

MARK SCHEME for the October/November 2012 series

9699 SOCIOLOGY

9699/11

Paper 1 (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.

Mark schemes should be read in conjunction with the question paper and the Principal Examiner Report for Teachers.

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Page 2	Mark Scheme	Syllabus	Paper
	GCE AS/A LEVEL – October/November 2012	9699	11

Section A: The Sociological Perspective

1 "Evidence from a number of sources suggests that socialisation is the main factor shaping human behaviour." Explain and assess this claim. [25]

- (0–6) A few simple remarks about human behaviour or about different ways of studying humans, might be worth two or three marks. Higher in the band, answers will contain a few basic observations about socialisation and may offer some assertions about the part it plays in shaping human behaviour. There will be little or no reference to appropriate sociological evidence and arguments at this level.
- (7–12) Answers here are likely to be descriptive and confined to a review of the ways in which socialisation may influence human behaviour. Lower in the band, answers may be limited to an account of the agencies of socialisation and/or the stages of socialisation. Better answers at this level may begin to consider the evidence that socialisation plays a major part in shaping human behaviour, perhaps through an account of the cases of feral children. However, the range of evidence considered may be limited and any analysis will be superficial. Alternatively, to merit the top part of the band answers may provide a basic account of the functionalist or interactionist theory of socialisation.
- (13–18) Answers that fit the lower part of the band may be confined to a sound account of different sociological perspectives (most likely functionalist and interactionist) perspectives on socialisation. To go higher in the band, there needs to be some focus on the evidence that socialisation plays a major part in shaping human behaviour. The evidence cited may include, for example: the cases of children exposed to little or no human socialisation; Durkheim's study of suicide; cross-cultural differences in human behaviour; studies of gender divisions; and the sociological critique of biological accounts of human behaviour. Higher in the band, there will also be an assessment of the claim that socialisation is the main factor shaping human behaviour, though the analysis may be limited in both range and depth at this level.
- (19–25) Answers that merit this band will provide a good account of a range of evidence that may be used to support the claim that socialisation is the main factor shaping human behaviour. There will also be a sustained and well informed assessment of the arguments and evidence about the determinants of human behaviour. Lower in the band, the assessment may be somewhat implicit in the points made about the value of the evidence from sources such as the cases of feral children and various cross-cultural studies in differences in social behaviour. To go higher in the band, however, the assessment must also take a more direct form. This may be achieved by, for example, questioning the oversocialised concept of humans implicit in many sociological perspectives or through references to relevant material from socio-biological studies/theories. Good use might also be made of the post-modernist perspective to question over-deterministic views of the factors influencing human behaviour.

Page 3	Mark Scheme	Syllabus	Paper
	GCE AS/A LEVEL – October/November 2012	9699	11

2 Assess the contribution of post-modernist theorists to understanding society today. [25]

- (0–6) A few vague reflections on the nature of society today might be worth three or four marks. Some simple points about post-modernist theory, poorly linked to the question, would trigger the top of the band.
- (7–12) Answers that merit the lower part of the band may lack references to post-modernist theory and focus on discussing the strengths or limitations of other sociological perspectives on society today. Higher in the band, some knowledge of post-modernist theory must be demonstrated and applied to the question appropriately. However, the coverage of relevant post-modernist ideas is likely to be partial and may include some inaccuracy in the points made. There may be little or no assessment of the value of post-modernist theories at this level.
- (13–18) Lower in the band, the account of post-modernist theories may still lack breadth of coverage, though the material used will be described with greater accuracy at this level. Higher in the band, a wider range of post-modernist concepts and themes will be explored and there will also be an assessment of the post-modernist contribution to understanding society today. However, the assessment may lack depth at this level and is likely to rely mainly on juxtaposition of post-modernist ideas with other sociological perspectives.
- (19–25) A good account of the post-modernist contribution to understanding modern society will be offered at this level. This may include references to different strands of post-modernist thought and to different thinkers within that perspective. There will also be a sustained and well-informed assessment of the extent to which post-modernist ideas help us better understand society today. Lower in the band, the assessment may still rely mainly on juxtaposition of post-modernist ideas with contributions from other sociological perspectives. To go higher in the band, however, the assessment must include some explicit evaluation of the strengths and/or limitations of post-modernist ideas and this will be articulated in relation to 'understanding society today' specifically. Broad assessments of the philosophical strengths/limitations of post modernist theory would gain some credit, though the highest marks should be reserved for candidates who rightly focus their analysis on assessing the sociological value of post-modernist ideas in terms of understanding society today.

