National Unit Specification: general information

UNIT Studying Human Society: The Sociological Approach (Higher)

CODE DV3P 12

COURSE Sociology (Higher)

SUMMARY

This Unit is designed to introduce candidates to the variety of sociological theories and methods of research that characterise the discipline of sociology. It enables candidates to describe, explain, analyse, evaluate and apply an understanding of the principal features of major sociological theories and their associated methods of research. It provides a framework for understanding human behaviour from different sociological theories. By evaluating major sociological theories, candidates will be able to enhance their understanding of the nature and development of human societies.

This is a mandatory Unit in the Higher Sociology Course. This Unit can also be taken as a free-standing Unit for candidates who wish to gain a sound understanding of sociological theories and methods.

OUTCOMES

1 Explain the contribution of key sociological theories to an understanding of human social behaviour.
2 Evaluate sociological theories.
3 Evaluate the main methods and research strategy used by sociologists.
National Unit Specification: general information (cont)

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RECOMMENDED ENTRY

While entry is at the discretion of the centre, candidates would normally be expected to have attained one of the following, or equivalent:

♦ Intermediate 2 Sociology Course or Unit(s)
♦ Standard Grade in a social subject at Credit level
♦ Standard Grade English at Credit level or Intermediate 2 Communication

CREDIT VALUE

1 credit at Higher (6 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 6*)

*SCQF credit points are used to allocate credit to qualifications in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Each qualification in the Framework is allocated a number of SCQF credit points at an SCQF level. There are 12 SCQF levels, ranging from Access 1 to Doctorates.

CORE SKILLS

Achievement of this Unit gives automatic certification of the following:

Complete Core Skill None
Core Skills components Critical Thinking at SCQF Level 6
National Unit Specification: statement of standards

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Acceptable performance in this Unit will be the satisfactory achievement of the standards set out in this part of the Unit Specification. All sections of the statement of standards are mandatory and cannot be altered without reference to the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

OUTCOME 1

Explain the contribution of key sociological theories to an understanding of human social behaviour

Performance Criteria

(a) Clearly distinguish between common sense and sociological knowledge.
(b) Describe key sociological theories correctly.
(c) Explain the principal features of the main sociological theories clearly, using relevant examples.

OUTCOME 2

Evaluate sociological theories

Performance Criteria

(a) Describe the similarities and differences between consensus and conflict structuralism clearly.
(b) Describe the similarities and differences between structural and action sociological theories clearly.
(c) Analyse the strengths and weaknesses of structural and action sociological theories in a balanced way, using relevant examples.

OUTCOME 3

Evaluate the main methods and research strategy used by sociologists

Performance Criteria

(a) Describe the research strategy used by sociologists correctly.
(b) Describe quantitative methods used by sociologists correctly.
(c) Describe qualitative methods used by sociologists correctly.
(d) Explain the relative advantages and disadvantages of qualitative and quantitative methods clearly.
EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE UNIT

The Appendix to the Statement of Standards details the mandatory content/context for this Unit.

Evidence Requirements apply to the Unit as a whole and, therefore, apply holistically to all Outcomes of the Unit.

Candidates must produce written and/or oral evidence for all Outcomes and Performance Criteria of the Unit. The assessment should take the form of an unseen, closed-book, supervised test that should be completed in one hour. The instrument of assessment should take the form of a range of restricted response-type questions, and should make use of stimulus material as a tool with which to help candidates focus on the question(s) posed.

All theories and research methods should be covered prior to candidates being asked to prepare for assessment. Candidates should not be informed prior to the Unit assessment which theories and methods they will be assessed on.

Evidence for the Unit must include:

♦ the distinction between common sense and sociological explanations

Theories
♦ description and explanation of the principal features of the main sociological theories
♦ description of the similarities and differences between consensus and conflict; and structural and action theories
♦ analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of structural and action theories

Structural theories: Consensus theory (functionalism) and conflict theories (Marxism, neo-Marxism, feminism) must be covered in teaching and learning. For assessment purposes, only functionalism and two of Marxism or neo-Marxism or feminism is required.

Action theories: both Weberian and symbolic interactionism must be covered in teaching and learning and candidates must be prepared to answer on either.

Research Methods and strategy
♦ description of the research strategy: candidates must be able to describe all five stages in the research strategy
♦ description of quantitative and qualitative research methods, and an explanation of the relative advantages and disadvantages between both

All four quantitative and all six qualitative methods (including secondary sources) must be covered in learning and teaching, and any one of each type can be sampled in Unit assessment.

