

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

**MARK SCHEME for the May/June 2012 question paper**  
**for the guidance of teachers**

**9699 SOCIOLOGY**

**9699/12**

Paper 1 (Principles and Methods 1), 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: The Sociological Perspective

### 1 "Functionalist theorists have exaggerated the amount of consensus in society." Explain and assess this view.

0–6 A few assertions about the nature of social order, with little sociological provenance, might be worth 3 or 4 marks. A cursory attempt to define the functionalist concept of value consensus could trigger the top of the band. Likewise, a few simple points about the functionalist view of socialisation, with only weak links to the question, would be worth 5 or 6 marks.

7–12 Answers that are confined to a simple account of the functionalist view of social order would merit the lower part of the band. To go higher, there needs to be some attempt to explain the importance of value consensus in functionalist thinking about society. At this level, there need be no attempt to distinguish between functionalist theorists or to assess the view expressed in the question.

13–18 A sound account of the functionalist theory of social order, including discussion of the concept of value consensus, would trigger this band. Higher in the band there will be an attempt to explain why some sociologists believe that there may be less consensus in society than functionalists think is the case. This may be achieved through discussing contrasting theories of social order, such as those within the Marxist and feminist perspectives. To reach the higher part of the band there must be some assessment of the view expressed in the question, though at this level the points made are likely to be somewhat basic.

19–25 Answers at this level will demonstrate a good understanding of the functionalist view of social order. Discussion of different strands of functionalist theory might be a feature that distinguishes answers meriting the top of the band. To merit this band, there will also be a sustained and well-informed attempt to assess the view expressed in the question. Lower in the band, the assessment may be delivered by contrasting different theories of social order. Higher in the band, the assessment may move beyond juxtaposition of different theoretical perspectives to offer a more direct analysis of the extent to which social order depends upon consensus and shared values.

### 2 Assess the *realist* theory that there are more similarities than differences between sociology and the natural sciences.

0–6 Some simple observations about the nature of scientific enquiry/method may be worth three or four marks. A limited attempt to define the positivist position in sociology would reach the top of the band.

7–12 Lower in the band, answers will demonstrate a simple understanding of the methods of the natural sciences and the position advanced by the positivists in the debate about whether sociology can be a science. Higher in the band, answers may demonstrate a more developed understanding of what scientific method involved through, for example, references to thinkers such as Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos, and Lynch. Any attempt to discuss the Realist view will be very limited at this level.

13–18 Answers that merit this band will demonstrate a sound understanding of different views about the links between sociology and the natural sciences. This will include some discussion of the Realist perspective. Higher in the band, there will be a clear explanation of why Realists think there may be more similarities than differences between sociology and the natural sciences. There will also be some attempt to assess the Realist view, though the analysis may be very limited at this level.

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19–25 Answers that trigger this band will feature a good understanding of the positivist and anti-positivist positions, and the position taken by the Realists between these two extremes. There will be a sustained and well informed assessment of the view expressed in the question. Lower in the band, the range of analytical points may be confined to the conventional positivist versus anti-positivist debate. Higher in the band, a wider range of points may feature, including possibly references to one or more of the following: the post-modernist perspective, the feminist critique of positivism, and debates about subjectivity and the role of values in sociology/science.

## **Section B: Sociological Methods**

### **3 "Official statistics provide a distorted picture of social reality. For this reason, they have little value in sociological research." Explain and assess this view.**

0–6 A few simple points about secondary data in general would be worth three or four marks. A basic account of what official statistics entail would merit the top half of the band.

7–12 Lower in the band answers are likely to offer a basic outline of a few strengths and/or limitations of official statistics. Answers that are confined to an account of one or more studies in which official statistics have been used (Durkheim's study of suicide, for example) would also fit the lower part of the band. Higher in the band, a wider range of strengths and limitations of official statistics will be noted, though the answer may lack specific references to the idea of 'distorted social reality'.

13–18 Answers at this level will demonstrate a sound understanding of the strengths and limitations of official statistics. Higher in the band, there will also be a clear focus on the idea that official statistics provide a distorted picture of social reality. This aspect of the answer may be developed through references to appropriate examples, such as crime and the 'dark figure' or suicide rates and the social influences on the work of coroners. To reach the top half of the band, there will be some assessment of the view expressed in the question, though the conclusions reached are likely to be lacking in depth.

19–25 Answers will demonstrate a good understanding of the strengths and limitations of using official statistics in sociological research. A range of practical and theoretical points will be covered, possibly supported with well-chosen references to relevant studies. The thinking behind the claim that official statistics provide a distorted picture of social reality will be explained accurately. There will also be a clear attempt to assess the value of using official statistics in sociological research. Lower in the band, the assessment may lack some sharpness and detail. Higher in the band, the assessment will be well developed and reach coherent and plausible conclusions that focus directly on the issues raised by the question.

### **4 "Much can go wrong when carrying out covert participant observation. The risks with this research method outweigh the rewards." Explain and assess this claim.**

0–6 A few basic points about research methods in general, with no clear links to participant observation, might be worth two or three marks. Some simple points about participant observation, with no distinction drawn between covert and overt methods, would trigger the top of the band. Answers that are confined to defining the difference between covert and overt observation could also reach the top of the band.

