaluate Marxist views of social control, including at least three arguments for and three arguments against, with a conclusion. Stronger answers frequently referred to Althusser's ideological state apparatus, principally the media and education as the purveyor of capitalist norms and values to the masses, keeping them in unquestioning subordination. Others explained how the family continues to reproduce a capitalist workforce thus maintaining the status quo, in effect controlling society by keeping the cogs on the capitalist machine turning. Many also focused on the repressive state apparatus in the form of formal agencies such as police, courts and armed forces which use coercion and the law to control and deter resistance. Many answers, however, tended to be less well directed and tended towards more generic descriptions of the Marxist view of society, i.e. the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, without explicitly focusing on their views on social control. In evaluation functionalist, feminist, and occasionally postmodernist views were put forward and these were generally well unpacked. Most answers drew a conclusion which was most often a summary rather than a reasoned judgement based on the actual arguments presented.

Question 3 Social stratification and inequality

(a) (i) The definitional question on capitalism proved difficult for many candidates who did not give a clear answer. Partial definitions often made reference to society being divided into the proletariat and the bourgeoisie or economic exploitation. The better answers defined capitalism as an economic system and one that is based on private ownership of the means of production.

(ii) Some candidates provided a comprehensive definition of the term 'modern slavery', defining it as the exploitation of vulnerable people for personal or commercial gain. Debt bondage, forced marriage and child labour were often given as examples of modern slavery. A large number of responses offered only partial definitions about people being exploited or vague definitions, for example *working class people kept on a minimum wage*, that could not be credited.

(b) This question required candidates to give two examples of ecological issues. Candidates' responses showed generally good knowledge. Common answers seen included climate change, global warming, pollution (of various kinds), deforestation etc. Some responses, however, identified issues that were not ecological, e.g., racial inequality, poverty, lack of human rights etc. which could not be credited. A few answers gave extra and unnecessary explanation for their points.

(c) This question asked candidates to explain three push factors that may cause people to migrate to another country. It was answered well in general and many candidates scored full marks. Common push factors identified included poverty, famine/natural disasters and war. Others discussed a lack of various things in society such as a lack of human rights, healthcare or educational and job opportunities. These just needed to be unpacked a little to achieve the second mark per point. Some answers showed some confusion and identified pull factors instead such as seeking better education and job opportunities. Candidates need to take care to keep their points oriented to the question asked.

(d) This question asked candidates to explain three reasons why social mobility exists. Common answers included the idea of society having an open structure or being a meritocracy, allowing people to move from one social class to another. References to both intra and intergenerational mobility were seen. Other popular answers explained that individuals can work hard, get educated, gain promotion, win the lottery or get married as ways of improving their social class. The best answers also referred to changing one's social class rather than simply achieving more status or moving up the social hierarchy. Examples of downward social mobility, as a result of losing a job or going bankrupt, were also acceptable though less common.

(e) This question asked candidates to discuss the view that people's life chances are affected by age. Answers needed to include at least three developed points with evidence; no evaluation is required. Whilst few candidates attained marks in level three, the majority of answers demonstrated a good understanding of the demands of the question and scored marks in level two. Most answers mentioned ageism in the workplace, for both younger and older people. Many also discussed age-differences in the provision of healthcare and education. Less confident answers mentioned different social expectations of different age groups – older people being seen as wise and so on –

or stereotypes of age groups with no application to life chances. As with **Question 2(e)** a few candidates mistakenly believed that a balanced argument was required and went on to discuss other factors that may affect life chances, most commonly gender, ethnicity and class. Answers should include at least three developed points for the view in the question. No evaluation is required.

