Investigation Project

While there were many well researched and written investigation reports, there were also a number of shortcomings that students need to avoid. Students are reminded that their research needs to fall within the specifications outlined in the published guidelines. For Sociology this can be quite complex as there are a number of different aspects that need to be considered in relation to one another. Firstly, the focus of the investigation must be on inequality. Secondly students need to select one of the six social groups to investigate: gender, indigenous people, ethnicity, age, youth or rural/regional Australians. Thirdly, depending on the focus question chosen, students may also have to explore this in relation to one of the four institutions studied in the course: Family, Education, Work or the Media.

Students need to be aware that having chosen one of these groups (age etc.), they should be investigated as the source of the inequality. That is, for example, indigenous people experience inequality as a consequence of them being indigenous people, or people living in rural/regional Australia experience inequality as a result of them living in rural/regional Australia. The investigation can then be focussed down on to a particular area of inequality, for example people living in regional/rural Australia have lower post-Year 10 retention rates (educational inequality) as a consequence of them having less access to educational opportunities compared to people living in metropolitan areas. Likewise women (gender inequality) experience inequality because of the additional burden of domestic labour they are required to shoulder as a consequence of societal expectations about women.

A second shortcoming which students need to avoid and which has been repeatedly commented upon by markers in the past is students need to undertake genuine objective research that sheds light on the topic they are investigating. It seems to be a weakness of investigations into the media in particular that students ask fellow students what they think about a particular topic. The researcher then ends up with what amounts to an opinion poll rather than an objective investigation. The researcher has found out that Year 11/12 students think the media unfairly represents women or indigenous Australians or old people but this does not shed any light on what the media actually does. In contrast a content analysis of a newspaper or a sequence of television news reports or an interview with a person with expert knowledge because they work in the media industry does reveal information about how the media actually behaves. Candidates are urged to follow such lines of research rather than asking their friends what they think might be happening.

There are, of course, some issues that relate to public opinion and how those opinions may perpetuate or even cause a group to be subject to some form of inequality. A current example would be domestic violence and the perpetuation of this through male attitudes to women. Here, the investigation of male attitudes to women is of prime importance and thus an opinion poll would provide useful data.

Candidates are also reminded that they are undertaking a sociological investigation project. There is an expectation that sociological sources will be used in their report and, indeed, they will be assessed on this. With the advent of the Internet it has become easy to search for particular topics. Students may find useful scholarly articles and government reports that complement their research, but what often turns up is commentary and opinion outside of the field of sociology. This has a place but students are discouraged from making it the sole source of information and debate. This reliance on electronic sources led to a quite dramatic lack of both quality and depth of analysis that many candidates were able to add to their research. At this beginning level, students should be directed to use a range of textbooks (electronic or hardcopy), which offer a subject specific, balanced and sequential arrangement of relevant information. Old fashioned though it may be, students are urged to make use of published sociological texts for it is in these that they will find established sociological discussion of the issues rather than the opinion of a journalist or other commentator whose interest or agenda may have nothing to do with the academic study of sociology.

Several candidates did not attach any evidence relating to analysis of raw data, nor did they include the limitations of their research. Again at this beginning level, the ability to recognise this, is really an essential part of
the process. Many candidates referred to having interviewed people from workplaces, or outside family or college and had not explicitly indicated that they had used the requisite ethics consent form in the research methodology section of their report. Nor had they attached a copy of the TASC provided exemplar. Some candidates left names of their college and/or teacher on the report. Some candidates left the name of the subjects of their interview on the transcript of interview, but did not indicate in their research methodology that the individual had given permission for their name to appear. Attention to these details is an essential part of the process.

Finally students are yet again urged to pay greater heed to the rules around referencing. Referencing was often poor. Too often there were discrepancies between the works referred to in the report and what appeared on the reference list at the end. One cause of this seems to be students using references cited within other works and adopting them holus bolus and then not referencing them within their reference list. Greater diligence is needed. Many weaker projects were poorly referenced, it seemed apparent that many candidates had not proofread or taken much care or time with their reference list, which seems very poor practice. Some not even bothering to add subheadings or publishing details. Some candidates used a version of footnoting which was not accurate. Teachers need to remind their students that this is a very important part of learning to conduct academically sound research, and not something that is peripheral to the project.

