

6 WORK, POVERTY AND WELFARE

Example answers

AS LEVEL

1 Define the term 'income'.

[2 marks]

STUDENT RESPONSE

Income is the overall amount of money an individual earns.

TEACHER COMMENTS

Although these are short answer questions, try to provide a detailed sentence that provides an example to illustrate. Can you add more detail to this definition? How do people earn money?

2 Using **one** example, briefly explain how voluntary providers can help to reduce poverty.

[2 marks]

STUDENT RESPONSE

A voluntary provider could supply people with emergency food supplies when they can no longer afford to buy what they need.

TEACHER COMMENTS

To meet the demands of such a question, you need to consider the specific wording. Although this response is relevant, it could be improved further by linking it specifically to reducing poverty. It may also be impressive to refer to a specific voluntary provider to illustrate knowledge.

3 Suggest **three** reasons why, overall, men tend to be wealthier than women.

[6 marks]

STUDENT RESPONSE

Firstly, on average men have higher wages than women. This applies even when men and women are doing the same job. Secondly, women are more likely to have a dual labour responsibility, as women are more likely to undertake unpaid domestic labour. This means they are more likely to work part-time and have a lower income. Finally, women are less likely to be hired than men, as some employers are concerned over maternity leave.

TEACHER COMMENTS

Structuring your response in a particular way can make it more effective. Although you could follow this approach, another method is to bullet point each 'reason' which shows there are three clear points. Just remember to add an explanation to each answer.

4 Outline and explain **two** ways in which work can be deskilled.

[10 marks]

STUDENT RESPONSE

Work may be deskilled through the introduction of new technologies. This allows for technology to replace work previously done by humans, making it cheaper and more efficient. Another way in which work can be deskilled is through the introduction of less professional workers to a profession, making it cheaper but less skilful.

TEACHER COMMENTS

It may be helpful to approach these questions with two separate paragraphs that focus on each specific answer to the question. This helps you to illustrate your answer to the marker effectively however it also benefits you when writing the response as it encourages you to add more detail. If this response had been separated into two separate paragraphs, it would be clear how brief each answer was. Can you add more detail?

5 Read **Item A** and answer the question that follows.

ITEM A

Poverty is often blamed on the laziness or culture of the poor. Some sociologists believe that the poor do have a distinct culture which stops them from taking advantage of opportunities when they arrive, while others see the welfare state as likely to produce dependency. However, these views have been challenged by other sociologists who believe that the poor should not be blamed for their own circumstances.

Applying material from **Item A** and from your knowledge, evaluate the view that poverty is caused by the attitudes and values of the poor.

[20 marks]

STUDENT RESPONSE

As Item A states "Poverty is often blamed on the laziness or culture of the poor". Many sociologists from the New Right, including Charles Murray have supported this view with research. Often the media illustrates bias, with programs such as "Benefits Street" provoking reactions which blame poverty on laziness which tends to support the New Right view. As Item A points out, "these views have been challenged by other sociologists who believe that the poor should not be blamed for their own circumstances". Other arguments demonstrate that poverty has many different forms, and is caused by wider economic and social factors, rather than just laziness.

Sociologist Charles Murray studied the UK in the 1990's and supported the view that poverty was caused by the attitudes and values of the poor. His study suggested that children from single parent families were born into a "culture of dependency". This was because single parent families received large amounts from the government in welfare support, including benefits. He also argued that young males who were brought up in single parent households were lacking a father figure, meaning they turned to gang-culture and were more likely to commit crime.

Many other factors also determine why people are in poverty rather than just culture and family background. Gender is also a crucial factor in determining poverty. Women are less likely to earn a high salary than men, due to a pay gap in certain jobs. Furthermore, the "glass ceiling" prevents women from progressing into top managerial jobs with higher pay. Women also do the majority of unpaid labour. Many of these factors are not due to a culture of poverty within women, meaning they cannot be blamed for causing their own poverty. Women in poverty doing unpaid labour challenge the view that laziness is an inherent attitude amongst poor people.

Overall, the argument that poverty is caused by the attitudes and values of the poor is limited in understanding poverty. It ignores how social characteristics such as gender also play an important role in poverty. There is a wider range of sociological study to suggest that poverty in relative terms cannot be simply ascribed to people who are lazy. Poverty in material and social terms is due to a much wider range of social and economic factors.

TEACHER COMMENTS

The evaluation questions are generally an opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge of a range of theories and how you can apply them to the situation on which question focusses. The above student response specifically refers to two theoretical perspectives which provide some theoretical debate. Can you think of any other theories that would comment on the theme of this question?