(f) The essay-style question asked candidates to evaluate the extent to which labelling theory is the best explanation for social inequalities. As with **Question 2(f)**, the guidance bullets in the question appeared to be helpful in making it clear that at least three arguments for and three against should be given with a conclusion offered at the end. Most candidates presented two-sided answers and offered a range of points. The best answers were also consistently conceptual and focused arguments, both for and against, on social inequalities of various types. The differentiator in terms of level tended to be the degree of knowledge of labelling theory itself. Arguments against labelling theory being the best explanation were frequently done more effectively than arguments for it. Less developed responses explained some of the key concepts including stereotyping of social groups, the development of a master status and a self-fulfilling prophesy. A few made reference to moral panic theory and deviancy amplification. However, many answers did not develop such points in terms of explaining social inequality, resulting in partial development and marks limited to level two. By contrast many strong points were given in evaluation, drawing upon Marxism, feminism and functionalism.

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 2251/22
Family, Education and Crime

Key messages

- Candidate knowledge of the limitations of theoretical perspectives could be improved, perhaps by getting candidates to draw up 'for and against' tables during preparation and revision.
- In **part (a) (i)** and **(ii)** of the questions candidates did not always include two separate elements, which prevents full marks being awarded.
- In **part (b)** some responses presented long paragraphs which were unnecessary.
- Candidates did not always develop their points in the **(c)**, **(d)**, **(e)** and **(f)** questions, and, particularly in the **(e)** and **(f)** questions, some of the responses lacked range and/or were not sociologically engaged to a sufficient degree, and therefore did not achieve marks in the highest level.
- In **Question (e)** there is no requirement to evaluate, nor to provide a conclusion; candidates should focus only on providing three developed (i.e. evidenced) points **for** the view in the question.
- Some responses in the **(f)** questions were not organised into paragraphs and in some areas were underdeveloped, and/or descriptive, lacking clarity and synthesis. There were also some list-like and/or one-sided answers that could not score higher than Level 2. Most candidates, nonetheless, provided a judgement, mainly as a conclusion to their answer, although developed conclusions were rare.
- Key concepts could be improved. Candidates need a good working knowledge of key terms and concepts within the specification and the topics. A glossary for each of the units studied would be of great use to the candidates.
- Time management should be better considered. The **(a)** and **(b)** questions are worth just two marks, as such, there is no need for candidates to write lengthy paragraphs. A number of candidates ran out of time and potentially were not able to demonstrate all they knew in the higher tariff questions.
- Candidates must read the questions carefully – this caused issues with a number of questions. For example, if the question asks for limitations of a theory, answers that simply describe the theory will not be credited. Another example would be if the question asks for positive views, raising negative issues will similarly not be credited.
- Sociological theories – candidates are expected to have a good working knowledge of the main theoretical approaches in Sociology for Family, Education and Crime. The key aspects, ideas, strengths and weaknesses of each theory in relation to each topic need to be covered.
- Using distinct paragraphs for each point made – it is good practice for candidates to separate answers into clear paragraphs, making it obvious where one point ends and another begins. For example, using discourse markers such as, 'Firstly', 'Secondly', 'On the other hand' etc.
- The **(f)** question is the only one which requires evaluation, a number of candidates were evaluating in **(c)**, **(d)** or **(e)** questions when this is not required and will not be credited.
- Candidates could develop their points further and demonstrate more sociological engagement, especially in the **(e)** and **(f)** parts of the questions.
- Candidates should avoid writing introductions and conclusions where they are not required. Introductions are never needed and conclusions only in the **(f)** questions.
- Generic, common-sense, list-like answers should be avoided.
- Candidates should be encouraged to read all questions thoroughly before starting to write and to make a short plan to best answer each essay question.

General comments

- **Section A**, Family, remained the most answered section, followed by **Section B**, Education, and then **Section C**, Crime.
- This was the first paper of the new specification to be sat. Overall, it was accessible to all and a full range of marks were seen.
- The new question format gives candidates clear instructions on what is required to answer the question.

