



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority

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# **Review of standards in A level sociology: 1999–2004**

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# 1. Introduction

This is a review of standards in A level sociology between 1999 and 2004.

The A level syllabuses included in this review attracted all of the approximately 25,000 candidates who took A level sociology in 2004.

This enquiry provides details about standards in A level sociology examinations across the awarding bodies AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance) and OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations).

## 2. Examination demand in A level sociology

The major issue that affected all A level examinations between 1999 and 2004 was the change in design of the A level qualification in line with the Curriculum 2000 reforms. This involved a move to unitised assessment based on a six-unit structure. The overall assessment of the A level qualification was split into the first half, Advanced Subsidiary (AS), and the second half, A2. The AS and A2 sections of the course were each assessed by three units, making six units for the A level overall. The level of demand of the AS qualification was reduced from that of the former Advanced Supplementary qualification, to allow a smoother transition for students moving from GCSE to A level and to allow the new AS to stand as a 'broadening' qualification in its own right. The main requirement of the changes was to carry forward the full A level standard.

The most significant changes for A level sociology between 1999 and 2004 were:

- the change to a mandatory six-unit AS/A2 assessment structure, as described above
- a move to less demanding AS unit assessments and more demanding A2 units
- an explicit requirement for synoptic assessment.

A level syllabuses in 1999 were developed in the light of the inter-board subject core for sociology. Subject cores tended to deal with syllabus content but not structure. 2004 syllabuses conformed to the Curriculum 2000 A level qualifications criteria and the sociology subject criteria.

### **Materials available**

Only AQA and OCR offered A level sociology syllabuses in 1999 and 2004. The reviewers considered the syllabus documents, examiners' reports and question papers with associated mark schemes from each awarding body in 1999 and 2004 (with the exception of the OCR 1999 mark schemes). Details of the syllabuses included in the review are given in Appendix A.

### **Assessment objectives**

There were some significant changes to the assessment objectives in both the AQA and OCR syllabuses between 1999 and 2004, although the reviewers judged that these had little impact on demand.

In the 1999 AQA syllabus there were six assessment objectives presented in three skill domains:

- Knowledge and Understanding (26 per cent)
- Interpretation and Application (37 per cent)
- Evaluation (37 per cent).

AO6 (Organise and present information, ideas, descriptions and arguments clearly and logically, taking into account their use of grammar, punctuation and spelling) ran through each skill area and was not given a specific weighting.

In the 1999 OCR syllabus there were four assessment objectives:

- Knowledge and Understanding (25 per cent)
- Interpretation and Analysis (34 per cent)
- Evaluation (28 per cent)
- Communication and Presentation (13 per cent).

In the 2004 syllabuses there were two assessment objectives as specified in the subject criteria:

- AO1 Knowledge and Understanding (45–55 per cent)
- AO2 Identification, Analysis, Interpretation and Evaluation (45–55 per cent).

Thus in 1999 AQA and OCR allocated 26 per cent and 25 per cent respectively to Knowledge and Understanding, whereas in 2004 this was 50 per cent (AQA) or 54 per cent (OCR) at AS, and 40 per cent (AQA) or 46 per cent (OCR) at A2. Both syllabuses therefore shifted to a greater emphasis on Knowledge and Understanding (AO1), particularly at AS.

The reviewers judged that the increased weighting for Knowledge and Understanding was appropriate, as AS sociology assumes that candidates have no prior knowledge of the subject. At A2 the skills of Identification, Analysis, Interpretation and Evaluation received a higher weighting. The reviewers judged that this was appropriate given that AO2 necessarily builds on AO1 and this helps to ensure a higher level of demand at A2. The increased weighting for Knowledge and Understanding was a change from 1999, but the reviewers considered that it would reward candidates appropriately for knowledge and understanding demonstrated at this level.

The reviewers judged that the mark schemes for both 1999 and 2004 lacked transparency in terms of assessment objective coverage, as credit was not clearly linked to assessment objectives. The 1999 mark schemes offered examiners limited guidance about how and where assessment objective coverage was rewarded. For the 2004 AQA AS qualification a global mark was given, ie there were mark band descriptors covering both assessment objectives and examiners had to choose the band with the 'best fit'. This made it difficult to evaluate the actual effect of the changes in assessment objective weightings between 1999 and 2004.

