



GSOC.ST2 Social Class and Life Chances

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 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** Which term describes the opportunities and chances a person has to obtain valued things in life, such as good health, education and a well-paid job?

- ☐ A) Social mobility
☐ B) Life chances
☐ C) Meritocracy
☐ D) Status

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

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- 2** Define the term 'life chances'.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 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 3 is 4 marks)

4 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 4 is 4 marks)

5 Explain what sociologists mean by social class.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 Explain the link between social class and educational life chances.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

7 Explain the link between social class and health-related life chances.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

8 State one way social class can affect a person's employment-related life chances.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

9 State one criticism that has been made of using occupation alone to measure social class.

(Total for Question 9 is 2 marks)

10 Explain the difference between income and wealth as measures of economic inequality.

(Total for Question 10 is 2 marks)

- 11** Explain why sociologists say social class in the UK is not only about how much money a person has.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

- 12** Social class background is often studied as an influence on life chances, alongside other factors.

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 12 is 12 marks)

- 13** For each definition below, state the correct term.

- (a) The idea that reward should be based on ability and effort. (1)
- (b) The opportunities a person has to access valued outcomes such as health, education and employment. (1)
- (c) The total value of a person's assets, minus debts. (1)

(Total for Question 13 is 3 marks)

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

(Total for Question 14 is 2 marks)

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

(Total for Question 15 is 2 marks)

- 16** 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 16 is 2 marks)

- 17** Explain two ways sociologists say class-based differences in life chances could be reduced.

(Total for Question 17 is 4 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.ST2 Social Class and Life Chances

Question 1

- **B1** B (life chances)
- **Answer: B**

Question 2

- **B1** 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
- **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.**

Question 3

- (a) **B1** a correct resource, e.g. his own bedroom to study in, or his parents being able to afford a tutor
- (a) **B1** 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
- **(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) **B1** a correct circumstance, e.g. sharing a bedroom, studying at the kitchen table, or her mother working two jobs
- (b) **B1** 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
- **(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 4

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

Question 5

- **B1** identifies social class as a way of grouping people according to their economic and social position, e.g. related to occupation, income, wealth and education
- **B1** development, e.g. sociologists often use occupational scales, grouping people into broad categories such as higher managerial/professional, intermediate and routine/manual occupations, to measure class
- **B1** identifies that class shapes access to resources and opportunities
- **B1** development, e.g. this is why sociologists study class as a major influence on life chances rather than treating it as just a label
- **Answer: Social class groups people by their economic and social position, often using occupational scales; it shapes access to resources and opportunities, which is why sociologists study it as a major influence on life chances.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies a pattern, e.g. pupils from higher-income/professional backgrounds tend, on average, to achieve higher qualifications than pupils from lower-income backgrounds
- **B1** development, e.g. this is linked to factors such as access to resources including books, tutoring and quiet study space, rather than differences in ability
- **B1** identifies material deprivation as one structural explanation, e.g. families with less income may find it harder to afford educational extras, or older children may need to contribute to household income
- **B1** development, e.g. sociologists stress these are patterns about circumstances and resources, not judgements about the ability or effort of pupils from any particular background
- **Answer: Pupils from higher-income backgrounds tend, on average, to achieve higher qualifications, linked to access to resources such as tutoring and study space; sociologists stress this reflects circumstances, not the ability of pupils.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies a pattern, e.g. people in lower income/routine occupational groups tend, on average, to have poorer health and lower life expectancy than those in higher income/professional groups
- **B1** development, e.g. this is linked to factors such as housing conditions, access to healthcare, diet and working conditions, rather than to individual choices alone
- **B1** identifies that sociologists call this pattern the 'social class gradient' in health, since it runs gradually through the whole class structure rather than only affecting the poorest
- **B1** development, e.g. this shows the pattern is structural and continuous, not limited to one group
- **Answer: People in lower income groups tend, on average, to have poorer health, linked to housing, healthcare access, diet and working conditions; this 'social class gradient' runs continuously through the class structure, not just affecting the poorest.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies, e.g. people from professional/higher-income family backgrounds may have wider access to useful contacts (social networks) or unpaid work experience opportunities that can help with job applications
- **B1** development, e.g. this can affect access to some careers, without meaning people from other backgrounds lack ability
- **Answer: People from higher-income backgrounds may have wider access to useful contacts or unpaid work experience, which can affect access to some careers, without meaning others lack ability.**

Question 9

- **B1** identifies a genuine criticism, e.g. occupation-based scales may not fully capture wealth, such as inherited property or savings, or may struggle to classify people who are unemployed, retired or economically inactive
- **B1** brief development
- **Answer: Occupation-based scales may not fully capture wealth such as inherited property or savings, and can struggle to classify people who are unemployed, retired or economically inactive.**

Question 10

- **B1** identifies income as money received regularly, e.g. from wages, benefits or investments
- **B1** identifies wealth as the total value of assets someone owns, e.g. property, savings and possessions, minus debts
- **Answer: Income is money received regularly, such as from wages or benefits; wealth is the total value of assets someone owns, such as property and savings, minus debts.**

Question 11

- **B1** identifies, e.g. sociologists such as Weber argued that status (social prestige) is a separate dimension from economic class, so a person's class position also involves how they are perceived and treated by others
- **B1** development, e.g. two people with similar incomes could still be treated differently, for example based on the type of job or their background
- **Answer: Weber argued status is a separate dimension from economic class, so class position also involves how a person is perceived and treated by others, meaning similar incomes do not guarantee similar status.**

Question 12

- **Level 4** (10-12): 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.
- **Level 3** (7-9): 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.
- **Level 2** (4-6): 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.
- **Level 1** (1-3): One or two isolated, undeveloped points about class or life chances, with little or no sociological terminology or accurate detail.
- **Level 0** (0): No relevant content.
- **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 13

- (a) **B1 meritocracy**
- **(a) Answer: Meritocracy**
- (b) **B1 life chances**
- **(b) Answer: Life chances**
- (c) **B1 wealth**
- **(c) Answer: Wealth**

Question 14

- **B1** 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
- **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 15

- **B1** 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
- **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 16

- **B1** 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
- **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 17

- **B1** identifies one way, e.g. redistributive taxation and benefits, which can narrow income gaps between richer and poorer households
- **B1** development
- **B1** identifies a second, different way, e.g. targeted funding or support in education, such as additional resources for schools serving disadvantaged areas, which can help offset unequal access to resources like tutoring
- **B1** development
- **Answer: Redistributive taxation and benefits can narrow income gaps between households, and targeted education funding for disadvantaged areas can help offset unequal access to resources such as tutoring.**