

**UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS**  
GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level and GCE Advanced Level

**MARK SCHEME for the May/June 2011 question paper**  
**for the guidance of teachers**

**9699 SOCIOLOGY**

**9699/21**

Paper 2 (Principles and Methods 2), 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 must be read in conjunction with the question papers and the report on the examination.

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- 1 Many sociologists recognise that their research is influenced by their personal values. They believe that the purpose of research is to make the world a better place. Therefore the choice of research topics requires a value-judgement that some features of social life are unacceptable and that research which may lead to improvement in society is a 'good thing'. Sociologists who hold this view are concerned about how their research data is used and whose interests it serves.

Sociologists who favour the positivist perspective take a different view. They claim to carry out research in a way that is *value-neutral*. All they do, they say, is to search for the truth. What is done with the information they produce is not their concern. They are content to leave it for politicians to decide how their research is used.

- (a) What is meant by the term *value-neutral*? [2]

Value-neutral refers to a state of detachment whereby sociologists claim to separate their own values and goals from any influence on the research process. Two marks for a clear and accurate definition; one mark for a partial definition, such as 'values don't influence anything' or 'where the researcher doesn't take sides'.

- (b) Describe two factors, apart from personal values, that may influence the sociologist's choice of research topic. [4]

Relevant factors include: funding and sponsorship; career considerations for the researcher; what is topical and newsworthy; the consensus among academics about what topics are important to study; because the opportunity was available; and because the topic suited the particular knowledge and skills of the researcher. One mark for the example and one mark for the development (2 x 2 marks).

- (c) Explain how a sociologist might try to prevent personal values influencing their research findings. [8]

0–4 Lower in the band answers will be limited to a few tangential or vaguely relevant points only. Higher in the band candidates will demonstrate some basic awareness of the way that the values of the researcher may be connected with bias in the research data, though the specific links are likely to be left implicit.

5–8 Answers lower in the band will begin to pinpoint some actions that might be taken to prevent personal values influencing the research process. For example, it might be suggested that the researcher uses research methods that offer greater detachment from the study group, such as postal questionnaires or secondary data. The researcher might also state their values at the commencement of their study in the hope that this would make them more sensitive to any personal bias that may affect their findings. The researcher could enlist other sociologists to scrutinise how the research is implemented and to check the research findings. To reach the top of the band, several plausible suggestions for preventing or limiting the influence of personal values on the research process must be made. Answers also need to demonstrate, albeit implicitly, a sound understanding of how the values of the researcher can lead to bias and distortion in the research findings.

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**(d) Assess the view that the purpose of sociological research should be to bring about improvements in society. [11]**

0–4 Any relevant points at this level will be vague and poorly supported by references to evidence and arguments. A legitimate viewpoint may be asserted, but the answer will be weak in terms of development and structure. Some awareness that there are different views about the purpose of sociological research may be apparent in a very rudimentary way in answers that merit the top of the band.

5–8 Answers at this level will demonstrate some awareness of the arguments and perspectives supporting the idea that sociological research should aim to bring about improvements in society. Higher in the band this may be contrasted with relevant alternative views, particularly those that argue for a value-neutral sociology. However, any assessment will be weak and may remain entirely implicit.

9–11 Answers in this band will demonstrate a good understanding of the arguments and theoretical perspectives that support the idea of a value-committed sociology. There will also be some attempt to assess the view that sociological research should aim to bring about improvement in society. Lower in the band, much of the assessment may be through the juxtaposition of thinkers/theories supporting opposite positions in the debate about values in sociology. Higher in the band the assessment will be more explicit and better developed; for example, candidates may question whose interests sociological research serves and who may benefit from supposed improvements in society, and what values underpin the idea of social engineering and what type of society it might give rise to.

**2 Participant observation is one of the research methods that is widely used in sociology. Overt participant observation describes the situation where the study group knows the identity of the researcher. Covert participant observation is where the identity of the researcher is concealed from the study group. Sociologists in the interpretivist tradition favour the use of participant observation. They claim that researchers who use this method are able to collect data that is high in validity.**

**However, positivists identify a number of limitations with participant observation. Loss of objectivity and the difficulty of making comparisons based on a small scale study are two potential problems. Critics have also pointed out that there are many ethical issues associated with covert participant observation. Positivists prefer to collect *quantitative data* using research methods such as questionnaires and structured interviews.**

**(a) What is meant by the term *quantitative data*? [2]**

Quantitative data refers to research findings that are expressed in a statistical form. Two marks for a clear and accurate definition; one mark for a partial definition, such as 'numbers rather than words' or 'information in tables and graphs'.

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**(b) Describe two ethical issues associated with covert participant observation. [4]**

The ethical issues might include, for example, the confidentiality of information gained, lying and deception by the researcher, the impact on the group if they later find out that they have been studied without their permission, and whether or not the researcher should get involved in dubious activities if necessary in order to prevent their cover being blown. One mark for each example plus one mark for development (2 x 2 marks).