## **Syllabus content**

Both the 1999 and 2004 syllabuses offered a wide range of topics, with conceptually easy ones, such as family and education, being offset by more demanding ones, such as power, politics and social stratification. The range of topics was thought to be slightly narrower in 2004 (see 'Options' on page 9). Theory and methods remained mandatory over time. The reviewers judged that the nature of topics was broadly comparable over time.

In the 1999 AQA syllabus there was a difference in the number of topics studied by candidates doing coursework and those doing the examination option. In 1999 candidates doing the exam option had to cover seven topics (one compulsory plus six optional), while candidates doing coursework had to cover five (one compulsory plus four optional). By 2004 this variation had disappeared and all candidates did one compulsory topic and four optional topics. The reviewers judged that the demand of syllabus content had been maintained between 1999 and 2004.

For OCR, more topics could be avoided in 2004 than in 1999. In 2004 there were three compulsory topics. In addition, candidates did two or three optional topics. The examination required coverage of five or six topics in total. In 1999 there were two compulsory topics (requiring depth and breadth) plus four optional topics, making six topics in total. In 2004 candidates had to do more compulsory topics (three) but fewer optional topics (two or three), and overall it was possible to do one topic less than in 1999. The reviewers judged that this had slightly reduced the demand of this aspect of the OCR syllabus.

A significant change in terms of syllabus requirement between 1999 and 2004 was the introduction of the synoptic element. In 1999 candidates had to write about a number of sociological topics in one examination taken at the end of the course. In 2004 both awarding bodies had taken into account the synoptic requirements of the Curriculum 2000 reforms, and candidates were required to synthesise and make links between topics in the synoptic unit. When balanced with the changes to topics identified above, the effect of the synoptic unit was to slightly increase the demand of the AQA syllabus and maintain the demand of the OCR syllabus.

The reviewers judged that in 1999 there was a lack of comparability across optional topics within both awarding bodies, which allowed candidates to gain credit by drawing on their own experience and knowledge of family, education and mass media. The reviewers judged that, for AQA in 1999, 'family' and 'education' were less demanding than other topics on Paper 1 and 'mass media' was less demanding than other topics on Paper 2. However, candidates doing the exam option who chose these topics still had to answer on

another three substantive topic areas. The reviewers judged that, for OCR, ‘household and family forms’ on Paper 1 and ‘education and training’ on Paper 2 offered less demanding routes than the other topic areas.

In 2004 there was still a lack of comparability across optional topics within both awarding bodies, mainly at AS level. For AQA the less demanding route existed through units 1 and 2, where candidates had the option to answer on ‘families and households’ and ‘education’ respectively. The mark schemes suggested that candidates could gain credit from explaining their experience of these aspects of society. The reviewers judged that a route which followed ‘health’ and ‘wealth, poverty and welfare’ would be harder, so that routes at this level were not comparable. For OCR the less demanding route at AS involved unit 2533, where candidates could choose the ‘family’ option. This was further exacerbated by the fact that this unit allowed candidates to answer questions on either one or two topics. The reviewers also found that OCR had a less demanding route at A2, where candidates could choose the ‘education’ option in unit 2536.

Overall, the reviewers judged the 1999 and 2004 AQA syllabuses to be marginally less demanding than those of OCR in terms of content. This was because AQA only had ‘theory and methods’ as a compulsory topic (1999 and 2004), whereas OCR had this plus ‘social stratification and differentiation’ (1999) and ‘individual and society’ (AS) and ‘social inequality and difference’ (A2) (2004).

### Scheme of assessment

Table 1 shows the schemes of assessment and overall examining times for AQA and OCR in 1999 and 2004. For the purpose of the review, the linear route for the AQA 1999 syllabus was the one considered.

Table 1

Awarding body	1999	2004
<b>AQA</b>	Linear without coursework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper 1 – 3 hrs</li> <li>• Paper 2 – 3 hrs</li> </ul> <b>Total: 6 hrs</b> <p>Or</p> Linear with coursework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper 1 – 3 hrs</li> <li>• Paper 3 – 1 hr 45 mins</li> <li>• Paper 4 – coursework (5,000</li> </ul>	AS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SCY1 – 1 hr 15 mins</li> <li>• SCY2 – 1 hr 15 mins</li> <li>• SCY3 – 1 hr</li> </ul> <p>Or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SC3W – coursework</li> </ul> A2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SCY4 – 1 hr 30 mins</li> <li>• SCY5 – 1 hr 30 mins</li> </ul>