Criterion 3
On the whole most folios were sound and addressed the topic of inequality. Candidates who demonstrated that they had researched their topic carefully, presented Australian data and followed the guidelines produced strong projects.

Candidates need to ensure that their focus is clearly outlined. Many projects started into the chosen topic with little reference to key concepts and their relevance. Some introductions with 400 words meant candidates repeated quotations and information in the discussion rather than building on their Lit review.

Some points to note:
- Direct quotations need to have the page number, especially when it is obvious that it has been taken from a book, for example, Germov & Poole, 2015. This is different if it is cited from a web page where the page is often not given, but if correctly referenced the marker can see this from the reference page.
- Research methodology needs to be attached in the Appendix; it is not enough to describe the questions that were asked. The sample population needs to be clearly specified in the method. Candidates should also indicate how the sample was accessed. It is easy to state that the researcher knew all participants.
- Data needs to be presented carefully. Axis on graphs should be labelled. Statement of results should match the graph. Raw data in a graph cannot be written in percentages in the statement if the graph does not show that.
- Extra graphs presented in the appendix should be referred to. Graphs taken from secondary sources should not be included in the Appendix. Information from these can still be incorporated into the project without providing the graph.
- Qualitative data should be summarized. Transcripts of interviews should not be placed in the Results section.

Criterion 7
The method needs to be clearly stated, especially given that it is no longer included in the word count. However, there is no need to educate the marker with a definition of the method (from a secondary source) that has been chosen.

The number of participants needs to be clearly stated. There were some projects with straightforward topics with 4 participants; this is not enough when administrating surveys.

Referencing was questionable in a number of projects, especially where the in-text referencing and the reference list did not match. If sources have been used initially but then not included in the final copy they should not appear in the reference list.

Journals accessed online need to be acknowledged as such. Online References need to be creditable. Sociology textbooks and dictionaries are preferable for definitions. All too often candidates provided an online definition.
Ethics need to be referred to in the Method. The marker should not have to search for the reference to ethics in the disclaimer. Candidates need to ensure that they do not provide the names of interviewees, especially when they have assured them of confidentiality.

Word count should be accurate. There were a number of projects where candidates had counted the method and results in the word count. These were quite short projects.

Written Examination

As noted in previous years in the Examiners Comments, a good response is a structured response to the question as it is asked on the Examination paper for that year. The best answers construct an argument incorporating a nuanced response to these variations. Thus, by incorporating their learned material with information derived from the provided stimulus, the candidates demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of Sociology. Skilful use of sociological perspectives, theories, concepts and terminology within the constructed answer to analyse and interpret the stimulus and other examples provide the much-needed academic basis for a good answer.

Section A

Question 1
This question on social control and socialisation was answered by a very small number of candidates (less than 10%). There were some notably good responses from students who displayed their knowledge and understanding of the concept of social control. These responses drew upon the functionalist perspective of socialisation and the necessity of social control in order to ensure a harmonious society. This was contrasted to the conflict perspective of socialisation and a discussion on norms and control. Informal and formal sanctions were mentioned. The stimulus was incorporated into the better responses, especially with the concepts of subculture and human agency. The interactionist perspective provided a robust means of criticism in some responses. As was the case in the previous year, there were many students who attempted an answer to this question but displayed no knowledge of social control, with several not even mentioning the term.

Question 2
Generally candidates who attempted this question had a sound understanding of socialisation and self-identity. Adequate coverage of the main theorists, Cooley and Mead, were the most popular ways for many candidates to approach this question.

Other students, stronger candidates, were able to integrate deviance theories such as Control Theory and Labelling – then relate this to the development of the self.

Many candidates only discussed primary and secondary socialisation. Tertiary socialisation needs some discussion, particularly when students acknowledged that socialisation is a life-long process but then stopped discussion on self and socialisation once a child entered school.

Better answers discussed:
- The structure-agency debate – competent discussions well related to the question. This required going beyond a discussion of solely interactionist theories.
- Feminist perspective and showed how socialisation reinforces patriarchy and how this relates to self-concept
- The relationship between stimulus 2 “Don’t judge a book by its cover” and the Looking Glass self
- The role of the media in self and socialisation. Related it to Goffman’s dramaturgical approach to self and socialisation.