CAMBRIDGE
International Education

- There were very few rubric errors seen this session. The evaluate question, on the whole, saw some excellent responses and there were many with conclusions.
- Generally, answers were well written, and candidates signposted their points using clear signal words, discourse markers and punctuation.
- Overall, there were some high quality responses seen with candidates showing very good knowledge of the subject matter and successfully integrating sociological concepts and theory into their answers.
- In addition to sociological knowledge, many candidates used localised examples well as evidence for the arguments they were making.
- Candidates must ensure they include the question number next to their responses to ensure they are credited.
- Candidates who performed well demonstrated a secure knowledge of sociological concepts and theories, with some reference to specific studies; answers were written in direct context of the question and there was good use of evidence to support answers.
- Conclusions should be justified and developed and not just a restating of earlier points in a summative way.
- Time management was generally good, with a small number of candidates opting to answer the **(e)** and **(f)** questions first. Those candidates that did run out of time typically spent too long on the lower tariff questions.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 Family

(a) (i) Candidates generally answered this question well. Most demonstrated a clear understanding of the 'warm bath' theory in terms of the functionalist idea of the male breadwinner returning home from work to his wife (and children) who function so as to soothe and relieve the stress generated by the workplace. A few candidates took the phrase 'warm bath' literally and did not score marks.

(ii) A well answered question. Most candidates achieved both marks by accurately defining the lone parent family as one parent living with a dependent child, typically due to divorce or death. Candidates who only scored one mark frequently omitted reference to children but spoke about only one parent being present in the family. A few candidates confused the term with the empty nest family.

(b) This question asked for two examples of family diversity. It was an accessible question; many different answers were acceptable and hence many candidates scored full marks. The majority used different family types such as nuclear and extended families as examples of family diversity. Others referred to ethnic and cross-cultural differences, diversity of family roles or different types of marriage such as polygamy and monogamy. Some responses mentioned social class/ethnicity/families in different parts of the world/cultures. Some candidates wrote long paragraphs with explanations of, for example, family types which was unnecessary.

(c) Many candidates described ways socialisation in the family can be different for girls and boys. Most responses focused on 'ways' or processes such as canalisation, manipulation, verbal appellation and role-modelling. There was some excellent sociological engagement seen here that was duly rewarded. When used, these concepts were generally well understood and applied appropriately in the context of the question. Some responses looked at socialisation by agencies other than the family, such as school which was not answering the question. Also, candidates needed to consider both boys and girls within each point made, a number of candidates only looked at one gender. Alternatively, some identified a 'way' but did not give further detail, in effect simply listing their points; others did not identify a 'way,' but instead described gender differences e.g. boys tend to socialise with other boys and play outside whilst girls stay indoors.

(d) Many candidates found this question on the limitations of the Marxist view of the family difficult. The most successful answers frequently identified key features of the Marxist view and then explained how this was challenged by other theorists or perspectives. For example, Marxists focus on the family as a support for an exploitative capitalist system, but functionalists argue this neglects the positive functions of the family such as the physical and emotional care of children. Other popular answers argued that feminists show the Marxist view to be gender blind or that the Marxist view, whilst critiquing the family, fails to offer any alternatives for family life. Several answers described

aspects of the Marxist view of the family and did not explain any limitations, thereby not answering the question.

(e) This question asked candidates to discuss why alternatives to marriage are becoming more common. Almost all candidates made some relevant points and most answers scored marks in Level 2. Many answers contained three or more points with better answers giving quality development, particularly in terms of evidence given in support of points. Answers which were a mixture of developed and partially developed points scored in Level 2, all three points being fully developed and explicitly sociological is a prerequisite for Level 3. Most candidates included some sociological concepts in their answer. Popular reasons given for the decline of marriage included secularisation and more liberal social norms and values, resulting in higher divorce rates and the proliferation of alternatives such as cohabitation. Many candidates identified the impact of feminism, citing the financial independence of many women along with greater freedom to make the personal decision not to marry but to stay single or cohabit with a partner. Others discussed the increase in friends as family due to financial pressures on the young. However, simply describing alternatives to marriage could not achieve a high mark as the core theme of the question was why alternatives to marriage are becoming more common. A small number of responses engaged in evaluation of the view in the question for which there are no marks available. Weaker responses offered list-like statements, typically scoring only in Level 1. A few candidates misinterpreted the question to discuss, perhaps, less common types of marriage such as arranged marriages. As these are not alternatives to marriage (a clear section in the specification) this could not be credited.

