

Commentary on candidate evidence

The candidate evidence has achieved the following marks for each element of the project-dissertation.

Candidate 1

Justifying an appropriate complex, contemporary political or social issue for research (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **7 marks** because they have a contemporary and relevant hypothesis.

The candidate explains the importance and relevance of the issue by explaining the view that inequality may be a result of tax policy and exemplifies this view with statistics from the World Inequality Database. The candidate clearly explains trickle-down economic theory and links it to social mobility. The candidate then considers and explains contrasting theories about whether social mobility is achievable.

At the start of the dissertation, the candidate outlines the aims and links them to the issue, which enables them to access 7 out of 8 marks. However, the candidate does not evaluate the extent to which the issue is relevant in a wider context which prevents them from achieving full marks in this section. It is also worth noting that page 2 detailing 'Aims and Methods' is not included in the total word count meaning the candidate would have exceeded 5499 words and would be subject to a PA referral.

Evaluating research methodology (6 marks)

The candidate was awarded **5 marks** because they make several developed and relevant points that address the validity and reliability of the research methodology. The candidate is detailed in their explanation of research undertaken – mentioning academic papers, interviewees and websites by name. Evaluative comments are well-written and show clear understanding of both the strengths and the limitations of the research carried out. The candidate explains that the respondent was comfortable with being recorded and that this allowed for ethical considerations to be respected. Whilst this point could be developed further, it is enough to gain a mark. However, the point about potential changes for improvement is under-developed because the candidate merely states that more follow-up questions could be asked. This does not link improvements to validity, reliability or ethical soundness and is therefore not detailed enough to access the final mark in this section.

Using a wide range of sources of information (6 marks)

The candidate was awarded **6 marks** because a wide range of relevant and contemporary sources are used including academic papers, interviews, books and official statistics. Sources are used convincingly throughout the dissertation and with correct academic convention, resulting in full marks for the candidate in this section.

Analysing the issue (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **7 marks** because there is impressive analysis of all key aspects.

In Aim 1, the candidate links vaccine roll-out to trickle-down economics; 'a rising tide lifting all boats' (page 5) and then goes on to analyse the alternative viewpoint by highlighting the global inequalities in vaccine roll-out.

In Aim 2, the candidate analyses the societal impacts of inequality well, using the work of Wilkinson and Pickett to explain the link between health and social problems and income inequality. Pieces of evidence are clearly analysed, for example, 'This shows how a child's 'life chances' can be impacted very early on...' (page 10). Furthermore, also in Aim 2, the candidate explains the functionalist perspective of inequality and links Merton's view to Wilkinson and Pickett's research (page 9).

The high-quality analysis continues in Aim 3 with contemporary and relevant statistics from several countries clearly linked to poverty, inequality and social mobility.

However, despite excellent analysis, the candidate's line of argument lacks conviction – due to a lack of sub-conclusions and slightly unclear chapter headings – which capped the candidate at 7 out of 8 marks for this element.

Evaluating arguments and evidence (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **6 marks** because there is reasoned consideration and evaluation throughout, though alternative perspectives of the issue could be developed further. In Aim 1, they consider alternative views, 'On the other hand, there is a substantial argument to disprove this...' (page 7). Likewise, in Aim 2, alternative views are considered when the candidate states, 'However, social stress also works the opposite way...' Yet, once again, the lack of sub-conclusions in each aim, means that while alternative views are considered, there is a lack of evaluation throughout their line of argument which limits the candidate to 6 out of 8 marks in this section.

Synthesising information to develop a sustained and coherent line of argument, leading to a conclusion, supported by evidence (10 marks)

The candidate was awarded **8 marks** because there is a very detailed overall conclusion that makes several judgements on the issue as a whole, as well as on each specific aim. Synthesis is used throughout the piece of work to support the

line of argument and there are detailed explanations for each judgement. For example, the candidate concludes that trickle-down economics reduces social mobility and increases status anxiety resulting in a reduction of wellbeing for all (page 15). The candidate also explains the correlation between inequality and wellbeing and uses international examples to illustrate this. However, while the candidate has a well-written, well-structured and detailed overall conclusion, Aim 1 has no sub-conclusion and Aims 2 and 3 have unclear and under-developed sub-conclusions. This prevents the candidate from accessing the top marks for this section.

