6.2 Social Class and Life Chances: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Show your understanding by using sociological vocabulary and, where asked, your own examples.

Item A: Two Households

A hypothetical comparison, written for Revision Library to illustrate how social class background can shape access to resources. Not based on real individuals; described neutrally, without suggesting either household's circumstances reflect anything about their own character or effort.

Deacon lives with his parents in a three-bedroom house in a suburb with a highly rated secondary school. Both his parents are in professional careers, and the family owns their home outright. Deacon has his own bedroom to study in, and his parents can afford a tutor when he is preparing for exams. Elsewhere in the same city, Farah lives with her mother and younger brother in a rented flat above a shop. Her mother works two part-time jobs to cover the rent, and money is often tight towards the end of the month. Farah shares a bedroom with her brother and often studies at the kitchen table in the evening, when it is quieter.

1 Evaluate the view that social class background remains the biggest influence on a person's life chances in the UK today. In your answer you should refer to Item A, sociologists' views, and consider more than one influence on life chances.

(Total for Question 1 is 12 marks)

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2 State one example of a policy intended to improve the life chances of pupils from lower-income backgrounds.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

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3 Explain one reason class-based differences in life chances might narrow over a person's lifetime.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

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4 State one similarity between how sociologists describe the effect of social class and the effect of family background more generally on a child's outcomes.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

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5 Define the term 'life chances'.

(Total for Question 5 is 2 marks)

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6 Look at Item A.

(a) Using Item A, identify one resource Deacon has access to that may support his education, and explain how it could improve his life chances. **(2)**

(b) Using Item A, identify one circumstance in Farah's household that could make studying more difficult, and explain your choice. **(2)**

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

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7 Look again at Item A.

(a) Using Item A, suggest one reason housing tenure (owning a home outright, compared with renting) can be linked to differences in life chances. **(2)**

(b) Using Item A, explain why sociologists would be cautious about assuming Farah's circumstances will determine her future, rather than just influence it. **(2)**

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

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Mark scheme · 6.2 Social Class and Life Chances: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

Level 4 A detailed, well-balanced evaluation that accurately explains the case for class as the main influence on life chances, supported by accurate reference to Item A and to sociologists' views (e.g. Weber), while also considering other influences on life chances. Strengths and weaknesses of the 'class is decisive' view are analysed, and a reasoned, supported judgement is reached that treats life chances as shaped by structure and opportunity, not by the qualities of any group. Sociological terminology is used accurately and consistently throughout. **10-12**

Level 3 A clear evaluation that explains the case for class as an influence, with some accurate reference to Item A and/or sociologists, and some awareness of other influences. Some analysis of strengths/weaknesses. An attempt at a conclusion, which may be only partly supported. **7-9**

Level 2 Some relevant explanation of class as an influence on life chances, with limited development or accuracy, and little reference to other influences. Little clear evaluation or comparison. **4-6**

Level 1 One or two isolated, undeveloped points about class or life chances, with little or no sociological terminology or accurate detail. **1-3**

Level 0 No relevant content. **0**

Indicative content:

- The case for class as the biggest influence: patterns show that, on average, people from higher-income/professional-class backgrounds tend to have better educational, health and employment outcomes than those from lower-income backgrounds, illustrated by the contrast between Deacon's and Farah's circumstances in Item A, which are about resources and opportunity rather than ability.
- Weber's concept of life chances links directly to market situation (class), arguing that a person's ability to obtain goods, services and a favourable position in life is shaped by their position in the labour market.
- The case for other influences mattering too: sociologists also study how gender, ethnicity and age shape life chances (covered elsewhere in this strand), and individual factors such as effort, ability and support from school can also make a difference within any class background.
- Evaluation of the 'class is decisive' view: critics note that class explanations describe average patterns and probabilities, not certainties, e.g. Item A shows Farah's circumstances make some things harder, not impossible; social mobility (covered elsewhere in this strand) shows movement between classes does happen.
- Evaluation of the 'class is not the main influence' view: supporters of the class-centred view respond that structural patterns in education, health and employment by class are well established and persistent over time, suggesting more than only individual factors are at work.
- A balanced conclusion could argue that class background remains a powerful and well-evidenced influence on life chances, working alongside, and often interacting with, other influences such as gender, ethnicity and age, rather than acting as the sole determinant of any individual's outcome.