(f) The essay question on the family asked candidates to evaluate the view that children are an essential part of family life. Most responses were well structured and presented both sides of the argument with various degrees of competency and sophistication. Many better answers engaged with sociological concepts and theory. Candidates chose to answer this question in different ways. Many wrote their arguments as to why children were essential first and then gave their counter arguments. Others wrote an argument in favour, followed by a counter argument and so on. Regardless of either format, better answers were separated into paragraphs; a small number of candidates interwove their arguments and this did, at times, make it more challenging to identify where one point ended and another started. In support of the view in the question, answers typically referenced functionalism, particularly the importance of reproduction and the need to transmit norms and values through the generations via primary socialisation to maintain social cohesion and cultural identity. Others sociological arguments focused on the increasingly child-centred nature of society with children now being seen as in need of care and protection rather than as an economic asset. The idea of the child consumer was also well discussed. However, some of these points focused on whether having children constituted a positive or negative experience rather than children being essential or not, and could often receive partial credit only. Arguments against the view in the question commonly referred to the change in the role and status of children from economic asset to economic burden, the changes in attitudes brought about by secularisation and feminism with the ensuing freedom to choose alternatives to the traditional family, whether this be women choosing singlehood or people choosing to create a childless (DINK) family. Evaluation points tended to be better developed than the points about children being essential. A few candidates used examples of other family members being more important/essential, e.g. mothers, fathers, grandparents, for their evaluation points, which was not creditworthy. Many candidates attempted to sum up their arguments in some form of conclusion with the best ones showing an ability to review, reflect and come to a reasoned judgement based on the evidence presented. The main discriminator in terms of the level awarded was the amount and quality of evidence used to support points made and the clear discussion of said material with an explicit focus on the question.

Question 2 Education

(a) (i) There were many accurate definitions of the term *value consensus* seen. Two creditable elements were needed to achieve full marks. The best answers defined value consensus as a shared agreement on norms and values or an agreement shared by members of society. A few candidates repeated the word value, some replaced it with norms or beliefs which was fine. Others made the link between value consensus and functionalist theory and it being the foundation of social order and stability.

(ii) A very well answered question with a significant number of candidates achieving full marks by correctly defining the concept of a co-educational school. Creditable elements included schools

that admit both sexes/male and female learners, and that the different sexes study together in the classroom or the same institution and that they are taught the same curriculum. A small minority of candidates incorrectly said that a co-educational school was a school where all subjects are taught, or where schools teach about life as well as education. No credit was given to such responses.

(b)   In this question candidates were asked to give two examples of what students learn from the hidden curriculum. No further description or explanation was needed. Some candidates did confuse the hidden curriculum with the official curriculum, however most candidates achieved both marks. Common responses included: norms and values, punctuality, manners, hierarchy, respect for authority and gender roles.

(c)   This question asked candidates to describe three ways education can cause gender inequalities. It was generally well answered. Candidates varied in response length, but even concise answers were able to achieve full marks if the content was clearly explained. The best responses identified in-school factors contributing to gender inequality, such as teacher expectations/labelling, teachers encouraging stereotypical subject choice, the hidden curriculum and the lack of role-models for girls**,** whether this be in the hierarchy of the school or in textbook representations. Some candidates pointed to problems for girls in accessing education at a higher level or, in certain parts of the world, accessing any education at all. An example of a point that would not gain the development mark would be simply describing the different subjects taken by boys or girls in schools; to be developed it would need to add how that causes inequality.

