

Candidate 1 evidence

To what extent is there social mobility in the UK? (25)

Your essay must include

- two contrasting theories

- one study in your answer.

-link theories and studies to the question

Social mobility is the ability to either move up or down social class. Social class is a type of stratification usually based on occupation, income and status. There are different ways to measure social class, for instance, Marxists measure social class by their relationship to the means of production. The UK govt. use a seven scale system based on occupation, income and status. Your social class of origin also has a huge impact of an individual's life quality. The higher social class an individual is born into the higher their life expectancy; those in classes one and two can expect to live an average of ten years longer than those in classes five to eight. The higher your social class of origin the higher your qualifications tend to be. The lower your social class the more likely you are to serve a jail sentence. The UK has some of the lowest social mobility in the developed world; the OECD found that the poorest people in Britain will take at least five generations to earn the average income. The inequalities in the UK which affect social mobility are gender, social class and income.

Marxists believe that social mobility is possible but doesn't happen all the time; when it does it is usually short range e.g. those from class three to two (Registrar Generals Scale). Marxists believe that as they control the base similarly the institutions of the superstructure are controlled by the bourgeoisie and therefore the proletariat are unable to reach their full potential. They state that social class strongly is the main influencer of life chances. The bourgeoisie tend to live longer and gain higher qualifications. For example, by the age of eleven only ¼ of children from the poorest fifth of families reach the governments expected level of key stage two, compares to eighty-seven percent of the richest fifth. As education is often the key to social mobility, this is an example of how the higher social class of origin is the better chance you have of social mobility. As it is based on exploitation, Marxism considers capitalism as a cause of class inequality and it therefore reduces opportunities for the proletariat. Capitalism is therefore exploitative in that it shapes social life in a way that benefits the wealthy that protect their wealth in society and disadvantages the workers. For instance, public services in the UK consist of sixty-eight percent of people in leadership roles who attended private schools, however only seven percent of the general public attend private schools. Marxists would say that all institutions are controlled by the bourgeoisie and work for their benefit. For example, Marxists believe in social closure, where those in top positions hire/help those from similar backgrounds, therefore limiting opportunities for the proletariat and creating little opportunity for social mobility. Overall, Marxists would argue that capitalism and structured inequalities in society create limited opportunities for those further down the system to achieve their full potential- therefore allowing for poor social mobility in the UK.

On the other hand, Functionalists believe we live in a meritocracy and therefore functionalists believe social mobility is possible for anyone no matter your gender, race or class of origin- it is all dependant on hard work. According to functionalists, order and stability are necessary for society to operate. They therefore consider how class stratification helps keep order and stability. Sociologist Talcott

Parsons suggested that order and stability were based on value consensus. Functionalists believe that because we all value certain things as good then we rank individuals likewise. Therefore, those individuals who perform successfully in terms of society's values (e.g. good qualifications or a professional job) will be ranked highly and receive high rewards. Functionalists would consider this to be the only reason for inequality. However, functionalists believe that it is up to the individual to work to become successful and claim inequality is a good thing. Firstly, as it gives people different rewards for what they do: those who carry out the most important jobs get a high salary. Secondly, it gives those in lower classes something to aim for i.e. to work harder and gain social mobility. Functionalism recognises structured inequality as necessary to the functioning of society. For example, Davis and Moore (1945) claimed effective role allocations as a functional prerequisite. This means all social roles must be filled and filled by the people best able to carry out those jobs, the necessary training for jobs must be done and that the roles must be carried out conscientiously. Davis and Moore argued stratification was the mechanism whereby effective role allocation was ensured. This was done by offering different (unequal) rewards. Therefore, overall functionalists believe of an open meritocratic system based on ability and hard work as well as all institutions work together for the good of all, and this gives opportunities for social mobility. However, this theory could be disproved as it is not always the case that the most important jobs in society gain the best rewards (e.g. top football players are paid a fortune but are not all that useful to society).

One study which looks at social mobility in the UK is the Blanden and Machin study "Up and Down the Income Ladder in Britain" (2008). This study backs up the Marxist view that there is little social mobility and chances of mobility are tied to your class of origin. The study found that rates of mobility in the UK were lower than in most comparable countries, for instance, in USA and Germany. The study also found that mobility was heavily reliant on parental background. Those from the poorest fifth dropped in terms of educational attainment as school progressed even if they began in the academically brightest group. Those from the richest backgrounds but the least able improved. This suggests that due to class, different individuals receive a variety of opportunities which can limit an individual's ability to progress. If this trend were to continue, the children from affluent backgrounds who are doing poorly at age three would be likely to overtake the poorer but initially bright children in test scores by age seven. The findings of the study support the Marxist theory as it shows how social class strongly affects life chances. Furthermore, Blanden and Machin conclude that the decline in intergenerational mobility that occurred between 1958 and 1970 is unlikely to continue for cohorts born from 1985 to 2000, and mobility is likely to remain at the low level observed for the 1970 cohort.

Rosenthal and Jacobson study supports the labeling theory as it shows that individuals can in fact internalise their labels and live up to what's expected of them. In this case it shows the pupils who got labelled something positive succeeded higher than those who got labelled more negatively¹

In conclusion, educational attainment inequality is an ongoing social issue. League tables highlight the highest attaining schools in the most affluent areas of Scotland, and many of the lowest attaining schools in some of the most deprived areas. Schools and Government re prioritizing equity and closing ¹ (Intro) the attainment gap, through support such as breakfast clubs, uniform banks and stationery packs and the empowered learning project giving all pupils an ipad tablet to access online learning.

The fact still remains though, that pupils from more affluent backgrounds have better access to quality educational experiences and are still more likely to achieve positive outcomes at school, further increasing their life chances such as better health, higher paid jobs, accessing Higher Education and a better standard of living as an adult.