Outline and explain two ways demographic changes in society have changed family structures [10]

One way in which demographic changes have changed family structures is through the ageing population in the UK. With increased life expectancy over the past century in the UK and a falling birth rate, the average age of the UK population has increased, so that the average age of British citizens is in their mid-40s. This has changes on the structure of family life in the UK, as with more elderly people and less children being born there has been a growth of vertically extended or beanpole families. These multi-generational families have closer links between generations, with grandparents often providing care for their grandchildren whilst their parents are in work. Alternatively, adults are providing care for elderly parents, who despite living longer, may be subject to ill-health associated with old age, such as dementia or mobility issues. This may necessitate elderly parents moving in with their grown children and their grandchildren, creating a beanpole family under the same roof.

A second way in which demographic changes in society have changed family structures is through migration. With increased migration both into and out of the UK, many extended families are separated by international boundaries. This can occur in several ways, with immigrants to the UK being separated from extended families in their homeland or through emigration, either for work or retirement creating a greater distance between families. Furthermore, migration into the UK from EU nations was based around young professionals coming to the UK for education or employment which generated an increase in lone person households or communal households, where people shared properties with others in a similar position to them. This migration of students and young professionals changes the structure of families and households from being based upon couples to a more diverse structure, with almost a third of households in the UK being lone person households in 2018.

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Item A

In recent years, the number of children born in the UK has fallen. Sociologists suggest that this is due to changes in social attitudes and the costs incurred in raising children.

2. Applying material from item A, analyse two reasons for changes in birth rates. [10]

One reason for changes in birth rates is due to 'changes in social attitudes' (Item A). Sociologists argue that as we move into a late modern era, there has been an increase in individualism. Giddens argues that people have become more reflexive in their attitudes, looking at themselves and reflecting upon their actions, striving for self-improvement. As a result, people have moved from having life-long relationships based upon romantic love, to a series of monogamous relationships based upon confluent love. Giddens argue that people no longer look to partners as a means of completing them but look for people that fulfil an individual's needs at a moment in time and move from one relationship to another when those needs change. As a result, people are less likely to make long-term commitments, such as getting married or having children with a partner until they are certain that the relationship will last a significant amount of time. As a result, people delay having children until later in life when they are more stable and settled. This reduces the fertility window for having children for many women, with the average age of first child being in the late twenties for women in contemporary society, compared to early twenties 50 years ago. As a result, they have less children, as can be evidenced by the fertility rate falling to 1.7 children per woman from over 2.4 in previous generations.

A second reason for changes in birth rates has been the 'costs incurred in raising children' (Item A). Over time, children have moved from being an economic asset to an economic burden. In pre-industrial and early industrial society, children helped to provide the family with income from either employment or through helping with farming. With the introduction of compulsory education, which has been extended through to the age of 18, children are no longer units of production, but units of consumption. As society has moved to being more child-centred, this level of consumption has increased, and children are now seen as an economic burden. Estimates have placed the cost of raising a child from £140,000 - £200,000 to the age of 18, and with the abolition of student grants and the introduction of tuition fees and student loans, many sociologists argue that children are often dependent upon financial support from their parents into their mid-twenties and in some cases beyond. As a result, people may choose to have less children than in the past or may even choose not to have children at all.