Organising, presenting and referencing findings using appropriate conventions (4 marks)

The candidate was awarded **4 marks** because there are consistent and accurate references throughout. The bibliography, though not in alphabetical order, adheres to academic convention. Whilst the appendices could have been improved by the inclusion of the dates of each interview, as well as the inclusion of the answers to the first interview, the candidate has included enough information to be awarded the mark. Data from primary and secondary research was thoroughly integrated throughout.

Overall, this dissertation was awarded **43 out of 50 marks**. This is a well-written and well-researched piece of work that shows clear understanding and analysis of a complex economic issue. It is both unusual and interesting to read a dissertation that focuses on inequality. It is worth noting that the candidate could have improved their marks by rephrasing each aim as a 'To what extent...' question. This would have allowed for clearer sub-conclusions at the end of each aim. Despite this, this is a high-quality dissertation.

Candidate 2

Justifying an appropriate complex, contemporary political or social issue for research (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **5 marks** because they have a relevant and contemporary hypothesis. The candidate gives several examples in the introduction, under the title 'Abstract', of the global importance of social media on politics, through reaching out to younger voters to encourage them to vote in the EU referendum or by the blocking of social media in countries such as China. While the candidate explains the importance and relevance of the issue and looks at relevant theories, there is no consideration of alternative theories, therefore, the mark is capped at 5 out of 8 marks.

Evaluating research methodology (6 marks)

The candidate was awarded **3 marks** because they have made some developed points of evaluation about the effectiveness of the research methods used. However, these were very vague and generic. For example, the point made about the Guardian being a left-wing newspaper, so could contain bias, requires development. It might have been useful to include a specific example that demonstrated the bias or otherwise.

There is some attempt to evaluate ethical issues when the candidate writes about the importance of consent when completing a survey.

While the candidate briefly describes how secondary research could be improved, this also requires detail as to how they would make these changes, who they would speak to and what they would ask. This section was capped at 3 marks out of 6.

Using a wide range of sources of information (6 marks)

The candidate was awarded **4 marks** because they use a range and variety of relevant, contemporary sources that support their line of argument and their concluding remarks.

The candidate's sources support the line of argument, eg in the 2015 General Election, hashtags supporting the SNP were retweeted 30,000 times and this spread the SNP message. There is also mention of the importance of fake news in the Russia/Ukraine conflict. However, the sources are not always referenced, especially in Chapter 2, and evidence was not fully commented upon to advance the point being made.

Analysing the issue (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **5 marks** because they make use of analytical comments which are linked to evaluative comments. For example, in Chapter 3, analytical comment is linked to evaluative comment where it shows the importance of social media in allowing Russians to view what is happening in the war. However, much of the coverage in the three chapters is highly descriptive, rather than analytical. The description of what happened in the Trayvon Martin

murder and the Black Lives Matter movement (in Chapter 2), is one example of this. Inclusions of what Grassroots movements do other than utilising social media would have been beneficial.

Evaluating arguments and evidence (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **4 marks** because they made some reasoned points of evaluation and related points to their line of argument. The conclusion in Chapter 1 refers to an email reply suggesting that social media played a big part in the respondent's election campaign and that an increased turnout creates a better democracy. Further evaluation of this in the candidate's own words would aid evaluation. Chapters 2 and 3 are very descriptive. Points of evaluation are not integrated throughout and there is no consideration of alternative arguments.

Synthesising information to develop a sustained and coherent line of argument, leading to a conclusion, supported by evidence (10 marks)

The candidate was awarded **5 marks** because the overall conclusion follows from a line of argument showing some understanding of the issue. However, it is not as developed as it should be and is highly descriptive in parts. It is weak in providing alternative arguments, which indicates a less than full understanding of the complexity of the issue.

Organising, presenting and referencing findings using appropriate conventions (4)

The candidate was awarded **3 marks** because the data is integrated into the body of the project-dissertation. The bibliography is organised and uses appropriate academic conventions. The appendices are clearly structured, though best practice would be to provide standardised titles for all of them. The candidate does not get the mark for references, as there are too many references missing and Tweets are not referenced, eg Schwarzenegger's video.

Overall, this dissertation was awarded **29 out of 50 marks**. The candidate has clearly done a lot of research on the topic, but the chapters tend to be highly descriptive which limits the amount of analysis and evaluative marks which can be given. The candidate would have benefitted from considering alternative influences to show how greatly exaggerated, or otherwise, the role played by social media is. Improved chapter titles (To what extent...) would have helped this candidate form a clearer line of argument and this would have likely resulted in more analysis, evaluation and synthesis marks.