



GSOC.ST5 Social Mobility

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 Generations

A hypothetical illustration, written for Revision Library, of intergenerational social mobility. Not based on real individuals; both examples are presented as ordinary instances of mobility, not as more or less successful than one another.

Noah's grandfather left school at fifteen and worked as a factory machinist for over thirty years. Noah's mother trained as a nurse, the first in the family to complete a professional qualification. Noah has recently qualified as a solicitor after studying law at university, helped by a student loan and, in his final year, a paid internship at a local firm. In the same town, Isla's grandmother worked as a shop manager. Isla's father took over running the same shop when her grandmother retired, and the family business has stayed in the same trade for two generations. Isla has recently started an apprenticeship in engineering, a field none of her family has worked in before.

- 1** Which term describes movement between social classes, either within a person's own lifetime or between generations of the same family?

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

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

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- 2** Define the term 'social mobility'.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 Look at Item A.

- (a) Using Item A, identify one example of intergenerational social mobility, and explain your choice. (2)
- (b) Using Item A, identify one factor that may have supported Noah's mobility, 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 Isla's family's occupation stayed the same across two generations, from her grandmother to her father, before Isla's move into engineering. (2)
- (b) Using Item A, explain why sociologists would caution against concluding that either family has been more capable or hardworking than the other. (2)

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 Explain the difference between absolute and relative social mobility.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 Explain John Goldthorpe's contribution to the study of social mobility in Britain.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

7 State one factor sociologists say can affect a person's chances of upward social mobility.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

8 State one criticism of using only absolute mobility figures to judge how meritocratic a society is.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

9 Sociologists disagree about how meritocratic Britain is.

(a) Explain what is meant by the term 'meritocracy'. (2)

(b) Explain Peter Saunders' view on how meritocratic Britain is. (2)

(Total for Question 9 is 4 marks)

- 10** Explain two reasons changes in the UK job market over the twentieth century affected absolute social mobility.

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

- 11** Give one example of a barrier that might limit a person's social mobility.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

- 12** State one way social mobility can be studied over a single lifetime, as distinct from intergenerational mobility.

(Total for Question 12 is 2 marks)

- 13** State one similarity between Item A's two families in terms of the type of mobility shown.

(Total for Question 13 is 2 marks)

- 14** Explain one reason sociologists are cautious about using individual examples, such as those in Item A, to draw general conclusions about social mobility in the UK.

(Total for Question 14 is 2 marks)

- 15** Explain two reasons some sociologists are cautious about describing the UK as a highly meritocratic society.

(Total for Question 15 is 4 marks)

- 16** State one strength of Peter Saunders' argument that Britain is reasonably meritocratic.

(Total for Question 16 is 2 marks)

- 17** Explain two ways government policy could try to increase social mobility.

(Total for Question 17 is 4 marks)

18 Michael Young's 1958 book on meritocracy is often misunderstood today.

- (a)** Explain how the term 'meritocracy' was originally intended as a warning rather than a straightforward ideal. (2)
- (b)** Explain one way this original warning differs from how the word 'meritocracy' is often used today. (2)
- (c)** State one strength of aiming for a more meritocratic society, despite Young's original warning. (2)

(Total for Question 18 is 6 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.ST5 Social Mobility

Question 1

- **B1** A (social mobility)
- **Answer: A**

Question 2

- **B1** identifies social mobility as the movement of individuals or groups between different positions in the class/status structure (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. this can be upward, moving to a higher class position, or downward, moving to a lower one
- **Answer: Social mobility is the movement of individuals or groups between different positions in the class structure, which can be upward or downward.**

Question 3

- (a) **B1** a correct example, e.g. Noah's family moving from factory work (grandfather) to nursing (mother) to law (Noah), or Isla starting an apprenticeship in a new field, engineering
- (a) **B1** explanation, e.g. this shows movement in occupational position between generations of the same family, matching the definition of intergenerational mobility
- **(a) Answer: Noah's family moved from factory work to nursing to law across three generations, showing movement in occupational position between generations, matching intergenerational mobility.**
- (b) **B1** a correct factor, e.g. access to a student loan and a paid internship
- (b) **B1** explanation, e.g. these gave Noah financial support and practical experience that could help with entering a professional career such as law
- **(b) Answer: A student loan and a paid internship gave Noah financial support and practical experience that could help with entering a professional career such as law.**