Question 2

identifies a genuine example, e.g. free school meals for eligible pupils, or additional funding for schools with more disadvantaged pupils (such as pupil premium funding) **B1**

brief explanation of the intended aim, e.g. helping to reduce the effect of financial disadvantage on education **B1**

Answer: Free school meals for eligible pupils, or additional funding for schools with more disadvantaged pupils, aim to reduce the effect of financial disadvantage on education.

Question 3

identifies a genuine reason, e.g. gaining qualifications, skills or a well-paid job can improve a person's own income and resources over time **B1**

development, e.g. or support such as means-tested financial help, apprenticeships or scholarships can reduce some of the resource gap linked to family background **B1**

Answer: Gaining qualifications, skills or a well-paid job can improve a person's own income and resources over time, and support such as apprenticeships or scholarships can reduce some of the resource gap linked to family background.

Question 4

identifies a genuine similarity, e.g. both are described as structural influences that shape the resources and opportunities available to a child, rather than reflecting the child's own ability **B1**

development, e.g. both are studied as patterns across large groups rather than as certainties for any one individual **B1**

Answer: Both are described as structural influences shaping the resources and opportunities available to a child, rather than reflecting the child's own ability, and both are studied as patterns across large groups.

Question 5

identifies that life chances refers to the opportunities a person has to access valued resources and outcomes in life, such as good health, housing, education and employment (oe) **B1**

development, e.g. sociologists argue life chances are not equally distributed, and are shaped by factors such as social class, gender, ethnicity and age **B1**

Answer: Life chances are the opportunities a person has to access valued resources and outcomes such as good health, housing, education and employment, and are not equally distributed across society.

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Question 6

(a) a correct resource, e.g. his own bedroom to study in, or his parents being able to afford a tutor **B1**

(a) explanation, e.g. this gives him a quiet space and extra academic support that could help him achieve higher grades, improving his chances of further education or a well-paid job **B1**

(a) Answer: Deacon has his own bedroom to study in and his parents can afford a tutor, which gives him a quiet space and extra academic support that could help him achieve higher grades.

(b) a correct circumstance, e.g. sharing a bedroom, studying at the kitchen table, or her mother working two jobs **B1**

(b) explanation, e.g. this could mean less quiet space and time for studying, or less money available for resources such as books or a tutor, though it does not mean Farah will necessarily do less well **B1**

(b) Answer: Farah shares a bedroom and studies at the kitchen table, which could mean less quiet space and fewer resources such as a tutor, though this does not mean she will necessarily do less well.

Question 7

(a) identifies, e.g. owning a home outright, as Deacon's family does, can mean more financial security and stability, e.g. no risk of rent increases or eviction **B1**

(a) development, e.g. this stability can support settled schooling and reduce stress that might otherwise affect a child's education **B1**

(a) Answer: Owning a home outright can mean more financial security and stability, with no risk of rent increases or eviction, which can support settled schooling and reduce stress affecting education.

(b) identifies that life chances describe unequal opportunities and probabilities, not fixed outcomes: e.g. Farah's circumstances make some things statistically harder, but do not guarantee a particular result **B1**

(b) development, e.g. individual effort, ability and other circumstances, such as support from school, also play a part, so class background is an influence, not the sole determinant **B1**

(b) Answer: Life chances describe probabilities, not certainties: Farah's circumstances make some things statistically harder, but individual effort, ability and other support also play a part, so class background is an influence, not the sole determinant.

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