Use of the stimuli still tends to be problematic. It is insufficient to just state, “as shown in the stimulus”. Criterion 4 requires students to answer the question, evaluate and analyse the perspectives/theories and use the stimuli to undertake this process.
Definitions – students need to ensure they use appropriate sociological language – often definitions were colloquial explanations. Stronger candidates used stimulus 1 as their definition for socialisation – a good idea. Lack of clearly structured paragraphs and inappropriate use of apostrophes continues to be a problem that detracts from the overall quality of students’ answers.

Question 3
This question was generally well answered. Strong responses offered a definition of deviance and referred to its relativity in connection to time, place, gender, culture and age. Candidates gave detailed interpretation of the stimulus material and linked this to alternative theoretical explanations. Weaker responses seemed pre-prepared generalised responses beginning with “there are 4 theories of deviance... the first theory is...” then launching into describing four theories without answering the question or addressing the relativity of deviance. It should be noted that 2 theories, linked to stimulus material is adequate, as well as using information from the course. Some candidates did not make any reference to the stimulus pieces.

Criterion 4
Most candidates used examples from all the stimuli, particularly stimulus 3, discussing the concept of subcultures, conformity to a group rather than mainstream dominant culture.

Criterion 5
There was good use of concepts including functions and dysfunctions of deviance; the difference between deviance and crime; anomie; changing social attitudes to deviance; and the notion that deviance is a social construct.

Criterion 6
Better responses drew on Becker’s labelling theory and Lemert’s distinction between primary and secondary deviance. They discussed who had the moral authority to apply deviant labels. Candidates also included a discussion of Merton’s typology of deviance as an imbalance between socially approved goals and socially approved means.

Question 4
Question 4 clearly asked candidates to use deviance theory to analyse why some people are likely to be involved in unacceptable or illegal consumer behaviour. Some candidates did not do this and wrote an essay about deviance theory. This was exacerbated by reference to examples that were also not relevant to the question. Some candidates did not refer to the stimuli at all.

Good answers included:
• Clear definitions of relevant terms deviance and socialisation. Often supported by stimulus 1
• A clear focus on the question throughout, using stim 4.
• Used deviance theory to analyse why unacceptable consumer behaviour occurred.
• Used many sociological terms
• Mention of perspectives and critiqued these using alternative perspectives and theories.
• Linked sociologists’ names to perspectives and theories
• Brought the essay back to the question with a summary conclusion.

Section B

Question 5
Only a small number of candidates answered this question. Most responses focused on dimensions of power and politics in the institutions of the family, work and education.

Very few of these responses demonstrated a real understanding of power in CAS: how it is exerted, how it is maintained and challenges to power in the institutions. A handful of answers provided a sustained analysis of power and politics within the institutions such as the family and education in CAS. Better responses discussed how the power base had changed within these institutions, aligning this to the passing of significant legislation such as the Family Law Act. The application of the Functionalist, Conflict, Feminist and Interactionist perspectives
to examine power and politics within these institutions was exceptionally well done in this small number of essays. Good answers provided analysis through application of these perspectives to material drawn from the stimulus and a wide range of relevant legislation. Several essays used sociological concepts in a sophisticated way that demonstrated deep understanding of the topic.

Many students were unable to provide a response to the question that integrated the stimulus and material from the course with the perspectives to explain power and politics in institutions within CAS.

Question 6
Overall, answers to this question were of a high quality. Students had a strong understanding of the concept of stratification and the ways in which it occurs within the various social institutions. Some candidates clearly ran out of time. Many candidates chose family and education as the institutions to write about. Fewer chose education and work and a very few incorporated media and family or all 4 institutions in their answer. Some very competent candidates tackled gendered inequality, geographical disadvantage, educational outcomes and cultural and economic capital, and indigenous inequality and education.

Good answers included:
a) An analysis that contrasted Functionalist and Conflict theory views regarding the institutions.
b) Cited the stimuli often
c) Used additional data and quotes/definitions that were relevant to the argument.