Question 4

- (a) **B1** a genuine suggestion, e.g. taking over an established family business can offer a stable, familiar route into a career, without necessarily reflecting a lack of other opportunities
- (a) **B1** development, e.g. this shows how staying in the same trade, or moving to a new one, can be shaped by opportunity and circumstance rather than simply ability
- **(a) Answer: Taking over an established family business can offer a stable, familiar route into a career; this shows how staying in a trade, or moving to a new one, can be shaped by opportunity and circumstance.**
- (b) **B1** identifies, e.g. differences in mobility can reflect differences in opportunities, structural change in the job market, or chance circumstances, not differences in the character or effort of family members
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. both examples in Item A show reasonable, ordinary career paths, just shaped by different circumstances and openings available at the time
- **(b) Answer: Differences in mobility reflect differences in opportunities and circumstances, not character or effort; both families in Item A show ordinary career paths shaped by different circumstances.**

Question 5

- **B1** identifies absolute mobility as the total amount of movement between class positions in a society, which can rise simply because the shape of the job market changes (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. if there are more professional/managerial jobs available than in the past, more people can move upward in absolute terms
- **B1** identifies relative mobility as comparing the chances of people from different class backgrounds reaching a particular class position, relative to each other
- **B1** development, e.g. relative mobility can stay unequal even while absolute mobility rises, if people from advantaged backgrounds are still more likely to reach top positions than people from disadvantaged backgrounds
- **Answer: Absolute mobility is the total amount of movement between class positions, which can rise as the job market changes; relative mobility compares the chances of people from different backgrounds, which can stay unequal even as absolute mobility rises.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies that Goldthorpe led major studies of social mobility in Britain, including the Oxford Mobility Study
- **B1** development, e.g. his research distinguished between absolute mobility, which rose over the twentieth century partly due to growth in professional and managerial jobs, and relative mobility, which he found remained much less equal between class backgrounds
- **B1** identifies this suggested that, although more people were moving upward overall, people from advantaged backgrounds were still much more likely to reach the top than people from disadvantaged backgrounds
- **B1** development, e.g. this challenged the idea that rising absolute mobility on its own showed society had become more meritocratic
- **Answer: Goldthorpe's Oxford Mobility Study distinguished absolute mobility (which rose with job-market change) from relative mobility (which stayed much less equal), challenging the idea that rising absolute mobility alone shows society is more meritocratic.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies a genuine factor, e.g. educational qualifications, or changes in the structure of the job market creating more or fewer higher-status jobs
- **B1** brief development
- **Answer: Educational qualifications, or changes in the structure of the job market creating more or fewer higher-status jobs, can affect a person's chances of upward mobility.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies a genuine criticism, e.g. rising absolute mobility can simply reflect a changing job market, such as more professional jobs overall, rather than genuinely fairer competition between people from different backgrounds
- **B1** brief development
- **Answer: Rising absolute mobility can simply reflect a changing job market rather than genuinely fairer competition between people from different backgrounds.**

Question 9

- (a) **B1** identifies meritocracy as a system in which social position and rewards are based on a person's ability and effort ('merit'), rather than on their family background
- (a) **B1** development, e.g. the term was coined by Michael Young in his 1958 book *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, originally written as a satirical warning about the possible downsides of such a system, rather than as a straightforward endorsement of it
- (a) **Answer: Meritocracy is a system where social position and rewards are based on ability and effort rather than family background; the term was coined by Michael Young (1958) as a satirical warning, not a straightforward endorsement.**
- (b) **B1** identifies that Saunders argued, using evidence such as long-term studies following people through their lives, that ability and effort play a bigger part in a person's social mobility than radical critics suggest, and that Britain is more meritocratic than often claimed
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. this is a contested view within sociology, challenged by researchers such as Goldthorpe, who point to persistent inequalities in relative mobility chances between class backgrounds
- (b) **Answer: Saunders argued Britain is more meritocratic than radical critics suggest, using long-term studies; this is contested, with researchers such as Goldthorpe pointing to persistent inequalities in relative mobility.**

Question 10

- **B1** identifies one reason, e.g. a long-term growth in professional and managerial jobs created more 'room at the top', allowing more people to move upward in absolute terms
- **B1** development
- **B1** identifies a second, different reason, e.g. a decline in traditional manual/manufacturing industries meant fewer people stayed in the same type of work as their parents, increasing overall movement between class positions
- **B1** development
- **Answer: Growth in professional/managerial jobs created 'room at the top', allowing more upward movement; decline in manual/manufacturing industries meant fewer people stayed in the same work as their parents, increasing overall movement.**

