

Higher National Unit Specification

General information for centres

Unit title: Social Science: Research Issues

Unit code: D81P 35

Unit purpose: This Unit introduces candidates to concepts and theory which assist in understanding the aims and practice of social science. Issues of values and ethical considerations will also be examined.

On completion of this Unit, the candidate will be able to:

1. Explain the concepts which assist in understanding the aims and practice of social science.
2. Explain the relationship between social theory and social science.
3. Analyse the place of value judgements and ethics in social science.

Credit value: 1 HN Credit at SCQF level 8: (8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 8)

Recommended prior knowledge and skills: Candidates should possess good communication skills. Other knowledge, skills and experience relevant to the Unit would also be beneficial.

Candidates also should have achieved HN Unit D81N 34 *Social Sciences: Research and Methodology*. Ultimately, entry is at the discretion of the centre.

Core skills: There may be opportunities to gather evidence towards core skills in this Unit, although there is no automatic certification of core skills or core skill components.

Context for delivery: If this Unit is delivered as part of a group award, it is recommended that it should be taught and assessed within the subject area of the group award to which it contributes. This Unit is included in the framework for the HNC/D Social Sciences.

Assessment: This Unit will be holistically assessed by a single instrument of assessment. This will take the form of one open book essay/report of not less than 2000 words. The assessment will not be conducted under supervision.

An exemplar instrument of assessment and marking guidelines have been produced to indicate the national standard of achievement at SCQF level 8.

Higher National Unit specification: statement of standards

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The sections of the Unit stating the Outcomes, knowledge and/or skills, and evidence required are mandatory.

Where evidence for an Outcome is assessed on a sample basis, the whole of the content listed in the knowledge and/or skills section must be taught and available for assessment. Different items should be sampled on each assessment occasion.

Outcome 1

Explain the concepts which assist in understanding the aims and practice of social science.

Knowledge and/or skills

- Objectivity/Subjectivity
- Empiricism
- Value free social science
- Realism
- Idealism
- Positivism

Outcome 2

Explain the relationship between social theory and social science.

Knowledge and/or skills

- Association between theory and research
- Theory influences research
- Deduction from theory
- Induction of theory
- Possibility for theory to be refuted
- Paradigm.

Outcome 3

Analyse the place of value judgements and ethics in social science.

Knowledge and/or skills

- Professional integrity
- Responsibilities to research participants
- Anonymity, Privacy and Confidentiality

Higher National Unit specification: statement of standards (cont)

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Evidence requirements for the Unit

To achieve this Unit each candidate will need evidence to demonstrate his/her knowledge and/or skills for Outcomes 1, 2 and 3. The Unit will be holistically assessed, in the form of an open book essay requiring a response of approximately 2000 words. Each candidate must provide evidence to show that s/he can :

- Explain **three** from the six concepts which assist in understanding the aims and practice of social science, (ie three concepts from: objectivity/subjectivity; empiricism; value free social science; realism; idealism; positivism.)
- Explain that theory influences the research process.
- Explain deduction and induction.
- Explain that theory should be able to be falsified.
- Work within paradigms.
- The candidate must also demonstrate knowledge of the importance of professional integrity and awareness of responsibilities to research participants including anonymity, privacy and confidentiality.

The essay will not be conducted under supervision.

Assessment guidelines for the Unit

This Unit will be assessed holistically by one instrument of assessment covering all Outcomes. Typically this will consist of the candidate being set a task in the form of an essay or report of not less than 2000 words. The task set should be relevant to the range of social sciences studied within the course.

From the given task candidates should be able to satisfy the following criteria:

- Be able to explain that although science is often thought of as being a coherent body of thought over which there is broad consensus, the actual practice is that of different perspectives on a given topic.
- Explain that social science often operates within a largely unquestioned framework governed by fundamental theoretical models or 'paradigms'. Paradigms influence the way in which research is designed and/or interpreted. Paradigms remain unchallenged until a 'revolution' occurs and the paradigm is replaced in favour of a new paradigm, or in other words a paradigm shift occurs.
- Candidates must also demonstrate knowledge of the importance of professional integrity and awareness of responsibilities to research participants including anonymity, privacy and confidentiality.