Criterion 4
A considerable number of students were able to answer the essay question through sustained argument and discussion. While many answers included discussion of the stimulus, and analysis of the strengths and limitations of sociological theories and perspectives, there was some misinterpretation of the education stimulus. Students need to be wary of simply accepting arguments put forth by the stimulus; there was a recurrence of students suggesting that public schools are typified by a lower work ethic and substandard teachers. Similarly, a number of students generalised that coming from a lower socio-economic background was equated with poorer attitudes towards education. It is important that students question these assumptions. Strong candidates immediately addressed the stimulus and used it throughout their argument, rather than relying too heavily on in-class material. They also made it clear when analysis and evaluation of theories was taking place through comparing and contrasting, and through the use of critical language.

Criterion 5
The topic of stratification lends itself to the use of a variety of terms and concepts and many students did well on this criterion. A number of students discussed concepts without actually naming them; students need to ensure they are being explicit with concepts rather than inferring. Strong candidates were able to use several concepts and demonstrate their understanding through a brief definition and an example that linked with the stimulus. It is important to ensure that students are not simply listing definitions. Some students used their entire introduction defining concepts, to the detriment of presenting their key argument(s). This issue was also observed in body paragraphs. Students also need to be aware of the importance of spelling concepts correctly.

Criterion 6
Most students were able to use two or more perspectives, as well as a variety of theoretical approaches. Outstanding answers were able to link several theories to the stimulus and draw conclusions about stratification based on this application. While a number of candidates were able to recall vast amounts of information in relation to a number of theories, sometimes this read more like a textbook rather than an analytical essay. More successful answers demonstrated the interrelationships between the theories and discriminated between relevant and irrelevant theoretical detail. Most students were strong on Functionalist and Conflict theories, and weaker on Interactionist theories. While this question lends itself to a lively conversation between Functionalist and Conflict approaches, Interactionist theories present an important and interesting contrast to these deterministic approaches. Students are reminded that the use of a theorist’s last name is adequate when introducing a theory and that students need not use time providing unnecessary background information on theorists.
Question 7
Approximately 20% of candidates answered this question. While it is arguably the most straightforward of the questions, as it requires candidates to analyse the interrelationships between at least two institutions, many students do not do this adequately.

Good answers show that the candidates have knowledge and understanding of the interplay between institutions e.g. the dynamic between work and family. Several well-constructed essays examined how family and work life balance is challenged by modern technology whereby workers are accessible at home 24/7. The increasing trend to work from home enabled by new technologies was also included in some very good responses that drew upon Stimulus 10.

Essays on the interrelationships between family and work or family and education were the most popular. Of great interest were those that examined work and media or family and media.

This essay can pose some challenges to incorporating the perspectives but there were several essays that competently used the three major perspectives and the addition of the feminist perspective. This was particularly relevant to this topic.

Question 8
This was the most popular question for candidates. There were a number of responses that demonstrated that candidates had prepared carefully and comprehensively. Even though this has been a predictable question, it is still difficult for candidates to ensure that they provide a balanced response with gives equal weighting to two or more institutions. Better answers were those written by candidates who chose to focus on two institutions. Candidates who devoted most of their discussion to one institution provided weaker responses; most of the time this was family. Better essay planning during the suggested reading time would ensure that candidates respond adequately to both institutions and integrate the stimulus sufficiently.

Family was the main institution of choice and students dealt with the changes in the family in an effective way. Stronger students related Feminism to the changes in families. Better answers clearly showed the relationship between legislation and changes over time. These included strong discussion of legislation such as Family Law Act, Child Care Act etc.

A few students attempted to look at changes over time in the media – these were a pleasing diversion from the majority who dealt with family and education or family and work.

Those students who looked at changes in work did so very well – looking at the impact of technology on the world of work and the implications this has had for families (often women) who wish to enter the work force.

Criterion 4
Stronger responses were able to address the given question, incorporate the stimuli into their discussion and evaluate the theoretical explanations. These candidates were judicious in their use of the stimuli, which in the case of education warranted careful consideration. It is important for candidates to clearly indicate that they are referring to the stimulus material and should not simply include a quotation without distinctly incorporating it into their argument. Making a point and then placing stimulus 8 in brackets after it, is not good use of the stimulus.

Criterion 5
Those candidates who produced strong responses provided a comprehensive range of concepts as well as other relevant information. Candidates who were unable to define and discuss a range of concepts, especially the key concepts of family, education and work, provided weaker responses.

Criterion 6
This criterion warrants accurate knowledge of the key theoretical perspectives. It was pleasing to read responses that outlined the theories and where possible linked these to the question and the relevant stimuli.