Question 11

- **B1** identifies a genuine example, e.g. the cost of further/higher education, unequal access to professional networks or unpaid work experience, or geographic factors such as living far from areas with more job opportunities
- **B1** brief development
- **Answer: The cost of higher education, unequal access to professional networks or unpaid work experience, or living far from areas with more job opportunities can all limit social mobility.**

Question 12

- **B1** identifies this as intragenerational mobility, movement between class positions within a single person's own working life, e.g. being promoted from a junior to a senior role
- **B1** development, e.g. contrasted with intergenerational mobility, which compares class position between generations of the same family
- **Answer: Intragenerational mobility is movement within a single person's own working life, such as being promoted, contrasted with intergenerational mobility, which compares generations of the same family.**

Question 13

- **B1** identifies a genuine similarity, e.g. both show movement into a new type of occupation compared with the generation before, Noah into law and Isla into engineering, so both illustrate intergenerational mobility
- **B1** brief development
- **Answer: Both families show movement into a new type of occupation compared with the generation before, so both illustrate intergenerational mobility.**

Question 14

- **B1** identifies, e.g. individual examples can illustrate what mobility looks like, but cannot show how common or rare such patterns are across the population as a whole
- **B1** development, e.g. sociologists such as Goldthorpe instead use large-scale studies following many families to measure overall patterns of mobility
- **Answer: Individual examples can illustrate what mobility looks like but cannot show how common or rare such patterns are, so sociologists such as Goldthorpe use large-scale studies to measure overall patterns.**

Question 15

- **B1** identifies one reason, e.g. relative mobility research, such as Goldthorpe's, suggests people from advantaged backgrounds remain considerably more likely to reach top class positions than people from disadvantaged backgrounds, even when absolute mobility has risen
- **B1** development
- **B1** identifies a second, different reason, e.g. access to resources that support success, such as private tutoring, unpaid internships or professional networks, is unevenly distributed by family background, which can undermine a purely merit-based system
- **B1** development
- **Answer: Goldthorpe's relative mobility research shows advantaged backgrounds remain more likely to reach top positions; also, resources such as tutoring, internships and networks are unevenly distributed, undermining a purely merit-based system.**

Question 16

- **B1** identifies a genuine strength, e.g. it draws on long-term evidence following individuals over time, and highlights that ability and effort do play some genuine part in mobility outcomes, not only family background
- **B1** brief development
- **Answer: Saunders' argument draws on long-term evidence and highlights that ability and effort do play some genuine part in mobility outcomes, not only family background.**

Question 17

- **B1** identifies one policy, e.g. expanding access to higher education through student finance, so that cost is less of a barrier
- **B1** development
- **B1** identifies a second, different policy, e.g. funding apprenticeships or careers guidance that opens up new career routes, such as the one Isla takes up in Item A
- **B1** development
- **Answer: Expanding access to higher education through student finance can reduce cost as a barrier; funding apprenticeships or careers guidance can open up new career routes, such as the one Isla takes up in Item A.**

Question 18

- (a) **B1** identifies that Michael Young coined the term in his 1958 book as part of a satirical, fictional account of a future society
- (a) **B1** development, e.g. Young's book warned that a fully merit-based system could create a new, potentially harsh, form of inequality between a confident 'meritocratic' elite and those left behind, rather than simply celebrating fairness
- **(a) Answer: Michael Young coined 'meritocracy' in a 1958 satirical, fictional book warning that a fully merit-based system could create a new, harsh form of inequality between a confident elite and those left behind.**
- (b) **B1** identifies that the term is now often used positively, to describe a fair system based on ability and effort, rather than as a warning
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. this shift means some of Young's original concerns about the downsides of a strict meritocracy can be lost in everyday use of the word
- **(b) Answer: The term is now often used positively, to describe a fair system based on ability and effort, so some of Young's original concerns about its downsides can be lost in everyday use.**
- (c) **B1** identifies a genuine strength, e.g. a system that rewards ability and effort rather than only background can open up opportunities to talented people regardless of where they start from
- (c) **B1** brief development
- **(c) Answer: A system that rewards ability and effort rather than only background can open up opportunities to talented people regardless of where they start from.**