Exam skills

L016 • Changes beyond school and gender • AQA A Level Sociology 7192

Measurable objective

Explain how wider social changes beyond school may shape gendered educational participation.

Connect employment, family change, feminism and changing aspirations to learner choices.

Theory reset: structure and agency

Structural explanations focus on opportunities and constraints: employment patterns, family expectations and policy change.

Agency explanations focus on how learners interpret, negotiate and pursue futures.

The strongest explanations connect both: social change alters the choices that seem realistic.

Changing labour market

Changing employment opportunities for women can increase the perceived value of educational success.

If paid work and qualifications are seen as more central to women's futures, girls' educational aspirations may rise.

Evaluation: opportunity is unequal by class, ethnicity, location and family resources, so the effect is not uniform.

Feminism and expectations

Feminist ideas challenge the assumption that girls' futures should be limited to domestic roles.

Changing representations of women in work, politics, education and public life may widen ambitions.

Evaluation: cultural change is uneven; gender stereotypes can remain even when formal messages promote equality.

Family change

Family diversity, changing marriage patterns and greater expectation of women's paid work can affect educational motivation.

Some learners may see qualifications as necessary for independence and security.

Evaluation: not all families communicate the same expectations, and economic pressures can restrict choices.

Named study link: Sharpe

Sue Sharpe's work is often used to illustrate changing ambitions among girls across generations.

The key sociological idea is not simply that "girls changed", but that changing opportunity structures and gender expectations affected what girls imagined for their futures.

Evaluation: dated studies need contemporary checking, and aspirations do not automatically become outcomes.

Mechanism chain

Social change -> wider idea of possible futures -> changed aspiration -> educational engagement -> attainment or participation outcome.

Every arrow in the chain needs evidence and can be challenged.

A strong answer explains why this mechanism may be stronger for some learners than others.

Response space:

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Route choice

Access: match wider social changes to examples.

Scaffold: complete a mechanism chain using employment or feminism.

Core: write two developed points using evidence.

Stretch: evaluate whether outside-school factors are stronger than school processes.

Response space:

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Assessment

6 marks: Outline and explain two wider social changes that may affect girls' educational achievement.

10 marks: Applying material from Item A, analyse two ways family or labour-market change may shape gendered choices.

30 marks: Evaluate the view that wider social change is the main reason for gender differences in education.

Response space:

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Recall and review

Define one structural factor and one agency factor.

Write one judgement sentence about how far wider social change explains gendered attainment.