(d)   In this question candidates were required to explain three reasons why education is not meritocratic for working class children. As with the previous question it drew typically good responses from candidates. Many responses used the Marxist critique of meritocracy, highlighting factors such as the lack of access to the best quality education (private schools) and the material and cultural deprivation experienced by working class children as a barrier to their success. Other popular points included the impact of negative teacher labelling and other school-based inequalities like the over representation of working class children in lower sets and streams. Other creditable points included the necessity for some children to work part-time, to the detriment of their schooling, and the fact that working class children are likely to speak in restricted rather than elaborated code which is the currency of schools and high academic achievement. Similar to **Question 2(c)**, answers varied in length and sophistication. Answers which scored fewer marks were usually not entirely clear, limited in their explanations and/or made fewer than the required number of points as per the question guidance. Some candidates lost focus on the question set and wrote about their family's impact on their education, rather than the system itself being meritocratic or not. This negatively impacted marks.

(e)   This question asked candidates to discuss why educational achievement differs globally. Three points supported by evidence were sufficient to score full marks. The challenge was to link reasons for differential achievement to global differences, whether this be between particular countries or regions such as developing and developed nations. It drew a fairly good response with the strongest responses highlighting the lack of access to schools (particularly for girls) or the poor quality of school infrastructure, resources and teaching in some countries compared to others. The best responses effectively illustrated how development levels impact the quality of education and how cultural beliefs shape educational aspirations and gender-based preferences across different societies. Specific examples were often seen, perhaps drawing upon the candidates own cultural context, and this helped in the making of global comparisons and the specificity of responses. Some responses described educational inequalities but either did not make a connection to different locations across the world or discussed differences within societies e.g. based on social class, gender or ethnicity. For example, discussing the inequalities in opportunities and outcomes linked to private versus state education in Britain or the United States. A few candidates ended their answers with a conclusion which was unnecessary in this question.

(f)   In this question candidates were required to evaluate the view that homeschooling is the best approach to education. Many high quality responses were seen. The question was clearly accessible to all. It drew a variable response in terms of quality and some answers illustrated more common sense rather than sociological knowledge of the debate. The concept of home schooling is new to the syllabus, many candidates offered a range of arguments both for and against. Candidates who responded to this question showed a clear understanding of home schooling as learning that occurs within the home environment, outside the formal school system. Some then discussed home schooling as provided by teachers either online or in person whist others saw it as something delivered by parents themselves. Both approaches were creditable. Common correct

points included cost benefits, the flexibility of homeschooling (particularly for children with disabilities/special educational needs), the desirability of a one-to-one focus with a teacher and protection from school-related issues such as bullying and labelling. Some responses overlooked the fact that homeschooling can still follow formal curricula and provide access to recognised assessments for progression to tertiary/higher education. In arguments against the view candidates often drew on more sociological conceptuality, referencing vocational and progressive education as superior to home schooling as well as functionalist ideas about formal education as a vehicle for secondary socialisation and the teaching of social norms and values via the hidden curriculum. The weaker answers were not organised into paragraphs, offering undeveloped (sometimes list-like) or underdeveloped points as well as common-sense arguments that did not engage sociologically. Again, most candidates included a conclusion but very few wrote a developed, evaluative conclusion.

Question 3 Crime, Deviance and Social Control

(a) (i) This question required a clear definition of vigilante groups. Candidates who knew what they were often offered a 'textbook' definition in terms of them being self-appointed individuals or groups who seek to punish offenders without any formal legal authority. These responses demonstrated a clear understanding of the concept and its distinction from officially sanctioned law enforcement and hence achieved full marks. Some candidates demonstrated no knowledge of the term and linked the phrase to gangs or other deviant groups.

(ii) A significant number of responses correctly defined the concept misogyny as the hatred of women mostly by men. Other acceptable elements were a contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against, women. Some candidates were clear on their definition linking to hatred and men as the perpetrators whilst others gave a partial definition by defining patriarchy. Answers that scored only one mark often referenced inequality against women but neglected to link this to males.

(b) Most responses correctly identified at least one, if not two, features of gang culture with most scoring at least one mark. Acceptable answers seen included deviant or violent behaviour, a hierarchical structure with a leader, specific dress codes, territorial behaviour, drug dealing and group loyalty. Some candidates also pointed out the fact that gangs are often composed of young, working class males which were also creditable elements. As with the other **(b)** questions it is not necessary to write paragraphs when the command word is 'state'.