	<p>words)</p> <p><b>Total: 4 hrs 45 mins</b></p> <p>Or</p> <p>Modular without coursework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper 1 – 3 hrs</li> <li>• Paper 5 – 1 hr 30 mins</li> <li>• Paper 6 – 1 hr 30 mins</li> </ul> <p><b>Total: 6 hrs</b></p> <p>Or</p> <p>Modular with coursework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper 1 – 3 hrs</li> <li>• Paper 3 – 1 hr 45 mins</li> <li>• Paper 4 – coursework (5,000 words)</li> </ul> <p><b>Total: 4 hrs 45 mins</b></p>	<p>Or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SC5W – coursework</li> <li>• SCY6 – 1 hr 30 mins</li> </ul> <p><b>Total: 8 hrs (exam only); or 6 hrs 30 mins (A2 coursework only); or 6 hrs (AS coursework only); or 5 hrs 30 mins (AS and A2 coursework)</b></p>
<b>OCR</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper 1 – 2 hrs 30 mins</li> <li>• Paper 2 – 2 hrs 30 mins</li> </ul> <p>Plus either personal study (coursework) or Paper 3 – 2 hrs</p> <p><b>Total: 7 hrs with exam option or 5 hrs with coursework</b></p>	<p>AS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2532 – 1 hr</li> <li>• 2533 – 1 hr 30 mins</li> <li>• 2534 – 1 hr</li> </ul> <p>Or coursework</p> <p>A2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2536 – 1 hr</li> <li>• 2537 – 1 hr 30 mins</li> </ul> <p>Or coursework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2539 – 1 hr 30 mins</li> </ul> <p><b>Total: 7 hrs 30 mins (exam only); or 6 hrs 30 mins (AS coursework only); or 6 hrs (A2 coursework only); or 5 hrs (AS and A2 coursework)</b></p>

There was a minor increase in overall examining times for OCR candidates choosing examination options only. For AQA candidates the increase was more substantial: two hours for examination option candidates and 45 minutes for candidates choosing coursework at AS and A2. However, the extra time meant that candidates had longer to



complete each task, so the reviewers judged that the change did not have an impact on demand.

By 2004 the schemes of assessment were more similar across the two awarding bodies. The most significant change by 2004 was the development of AS units, specifically designed to be at an appropriate level of demand for students completing the first year of an A level course. The level of demand was reflected in the amount of examination time given to candidates (3 hours 30 minutes at AS and between 4 hours and 4 hours 30 minutes at A2). The reviewers judged these overall examining times to be appropriate to the different levels of the examinations.

### Options

Table 2 shows the level of optionality within examination papers.

Table 2

Awarding body	1999	2004
<b>AQA</b>	<p>Linear without coursework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper 1</li> <li>• Paper 2</li> </ul> <p>Or</p> <p>Linear with coursework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper 1</li> <li>• Paper 3</li> <li>• coursework</li> </ul> <p><b>Paper 1</b> – one compulsory question, plus candidates choose two out of five topics</p> <p><b>Paper 2</b> – four topics from a choice of nine (choice of two questions within each topic)</p> <p><b>Paper 3</b> – one compulsory question plus choice of two out of eight topics</p> <p>Plus coursework</p>	<p><b>Unit 1</b> – choice of one from three questions</p> <p><b>Unit 2</b> – choice of one from three questions</p> <p><b>Unit 3W</b> – compulsory question</p> <p>Or</p> <p><b>Unit 3C</b> – coursework</p> <p><b>Unit 4</b> – choice of one from three questions</p> <p><b>Unit 5W</b> – compulsory data response plus choice of one of two essay questions</p> <p>Or</p> <p><b>Unit 5C</b> – coursework</p> <p><b>Unit 6</b> (synoptic) – choice of one of two questions</p>

<b>OCR</b>	<b>Paper 1</b> – one compulsory question; one question from choice of five; one question from choice of five <b>Paper 2</b> – one compulsory question; one question from choice of five; one question from choice of five <b>Paper 3</b> – one compulsory question; one essay question from choice of four Or personal study (coursework)	<b>2532</b> – choice of two questions <b>2533</b> – choice of two questions from four sections <b>2534</b> – one compulsory question  Or <b>2535</b> – coursework <b>2536</b> – choice of one from six sections (choice of one of two questions within each section) <b>2537</b> – two compulsory questions  Or <b>2538</b> – coursework <b>2539</b> (synoptic) – choice of one of two questions
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The reviewers judged that the structure of both syllabuses in 1999 and 2004 gave candidates the opportunity to cover a limited number of sociological topics in depth rather than requiring a breadth of sociological knowledge. AQA candidates in both years were limited to a compulsory question on their chosen topic area, whereas OCR candidates had a choice from two questions on each topic area.