Administrative Information

Unit code: D81P 35

Unit title: Social Science: Research Issues

Superclass category: ED

Date of publication:

Source: SQA

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Higher National Unit specification: support notes

Unit title: Social Science: Research Issues

This part of the Unit specification is offered as guidance. The support notes are not mandatory.

While the exact time allocated to this Unit is at the discretion of the centre, the notional design length is 40 hours.

Guidance on the content and context for this Unit

The Unit is primarily intended to introduce the candidate to the complexity of social science theory and research, the issues raised by such and to develop the necessary skills of analysis and evaluation required by the social scientist. Social scientists require the co-operation of people as research participants, as such candidates should be aware of the need to treat these people with respect.

It is envisaged that an integrated approach to teaching the Unit will be adopted. Examples used should be relevant to the social science disciplines offered to the candidate. One possible approach might be to use research examples as a framework to examine the issues raised in the Unit. For example: Freud's 'little Hans' case study would permit exploration of Outcome 1 issues such as subjectivity/objectivity, value free social science and empiricism. After candidates have been introduced to the issues they could discuss and explore issues in relation to the chosen research.

Outcome 2 issues could be explored in a similar way, eg Behaviourist theory operates within the paradigm of measurable and observable behaviour. From this premise theory influences the research process used (eg experiments and observation). Deductions are similarly influenced in that explanations arrived at exclude internal, non-measurable processes such as thinking and emotional interpretations. The possibility for theory to be refuted could be explored from the examples used.

Examples of research, which raise ethical questions, could be an appropriate place to discuss the issues of Outcome 3. Milgram's research into obedience may provide a good starting place for discussion of the need for responsibility to research participants and the need for professional integrity.

Guidance on the delivery and assessment of this Unit

The Unit is likely to form part of a group award and is primarily designed to provide candidates with knowledge of issues and theory which assist in understanding the aims and practice of social science. As such candidates will benefit from studying relevant subject based Units prior to studying this Unit. In these circumstances it is likely the Unit will be delivered in year two of a HND award. This should allow the Unit to be delivered in such a way that enables candidates to appreciate the relevance of the Unit to research in the social sciences. Wherever possible, examples used should have relevance to the subject Units previously studied.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

The Unit will be holistically assessed by a single instrument of assessment. This will take the form of one open book essay/report of not less than 2000 words. The assessment will not be conducted under supervision.

Open learning

Open learning implies that, while candidates study outwith the centres using materials provided, it would be necessary to attend the centre for assessment purposes. For further information on Open and Distance Learning, please refer to the SQA publication, *Assessment and Quality Assurance of Open and Distance Learning* (SQA, 2000).

Special needs

This Unit specification is intended to ensure that there are no artificial barriers to learning or assessment. Special needs of individual candidates should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment instruments or considering special alternative Outcomes for Units. For information on these, please refer to the SQA document *Guidance on Special Assessment and Certification Arrangements for Candidates with Special Needs and Candidates for whom English is an Additional Language* (SQA, 2000).

General information for candidates

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This Unit is designed primarily to introduce you to the complexity of social science theory and research, the issues raised by such and to develop the necessary skills of analysis and evaluation required by the social scientist. Furthermore social scientists require the co-operation of people as research participants, as such you should be aware of the need to treat participants with respect.

After studying the Unit, you should:

- Be able to explain that although science is often thought of as being a coherent body of thought over which there is broad agreement, the actual practice is that of different views on a given topic.
- Explain that social science often operates within a largely unquestioned framework governed by basic theoretical models or 'paradigms'. You should understand that these paradigms influence the way social scientists conduct their research and also influence the way results are interpreted. Due to the complexity of behaviour, no one theory can offer a complete understanding of behaviour therefore theoretical explanations should also be able to be contradicted and alternative explanations offered.
- You must also demonstrate knowledge of the importance of professional integrity and awareness of responsibilities to research participants including anonymity, privacy and confidentiality.

The Unit will be assessed holistically by one instrument of assessment, an essay or report of approximately 2000 words covering all Outcomes. The assessment will be open book and will not be written up under supervision.