**(c) Explain why interpretivists believe that the data collected using participant observation is high in validity. [8]**

0–4 Lower in the band there may be a few simple observations about the advantages of participant observation in general, with no clear reference to validity. Higher in the band, there will be some reference to validity, though the links with participant observation will be discussed only in a very simple way and there may be no reference to the interpretivist perspective by implicit or explicit links.

5–8 A sound account of why the data collected using participant observation may be high in validity will trigger the lower part of the band. To go higher, the account either needs to be more sophisticated in terms of explaining the links between participant observation and validity, or else some relevant links need to be drawn with the interpretivist perspective.

**(d) Assess the positivist view that research based on participant observation has little value in sociology. [11]**

0–4 A few basic observations about the positivist perspective in general may be worth 2 or 3 marks. Some simple comments about possible strengths or weaknesses of participant observation, with no clear links to the positivist critique, would trigger the top of the band.

5–8 A sound account of some strengths and weaknesses of participant observation, with no clear links to the positivist perspective, would be worth 5 or 6 marks. A somewhat list-like summary of the reservations that positivists have expressed about the value of participant observation studies would merit the top of the band.

9–11 At this level there must be an attempt to assess the positivist critique of participant observation. Lower in the band, the analysis may be limited to a basic juxtaposition of positivist and interpretivist views about the value of participant observation studies. Higher in the band, the assessment will be more explicit and well-formulated conclusions will be stated clearly.

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- 3 Social status in traditional societies is based mainly on ascription. Each person inherits a social position at birth in accordance with law, custom or religious practice. Usually, the individual remains within their ascribed position throughout life. Consequently, there is very little *social mobility* in this type of society. In modern industrial societies, traditional systems of stratification have been replaced by a more open system that is characterised by competition and a higher degree of social mobility. Customary divisions give way to a system of stratification based on social class and economic success.

Modern industrial societies may also be described as meritocratic. A meritocracy is a system in which people are rewarded on the basis of how hard they work and how much ability they possess. Functionalists believe that in order for the complex modern economy to operate efficiently, it is essential that people are rewarded on the basis of their ability and achievements. However, there is a debate in sociology about the extent to which modern industrial societies are meritocratic. Sociologists in the feminist and Marxist traditions reject the idea that a meritocracy exists.

- (a) What is meant by the term *social mobility*? [2]

Social mobility refers to the movement – usually of individuals but sometimes of whole groups – between different positions within the system of social stratification. Two marks for a clear and accurate definition; one mark for a partial definition, such as 'getting promotion' or 'rising up in society'.

- (b) Describe two ways in which an individual may achieve a higher position in society. [4]

There are various means through which a person may attain a higher position in society, such as: through educational qualifications; marriage; entrepreneurial activity; career progression; winning the lottery. One mark for the example plus one mark for development (2 x 2 marks).

- (c) Explain why functionalists believe it is important that people are rewarded on the basis of their talent and achievements in modern industrial societies. [8]

0–4 A few simple assertions about systems of reward or social inequality may be worth 2 or 3 marks. Some limited attempt to explain the functionalist perspective on social stratification would trigger the top of the band.

5–8 A sound account of the functionalist perspective on social stratification, which will include some reference to the importance of differential rewards in a modern economy, would be worth 5 or 6 marks. To go higher, the focus needs to be more directly on explaining why the functionalists think it so important that talent and achievement are highly rewarded. References to Parsonian functionalism and to Davis and Moore would be particularly relevant in this context.

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**(d) Assess the extent to which modern industrial societies are meritocratic. [11]**

- 0–4 A few general points about social stratification in modern industrial societies with little or no direct link to the question might be worth 1 or 2 marks. A simple definition of meritocracy and some assertions in favour of the idea that achievement is the basis of hierarchy in modern industrial societies would trigger the top of the band. Likewise one or two isolated points against the notion of a meritocracy, without further development, would be worth 3 or 4 marks.
- 5–8 A clear sociological account of the arguments in favour of the idea that modern industrial societies are meritocratic, with little or no consideration of the alternative viewpoints, would fit the lower part of the band. A list-like account of some of the arguments against the existence of a meritocracy, with no clear references to theories, concepts or studies, might also be worth 5 or 6 marks. To go higher, the arguments for and against the existence of a meritocracy need to be considered, though not necessarily with equal balance. There should also be some use of appropriate sociological sources (concepts, evidence, theories, studies) in answers that merit the top of the band and higher.
- 9–11 Answers at this level will demonstrate a good understanding of the concept of a meritocracy and the assessment will be sustained and well supported by references to evidence and/or theories. Higher in the band, answers will contain clear evaluative conclusions about the extent to which meritocracy exists in modern industrial societies. Detailed use of relevant empirical data and/or good understanding of the theoretical underpinnings to these debates may be another feature of answers that merit full marks.