For AQA candidates, the degree of choice was marginally narrower in the 2004 syllabus. In the 1999 syllabus, candidates chose two from five substantive topics for Paper 1 and four from nine for Paper 2. In 2004 candidates chose one from three for units 1, 2 and 4, one from two for unit 6 and a theory and methods paper at both AS and A2 (units 3 and 5).

For OCR the degree of choice remained broadly the same at question level, but there was a reduction in the number of optional topics covered and an increase in the number of compulsory topics. It was also possible for candidates to cover one less topic in 2004 than in 1999 (five rather than six), as already noted.

Overall, the reviewers judged that both syllabuses for both years equipped candidates with a good grounding for further study of sociology, offering depth in the chosen options.

### Question papers

The reviewers judged that AQA's questions, in both 1999 and 2004, were relatively complex, meaning that candidates had to analyse the questions before answering them.

The reviewers considered that the phrasing of the OCR questions was more accessible. They found the 2004 question papers for both AQA and OCR to be more structured, marginally reducing the overall level of demand.

The reviewers judged that the question papers for both syllabuses in 1999 and 2004 covered abstract concepts, which demanded a high level of comprehension and required candidates to generate much of the information needed to answer the questions themselves.

Overall, the reviewers found that the AS question papers and mark schemes represented an appropriately lower level of demand than the corresponding A2 papers, reflecting the design of the current A level. A2 questions were regarded as appropriately challenging, requiring candidates to design their own strategy for extended writing questions.

Both awarding bodies had a larger time allocation for the unstructured essay questions in 2004 than in 1999. Despite this, the mark schemes indicated that a similar depth of response and coverage was expected. The reviewers judged that this marginally reduced the level of demand of these questions in the 2004 examinations.

The reviewers found that the 1999 question papers made demands on candidates' reading skills which could have disadvantaged less able candidates. The higher percentage of data response questions in the 2004 question papers helped to make the questions more accessible for the full range of candidates without lessening the sociological demand.

The reviewers judged that the synoptic units in the 2004 syllabuses (AQA SCY6 and OCR 2539) were demanding for candidates but suitable for the second year of study of an A level course. The AQA unit required candidates to study a major topic (either 'crime and deviance' or 'stratification and differentiation'). Candidates were assessed on this topic in relation to 'one or more substantive areas of sociology; the nature of sociological thought; methods of sociological enquiry'. The format of the question paper was a stimulus passage with two shorter essay questions and one longer essay question. Candidates had to answer all parts of the paper.

The OCR synoptic unit assessed candidates' 'understanding of the relationship between social inequality, the nature of sociological thought and methods of social enquiry'. The format of the question paper included graphical/tabular information (with candidates gaining some reward for their understanding and interpretation of the data) in addition to longer questions. The reviewers judged that the scope of the topics was comparable between the awarding bodies, but the style of questioning meant that the AQA unit was more demanding.

The reviewers judged that some of the changes to question papers between 1999 and 2004 had marginally reduced the level of demand. However, this was balanced by the introduction of the synoptic units. The explicit requirement for synoptic assessment was a significant change, which increased demand both in terms of content (because candidates had to make links between topics) and in terms of question papers (because the style of the questions, especially for AQA, was demanding). Overall, the reviewers judged that the 1999 A level papers and the 2004 AS/A2 papers made broadly comparable demands on candidates.

## Coursework

Table 3 gives an overview of coursework options.

Table 3

Awarding body	1999	2004
<b>AQA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 per cent of A level qualification</li> <li>• 5,000-word project</li> </ul>	AS – unit 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30 per cent of AS</li> <li>• 15 per cent of A level</li> <li>• 1,200 words</li> </ul> A2 – unit 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 per cent of A level</li> <li>• 3,500 words</li> </ul>
<b>OCR</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 per cent of A level qualification</li> <li>• personal study – up to 4,000 words</li> </ul>	AS – 2535 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30 per cent of AS</li> <li>• 15 per cent of A level</li> <li>• no more than 1,000 words</li> </ul> A2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 per cent of A level</li> <li>• no more than 2,500 words</li> </ul>

The introduction of the AS and A2 in line with the Curriculum 2000 reforms made it hard for the reviewers to be confident about the implications of the changes in the coursework. On one hand, the total weighting for coursework had increased from 20 per cent to 30 per cent. On the other, the coursework element was now divided into two. The reduction in word limit was also inconclusive since the nature of the task in 1999 was not greatly different from that in 2004, but the lower word limit would pose additional requirements in terms of precision and relevance. Overall, the reviewers judged that the coursework requirements in 1999 and those in 2004 (for both the AS and A2) were at about the correct

level of demand. It should be noted, however, that the script review suggested AQA took no steps to enforce their word limit.