A-LEVEL

- 6 Outline and explain **two** reasons why informal welfare provision is necessary in addition to other types of welfare provision.

[10 marks]

STUDENT RESPONSE

Informal welfare support, often carried out by women and family members, provides people with emotional and psychological support which cannot be completely fulfilled by other providers of welfare. This may help the mental wellbeing of people who need welfare support. Often, state and private welfare providers may be lacking in providing this form of support.

Furthermore, many people may be unwilling to make use of state welfare provision out of embarrassment. Informal welfare support, such as a family member checking up on someone's health may bring health issues to the attention of people who are unaware they are suffering.

TEACHER COMMENTS

Ensuring you have enough detail in your answers can be difficult to gauge. Just outlining the answers is not sufficient for this style of question however anything more than two detailed paragraphs is probably unnecessary. The above response could benefit from slightly more detail added to each point, this could be achieved by adding more examples of how each point occurs or by applying knowledge of any relevant research studies to illustrate knowledge.

- 7 Read **Item B** below and answer the question that follows.

ITEM B

Sociologists have developed many different ways of defining and measuring poverty. Many of the earliest ways of defining poverty used an absolute definition which tried to establish the level below which people would be unable to survive. However, as societies such as the UK have become better-off, some sociologists believe that absolute definitions are no longer very useful and it is better to use a relative definition of poverty.

- Applying material from **Item B**, analyse **two** reasons why some sociologists prefer to use relative definitions of poverty rather than absolute definitions.

[10 marks]

STUDENT RESPONSE

As Item B notes, absolute understandings of poverty may be useful for gaining an insight into the material conditions of the poor. For example the UNDP used the dollar a day baseline for measuring those in absolute poverty in the USA. However, this relies on official statistics which are not always reliable, as some of the data may have errors.

The statistics generated by absolute poverty studies do not help explain how people experience poverty. In contrast, relative interpretations of poverty help gain a deeper understanding of how the poor experience poverty. Ruth Lister conducted group interviews with those in poverty, gaining a deeper insight into their interpretations of what it is like to be poor. Relative definitions constructed by poor people themselves in relative poverty studies like Breadline Britain help sociologists understand the subjective experience of poverty.

TEACHER COMMENTS

A common problem is that many students misread the question which can lead to their answer drifting from the subject. One of these answers is correct whereas the other is not relevant and therefore does not meet the demands of the question. Can you identify which statement is incorrect, explain why and then write a new alternative paragraph that would be appropriate for this question?

3 Read **Item C** below and answer the question that follows.

ITEM C

In the past, most sociologists saw work as being central to people's sense of identity and their ability to live satisfying lives. Consequently, unemployment has often been seen as having a devastating effect upon people who lose their jobs. However, some sociologists argue that this is no longer the case and leisure is now at least as important as work in providing a sense of identity and meaning.

Applying material from **Item C** and your knowledge, evaluate the view that work remains the most important source of meaning in people's lives.

[20 marks]

STUDENT RESPONSE

As Item C suggests, "most sociologists have seen work as being central to people's sense of identity and their ability to live satisfying lives". This has been highlighted by sociologists in the past. For example Weber studied "The Protestant work ethic", which was focused on hard work to affirm a religious identity. This demonstrates that work can also be linked to religious identity, providing a sense of community through shared values. Similarly to Weber, Marx highlighted that work provided a fundamental part of people's lives, giving them meaning. Without employment, people are likely to be alienated from society, making them isolated. Both these sociologists provide an understanding of how work shapes a person's identity within society. However, they both wrote at least 100 years ago, meaning that their interpretation may be limited to a historical period.

Item C also suggests that some sociologists think that "leisure is now at least as important as work in providing a sense of identity and meaning". Wilensky highlights how people are retreating into leisure and comfort. This is separated from their work life, as work is simply a means of providing the financial means for leisure time. Tom Burns argues that leisure allows people to have freedom of expression and choice. Leisure time is being stylised in a capitalist society, as people choose the consumer goods which facilitate leisure time. This is useful for understanding modern society as sociologists have highlighted the growth of leisure as a recent event.

Overall, it is still important to view work as a key part of forming social identity. Many people still take pride in their work as part of their identity such as police officers and teachers. However, the rise of leisure also highlights how work is not the overarching source of meaning to people's lives.

TEACHER COMMENTS

Whilst evaluating, the student needs to ensure that they are fully explaining each of the ideas that they bring into the debate. This response includes some relevant ideas which are accurate however it is limited in terms of detail. Can you enhance this answer by adding more detail to each of the points made in this essay, particularly the counter argument to the question which focuses on leisure?