Page 4	Mark Scheme	Syllabus	Paper
	GCE AS/A LEVEL – October/November 2012	9699	11

Section B: Sociological Methods

3 "The strengths of qualitative research methods far outweigh the limitations." Explain and assess this view. [25]

- (0–6) A few disjointed remarks about research methods in general might be worth three or four marks. A brief but broadly accurate attempt to identify some qualitative research methods would trigger the top of the band. One or two simple points about the strengths and/or limitations of a particular qualitative method, with no further development, would also fit the top of the band.
- (7–12) A descriptive account of different qualitative methods with no clear references to strengths or limitations, would fit the bottom of the band. A basic account of some strengths and limitations of qualitative research, perhaps focused mainly on practical issues, would trigger the top of the band. Answers that consider only the strengths or the limitations of qualitative research methods could also reach the top of this band, if very well done. However, 12 marks is the ceiling for this type of one-sided response to the question.
- (13–18) Answers that discuss the strengths and limitations of qualitative research in general i.e. without referring to specific qualitative methods, could reach the lower part of this band. To go higher, answers must include references to particular research methods. To reach the top half of the band, the discussion of the strengths and limitations of qualitative research methods must also cover both practical and theoretical points. Higher in the band there will be some evidence of assessment, though this may be largely implicit i.e. it will appear in the candidate's summary of the strengths and limitations associated with qualitative research. The assessment may also be delivered through the juxtaposition of the positivist and interpretivist perspectives on research methods.
- (19–25) At this level, candidates will demonstrate a good understanding of the strengths and limitations of qualitative research methods, covering both practical and theoretical issues in reasonable detail. Particular research methods will be identified and discussed in the context of the question and references to appropriate studies, though not essential, may help to distinguish answers that are worthy of this band. There will also be a sustained and well informed assessment of the value of qualitative research methods. Lower in the band, the assessment need go no further than a defence of the positivist or interpretivist views of qualitative research methods. Higher in the band, the assessment will be supported by a more direct analysis of the value of qualitative research methods. This might include, for example, a discussion of research aims and values, reflections on the influence of topic on the choice of research methods, and issues of what constitutes good sociological research. Reward candidates who use references to relevant studies to show the type of context in which qualitative research methods might be a particularly appropriate choice.

Page 5	Mark Scheme	Syllabus	Paper
	GCE AS/A LEVEL – October/November 2012	9699	11

4 "Availability of funding is the main influence on the choice of research methods in sociology." Explain and assess this view. [25]

- (0–6) A few simple points about research methods, with no direct links to the question, would be worth three or four marks. A poorly developed account of why funding is important in carrying out sociological research would trigger the top of the band.
- (7–12) A basic explanation of why availability of funding may influence choice of research method, with no further development, would merit the lower part of the band. Higher in the band, there will be some recognition that choice of research method may also be affected by other factors, including time, location, size of sample, nature of the study group, researcher's skill set, together with a range of theoretical concerns such as the researcher's aims, values, interests, and attitude to issues such as validity, reliability, representativeness, and objectivity. Answers at this level may be mainly or wholly descriptive.
- (13–18) Answers at this level will identify a range of practical and theoretical factors that may influence choice of research method and show a sound understanding of the part that availability of funding may play in this process. Lower in the band, the treatment of theoretical factors may be lacking in detail. Higher in the band, the discussion of theory will be better informed and there will also be a concerted attempt to assess the view that funding is the main influence on the choice of research methods. The assessment at this level is likely to lack depth and may be confined to some poorly supported claims about theoretical perspective being the key factor influencing the choice of research method.
- (19–25) At this level we should expect an accurate and detailed account of the role that funding may play in the choice of research methods. Other factors, both practical and theoretical, will also be considered in some detail. In addition, there will be a sustained and well developed assessment of the view on which the question is based. Lower in the band, the conclusions reached may lack originality and are likely to rely on the idea that theoretical perspective is the main influence on choice of research methods. Higher in the band, the assessment will be more refined and appropriate caveats may be added about the circumstances under which one factor or another may play the leading role in influencing choice of research methods.