### **3. Summary of findings from review of syllabuses**

Between 1999 and 2004 there were several minor changes that had the effect of marginally reducing demand. These included the slightly narrower range of topics and more structured question papers. The reviewers found that the increased weighting for AO1 (Knowledge and Understanding) had only a marginal impact. These changes were balanced by the introduction of synoptic units, which, along with more focused coursework requirements, had the effect of significantly increasing demand. There continued to be a lack of comparability between optional routes through both syllabuses, with experiential routes being easier. Overall, the reviewers judged that there was no significant change in the demand of A level sociology syllabuses between 1999 and 2004.

Across the awarding bodies, AQA was slightly less demanding than OCR in terms of syllabus content in 1999 and 2004, but its question papers were a little more demanding in both years, largely due to the phrasing of questions. The demand of the AQA synoptic unit (SCY6) was judged to be higher than that of the OCR synoptic unit (2539) because of the design of the question paper. Overall, the reviewers judged that these differences balanced one another and that both awarding bodies made comparable demands.

## 4. Standards of performance

### Materials available

The reviewers considered candidates' work from AQA and OCR in 2004 and from OCR in 1999. Details of the materials used are provided in Appendix B.

A2 scripts from 2004 were compared with A level scripts from 1999. AS scripts from 2004 were compared across awarding bodies, but not with 1999 A level scripts as the AS is a new qualification with a different standard.

At AS, candidate work from OCR was very close to the borderline for grades A and E, while work from AQA was mostly above the boundaries. This had an impact on the reviewers' findings.

The reviewers commented on the particular difficulty of assessing standards of performance over time in view of the design changes introduced to all A levels by the Curriculum 2000 reforms.

### Performance descriptors

The reviewers were asked to identify key features of candidate performance in 2004, based on the work seen at each of the key grades. Performance descriptors for each grade boundary were drawn up, focusing on the assessment objectives and allowing for additional features of performance.

The AS performance descriptors reflect the fact that work from AQA was mostly above the boundary at grades A and E. The descriptors therefore may not properly describe performance that might be expected at the grade boundary.

### Standards of performance at AS grade A

#### *AS grade A performance descriptor*

#### AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

Candidates showed knowledge of theories, empirical studies and contemporary issues in the sociological fields. In addition, they had an understanding of the links between theoretical perspectives and methodology. Answers had a sustained focus and a systematic treatment of debates. Responses were clearly expressed and well organised, focused on the question and conceptually confident, with sustained evidence in the form of studies/research findings.

## AO2 – Identification, Analysis, Interpretation and Evaluation

Candidates tended to be better at interpretation and analysis. However, candidates made a range of evaluative points and drew appropriate conclusions. Data was accurately analysed and material organised with sustained focus on the question.

### *Performance at the AS grade A boundary*

Candidates from AQA demonstrated a higher standard of performance than those from OCR. This was to be expected given the different samples of work considered. It is therefore impossible to draw any conclusions about relative standards between the two awarding bodies at this boundary. However, the ability of the reviewers to identify that the AQA work was of a higher standard suggests that the procedure used is effective, while the nature of the performances identified casts some useful light on the way candidates' work varies at this grade.

AQA candidates demonstrated a wider range and greater depth of knowledge and understanding of sociological theories and concepts. Their answers were more empirically based and they made use of a range of evidence to support their points. They were also stronger on interpretation and evaluation. OCR candidates showed the ability to interpret and analyse using contemporary examples. However, they were more prone to unsupported assertions and to providing 'common sense' references to support their arguments.

## **Standards of performance at AS grade E**

### *AS grade E performance descriptor*

#### AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

Candidate performance was led by knowledge and understanding and answers had a limited range and depth. Candidates were more likely to focus on concepts and evidence rather than theory. Their responses tended to be descriptive and often simplistic.

#### AO2 – Identification, Analysis, Interpretation and Evaluation

Candidates showed evidence of data interpretation but evaluation was often implicit, superficial and depended on juxtaposition. Responses tended to be general and not question-specific. Candidates demonstrated limited ability to identify appropriate studies and apply them logically to the question. Responses at this level often had technical inaccuracies, which sometimes resulted in unfocused answers.