7–12 A sound account of the strengths and/or limitations of participant observation, with no distinction drawn between covert and overt methods, could achieve up to ten marks. To go higher, there must be some attempt to describe the benefits and/or drawbacks of the covert method of observation. The discussion is likely to lack detail at this level and may focus mainly on

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practical points rather than exploring the more complex theoretical issues of validity, objectivity, and ethics.

At this level there may be little or no assessment of the claim on which the question is based.

13–18 A sound account of some benefits and drawbacks of covert participant observation, with the focus perhaps more on practical issues, would fit the lower part of the band. A more developed discussion of covert participant observation, with greater understanding of the relevant theoretical and/or ethical issues, would trigger the top part of the band. Higher in the band, there will also be an attempt to assess the claim on which the question is based. Within this band, however, the assessment may lack depth and is likely to be confined to a few simple contrasts with overt participant observation. Reward candidates who make an explicit attempt to explain some of the things that may 'go wrong' when carrying out covert participant observation.

19–25 A good account of the strengths and limitations of covert participant observation will be offered at this level, and the treatment of relevant theoretical issues will be accurate and well informed. It will be clear that the candidate understands what is meant by the reference in the question to the 'risks' associated with covert participant observation. The assessment at this level may still be based primarily on making contrasts between covert and overt observation, though now there must also be some attempt to draw direct conclusions about the usefulness of covert participant observation. The more developed the assessment in terms of analysing explicitly the usefulness of covert participant observation, the higher in the band the answer is likely to reach. Good use of relevant participant observation studies to illustrate key points may also be a feature of answers in this band, though in theory it would be possible to reach the top of the band without mentioning any studies.

## Section C: Social Differentiation and Stratification

### 5 "Post-modernist writers have exposed the weaknesses in traditional sociological theories of class." Explain and assess this view.

0–6 A few basic assertions about the nature of social class may be worth two or three marks. An answer that demonstrates some simple knowledge about traditional sociological theories of class could reach the top of the band.

7–12 A basic account of one or more traditional sociological theory of class (such as the functionalist or Marxist), would trigger the lower part of the band. A limited attempt to explain the idea that class divisions are breaking down, perhaps through reference to related social changes (such as increased social mobility, impact of the welfare state, and decline in traditional manual employment) would reach the upper part of the band, even if this view is not explicitly linked to the post-modernist perspective.

13–18 Answers at this level will discuss the post-modernist critique of traditional sociological theories of class explicitly. Lower in the band, this may be confined to a narrow range of material, perhaps concentrating on the post-modernist critique of economic determinism or the notion that class divisions are disappearing today. Higher in the band, a wider range of relevant material from the post-modernist perspective will be covered and there will also be an attempt to assess the view on which the question is based, though the analysis is likely to be fairly simple in this band.

19–25 Answers at this level will demonstrate a clear and detailed understanding of the post-modernist critique of traditional sociological theories of class. There will also be a sustained assessment of the post-modernist arguments. This may take the form of a defence of some or all aspects of one or more of the traditional sociological theories of class. Alternatively, the assessment may focus on contradictions and inconsistencies in the post-modernist arguments

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about class. Higher in the band, the assessment will be wider ranging and more incisive, avoiding simple conclusions and recognising different sides to the debate about the relevance of class analysis to modern societies.

**6 "In modern industrial societies, the poor are trapped in poverty by their dependence on welfare benefits." Explain and assess this view.**

0–6 A few poorly developed points about the nature of poverty may characterise answers that fit the lower half of the band. Better responses at this level may offer a simple account of one or two explanations of poverty, with no direct links to the question as such.

7–12 A basic account of one or two sociological explanations of poverty, with no direct reference to the question, would trigger the lower part of the band. A more developed account would go higher, but to reach the top of the band the answer must demonstrate some understanding of the concept of a poverty trap. Answers at this level will be largely or wholly descriptive.

13–18 At this level, different sociological explanations of poverty will be described accurately and there may be some reference to appropriate studies. There will also be an attempt to address directly the issues raised by the question, including the notion that welfare dependency creates a poverty trap. Lower in the band, the idea that welfare dependency leads to a poverty trap may be accepted largely uncritically. To go higher in the band, however, there must be some attempt to assess the view expressed in the question, though the analysis may be rather basic at this level. The distinction between cultural and structural accounts of the causes of poverty may be used to good effect to provide a theoretical framework for the discussion, particularly in answers at the top of the band.

19–25 Answers meriting this band will feature a wider ranging and more incisive assessment of the view expressed in the question. The idea that welfare dependency creates a poverty trap will be explained fully and may be illustrated with reference to appropriate empirical material. Links will be explored between the idea of a dependency culture and different explanations/theories of poverty. Answers are likely to identify a range of factors, in addition to the structure of welfare benefits, which make it difficult for the poor to escape their situation. Higher in the band, the analysis will reach beyond a basic juxtaposition of different theories of poverty to demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the issues by, for example, discussing the significance for the question of different definitions of poverty or recognising that the poor are not necessarily a 'fixed' or a homogeneous group.