(c) In this question candidates were asked to describe three ways the police can control individuals. A range of correct answers were offered and developed including powers such as stop and search, fines, warnings, arrest, weapons and the use of surveillance to monitor and manage potential criminal activity. There were some cultural differences within answers that were also creditable, e.g. sending individuals to prison, police violence etc. The quality of the descriptions often varied, with some candidates elaborating well on the impact on the police's ability to control, with other candidates neglecting this aspect.

(d) This question clearly posed a challenge to candidates in a similar vein to **Question 1(d)**. Both questions focused on the limitations of a theoretical view, in this case the interactionist explanation of crime and deviance. A higher proportion of no responses were seen on this question than any other on the paper, perhaps due to candidates not recognising the connection between interactionism with the more familiar-sounding labelling theory or moral panic theory. Of those who did respond, very achieved good marks. Some provided a general description of the interactionist perspective on crime and deviance without addressing its limitations. Others confused interactionism with other sociological theories. A few responses did accurately explain some key criticisms of interactionism and were rewarded appropriately. Such criticisms included the theory's failure to fully account for the origin of labelling, the fact that some crimes are always deviant regardless of any labelling, the committing of crimes by those who have not been labelled (e.g. white collar crime) and its tendency to portray criminals as mere victims of the labelling process. There was very little mention of moral panics or folk devils.

(e) In this question candidates were asked to discuss the view that prisons prevent crime. It drew a confident response from many candidates. Commonly, answers focused on how prisons prevent crime by incapacitating offenders, usually by removing them from society and locking them up. The idea of rehabilitation also featured strongly either through structured programmes or simply by virtue of the fact that offenders are given the time to reflect on what led to their past behaviours and the opportunity to be re-socialised by prison staff. Most answers also featured arguments around

the power of prisons to instil fear and thus to deter, both by discouraging the offender from recidivism and simultaneously issuing a warning to others in society about the consequences of committing criminal acts. Weaker answers offered common-sense information with list-like and/or partially developed points. A few candidates engaged in unnecessary evaluation of why prisons did not prevent crime (similarly in 1e and 2e) despite the scaffolded instructions in the question. Evaluation in an **(e)** question will not be credited, however good it may be.

(f)   In the essay question candidates were asked to evaluate the view that gender is the most important factor in explaining why an individual commits crime. Many candidates displayed an impressive array of arguments both for and against. Many different concepts, studies and sociological theories were used to good effect. Most candidates demonstrated strong sociological understanding of the role of gender in explaining crime, usually concentrating on trying to explain why males commit more crime, and more violent crime, according to official crime statistics. Many highlighted differential socialisation and social control, with boys being encouraged to adopt aggressive, risk-taking traits, while girls are socialised into more passive, conforming behaviours. The culture of masculinity, including toxic masculinity, was frequently referred to. Others attributed the traditional male role of the breadwinner as a reason for crime when legitimate means to fulfilling this role are blocked. Some answers also attempted to explain why women do not commit as much crime as males, particularly violent crime. There were many discussions of the chivalry thesis, with some even suggesting that women were emboldened to commit more crime by the knowledge that they were likely to 'get away with it'. Arguments against the view were also strong, with candidates effectively discussing the role of social class, ethnicity and age as equally if not more influential than gender as a factor in explaining crime. Competing theoretical arguments featured Cohen's status frustration, labelling theory and Lyng's 'edgework' idea. Many candidates scored marks in Levels 2 and 3 though relatively few maintained quality development through six points (three either side) necessary for Level 4. Like in the other **(f)** questions, some candidates provided only brief list-like answers, sometimes leaning heavily towards one side of the debate. The weaker answers were not organised into paragraphs, offering undeveloped or underdeveloped points as well as common-sense arguments. As with the other essays on the paper candidates made a good effort to conclude their arguments with some offering thoughtful summations on the basis of the evidence presented. Few developed and evaluative conclusions were seen.