### *Performance at the AS grade E boundary*

As at grade A, candidates from AQA demonstrated a higher standard of performance than those from OCR. This was to be expected given the different samples of work considered. It is therefore impossible to draw any conclusions about relative standards between the two awarding bodies at this boundary. However, the ability of the reviewers to identify that the AQA work was of a higher standard suggests that the procedure used is effective, while the nature of the performances identified casts some useful light on the way candidates' work varies at this grade.

AQA candidates showed greater breadth of knowledge and understanding of sociological concepts and theories. They engaged more directly with questions and made better use of supporting evidence in their arguments. Their analysis and evaluation were also stronger. OCR candidates tended to be anecdotal and descriptive in their responses, with limited knowledge and understanding of sociological concepts and methods.

## **Standards of performance at A level grade A**

### *A level grade A performance descriptor*

#### AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

Candidates were able to develop theoretical issues, arguing points consistently throughout their answers. There was evidence of clear and well-developed conceptual knowledge and the link between theory and methods could be clearly seen. This grade boundary was characterised by a sophisticated use of sociological debates and studies, with wide-ranging knowledge of theories, concepts and methods.

#### AO2 – Identification, Analysis, Interpretation and Evaluation

Candidates engaged with the questions, showing the ability to interpret and apply examples in the given context. They were able to assess the contribution of research to debates and their answers were sustained in their use of research as part of the argument. This grade boundary was characterised by evidence being evaluated effectively in terms of theory and practice, with sustained, detailed analysis and interpretation.

### *Performance at the A level grade A boundary*

There was a high level of comparability in the standards of performance between the awarding bodies at this grade boundary.

## **Standards of performance at A level grade E**

### *A level grade E performance descriptor*

#### AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

Candidates' knowledge and understanding were basic, lacking depth and not always well linked. Responses tended to contain descriptive empirical knowledge. Overall, there was a simplistic understanding of concepts and limited awareness of the links between theory and methods. Candidates used a limited number of studies.

#### AO2 – Identification, Analysis, Interpretation and Evaluation

Candidates' ability to interpret was basically accurate but unsophisticated and sometimes simplistic. Their identification of appropriate material was limited and answers lacked an analytical structure, leading to limited conclusions being drawn. Candidates tended to make assertions rather than analyse, and theoretical evaluation was generally seen through juxtaposition.

### *Performance at the A level grade E boundary*

There was a high level of comparability in the standards of performance between the awarding bodies at this grade boundary.

## **Standards of performance over time – A level grade A**

On the evidence of OCR scripts alone, standards of performance at grade A had been maintained between 1999 and 2004.

## **Standards of performance over time – A level grade E**

On the evidence of OCR scripts alone, at grade E there had been a decline in the standards of performance between 1999 and 2004. Candidates in 1999 demonstrated broader knowledge and understanding of sociological methods, content and concepts. They also tended to make better use of research evidence to support their answers.

## **5. Summary of findings from review of performance**

At AS, the sample of candidate work provided had a clear impact on findings. AQA candidates were above the grade boundary, while OCR candidates were close to the borderline. As expected, AQA candidates demonstrated a higher standard of performance than OCR candidates. This trend was very similar at grades A and E.

At A level the standard of performance was very similar across the two awarding bodies at grades A and E.

Over time, standards of performance had been maintained at grade A, while there had been a decline at grade E.

## Appendix A. A level syllabuses reviewed

<i>Year</i>	<i>Awarding body and syllabus</i>	
	<b>AQA</b>	<b>OCR</b>
<b>1999</b>	0638	9848
<b>2004</b>	6191	7878

## Appendix B. Numbers of A level scripts reviewed

<i>Awarding body</i>	<i>AQA</i>		<i>OCR</i>	
	<i>Year</i>	1999	2004	1999
<b>AS</b>		A: 8 E: 8		A: 8 E: 8
<b>A level</b>		A: 15 E: 14	A: 8 E: 8	A: 12 E: 12

## Appendix C. List of reviewers

<i>Review team</i>	
Coordinator	Teresa Keogh
Syllabus reviewers	Cate Amsdorf Anthony Batchelor Carole Waugh
Script reviewers	Helen Chester Tony Cole John Hewitt Tony Lawson (Association for the Teaching of the Social Sciences, ATSS) Fionnuala Swan (OCR) Rob Webb (AQA) Margaret Whalley

Note: where participants were nominated by a particular organisation, the awarding body is shown in brackets after their name.