Page 6	Mark Scheme	Syllabus	Paper
	GCE AS/A LEVEL – October/November 2012	9699	11

Section C: Social Differentiation and Stratification

5 Assess the strengths and limitations of cultural explanations of poverty. [25]

- (0–6) An answer that offers a few simple points about the nature of poverty may be worth three or four marks. A few assertions about the causes of poverty, with only weak sociological insight, could reach the top of the band.
- (7–12) Answers at this level will demonstrate a basic understanding of one or more sociological explanations of poverty. Lower in the band, answers may be limited to describing a single explanation or theory of poverty, with no clear reference to the distinction between cultural and structural explanations. Higher in the band, more than one explanation will be offered. Awareness of what is meant by 'cultural explanations' needs to be shown in order to justify a mark at the top of the band. However, this awareness may be conveyed implicitly rather than directly stated. Answers at this level may be mainly or wholly descriptive.
- (13–18) To reach this band, the main focus of the answer must be on cultural explanations of poverty. Lower in the band, responses are likely to be confined to sound account of one cultural explanation/theory of poverty, which most likely would be Lewis' 'culture of poverty' thesis. Higher in the band, a wider range of explanations will be considered and there will also be an attempt to assess the value of the cultural approach to explaining poverty. However, the assessment at this level may lack depth and is likely to be confined to judgements that are implicit in the weight given to the particular strengths and limitations identified in the candidate's answer. Some assessments may also rely on a simple juxtaposition of cultural and structural explanations.
- (19–25) At this level, answers will demonstrate a good understanding of what cultural explanations of poverty involve. Explicit references to the distinction between cultural and structural explanations of poverty are also likely to feature at this level. In addition, there will be a sustained and well-informed assessment of the strengths and limitations of cultural explanations of poverty. Lower in the band, the assessment is likely to focus on the strengths and limitations of particular explanations of poverty, such as the 'culture of poverty' thesis. Higher in the band, there may also be some discussion of the overall value of cultural versus structural explanations, with strengths and limitations in both approaches noted.

Page 7	Mark Scheme	Syllabus	Paper
	GCE AS/A LEVEL – October/November 2012	9699	11

6 "Social class background has more influence than gender in determining a person's life chances." Explain and assess this view. [25]

- (0–6) A few simple observations about social class may be worth three or four marks. Some poorly articulated points about the influence of class on life chances would trigger the top of the band.
- (7–12) Answers at this level will demonstrate a basic understanding of how social class background may influence a person's life chances. Lower in the band, the answer may be limited to an account of one theory of social class, such as the Weberian or Marxist. A general account (with limited sociological insight) of how class, gender and ethnicity may influence life chances would also merit the lower part of the band. Higher in the band, the discussion of how social class influences life chances may either be more direct or more developed in the ranges of explanations/theories covered. Answers at this level may be mainly or wholly descriptive.
- (13–18) To reach this band, responses must provide a sound account of a range of material showing how social class may influence life chances. Lower in the band, answers may examine two or three contrasting views about the importance of social class. Functionalist notions of meritocracy, for example, might be contrasted with Marxist and Weberian ideas of structured inequality. Higher in the band, the range of material applied in answering the question may be wider or covered in greater depth. There will also be some attempt to assess the view that social class background has more influence than gender or ethnicity in determining a person's life chances. However, the assessment at this level may lack depth and is likely to be confined to a juxtaposition of contrasting explanations/theories of the relationship between class background and life chances.
- (19–25) Answers at this level will demonstrate a good understanding of the possible links between social class and life chances. There will also be a sustained and well-informed assessment of the view on which the question is based. Lower in the band, the assessment may rely on the juxtaposition of some key theories about social class and life chances. To go higher in the band, however, the analysis needs to be more direct in dissecting the relative importance of class, gender and ethnicity as factors influencing life chance. This might be achieved by, for example, reflecting on the nature of the relationships between the inequalities associated with class, gender and ethnicity. Good use might also be made of post-modernist theory to deconstruct concepts such as class, gender, ethnicity and life chances. Candidates who use relevant empirical material as part of the assessment should also be rewarded appropriately.