Candidate responses will be descriptive in nature, and a proportion of analysis and evaluation is required at this level. The split between knowledge and understanding and analysis and evaluation in Unit assessment is 60% knowledge and understanding and 40% analysis and evaluation.
National Unit Specification: statement of standards (cont)

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Sampling

Assessment of this Unit should incorporate appropriate sampling of Unit content. For example, if a candidate demonstrates knowledge, understanding and analysis of functionalism as a consensus theory and two of Marxism or neo-Marxism or feminism as a conflict theory, it is inferred that she or he will have knowledge and understanding of all such structuralist theories. If a candidate correctly identifies similarities and differences between one of these structuralist theories and action theories, and analyses and evaluates the same theories, it is inferred that she or he can demonstrate knowledge, understanding, analysis and evaluation of any other sociological theory. This would ensure that both Outcomes and all Performance Criteria pertaining to these Outcomes are achieved.

Similarly, if the candidate demonstrates knowledge and understanding and provides an evaluation of the relative advantages and disadvantages of one example of a qualitative method of gathering data and one example of a quantitative method of gathering data, then it can be inferred this can be done for the other methods. The research strategy used by sociologists will always be assessed in Unit assessment.

Any requirement for reassessment will be based upon a different sample from the range of content, where appropriate, and candidates must attempt a different instrument of assessment in its entirety.

Achievement will be decided by the use of a cut-off score. The National Assessment Bank items illustrate the standard that should be applied and also the nature and extent of the sample to be used. If a centre wishes to design its own assessments for this Unit, they should be of a comparable standard.
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This part of the Unit Specification is offered as guidance. The support notes are not mandatory.

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

GUIDANCE ON THE CONTENT AND CONTEXT FOR THE UNIT

The Appendix to the Statement of Standards contains the mandatory requirements for this Unit.

The Unit introduces candidates to the variety of sociological theories and the particular perspectives they give to the explanation of human social behaviour. It also establishes the link between sociological theories and the research methods and strategies that may be adopted. It is the intention of the Unit to establish good understanding of the theories and research methods that underpin sociology and to encourage candidates to recognise the similarities and differences between their differing analyses, explanations and methodological strategies.

While some candidates may have studied sociology before (possibly at Intermediate 2), for others it will be their first experience of the subject and for this reason its content should be treated in an introductory way and as a means of establishing the sociological approach. Sociological concepts, theories and methods should all be supported by relevant examples. These may be drawn from Intermediate 2 (socialisation and stratification). This would not only offer a means of furthering already acquired sociological knowledge, but may also provide an introduction for those candidates new to the subject who may need to adjust their level of study after joining the Course.

GUIDANCE ON LEARNING AND TEACHING APPROACHES FOR THE UNIT

For candidates studying this Unit as part of the Higher Sociology Course, advice regarding approaches to learning and teaching are contained in the Course specification. It is recommended that the learning experience at this level should be varied, to encourage enthusiasm for the subject and to stimulate and prepare candidates for independent study.

The Unit should be approached using a wide range of stimulus materials and teaching approaches. Candidates should be encouraged to draw upon their own experiences, where appropriate, and should have access to resources such as audio-visual material, invited speakers, Internet, ICT and paper-based resources. Where appropriate, the material should be up to date and relevant to the Unit, the level of study and the interests of the candidates. For the Higher Sociology Course it is recognised that certain key sociological commentary and research, regardless of publication date, is appropriate. Comparisons with more up to date research should be used, where appropriate. The emphasis throughout should be on interactive learning, whether through whole class, small group, or individual activity. The Unit may be delivered on a flexible basis and may also be suitable for open learning and on-line delivery.

Outcomes 1 and 2 are interconnected and should be approached as such. It is recommended that, wherever possible, these two Outcomes should be covered in an integrated way. An Outcome-by-Outcome approach, which could lead to a compartmentalised view of sociology, should be avoided, where possible.
National Unit Specification: support notes (cont)

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If undertaking the Unit as part of the Higher Sociology Course, it is advised that the Unit is taken prior to the two Understanding Human Society (Higher) Units. This would allow for an introduction to theories and research, which may then be more effectively applied to the two Understanding Human Society (Higher) Units. This approach would also allow for movement between Intermediate 2 and Higher in the first few months of the Course. As the Studying Human Society: The Sociological Approach (Intermediate 2) Unit and this Higher Unit have overlapping content, it is envisaged that assessors will be able to decide the appropriate level of study for each candidate. Due to the level of demand at Higher, bi-level delivery of the Intermediate 2 and Higher Courses may be difficult.

GUIDANCE ON APPROACHES TO ASSESSMENT FOR THE UNIT

The Evidence Requirements provide specific requirements for Unit assessment.

Outcomes and Performance Criteria should be assessed by means of a single holistic assessment lasting no more than one hour. The Unit assessment must ensure that all Outcomes and Performance Criteria are fully met.

Evidence should be gathered by means of a single assessment towards the end of the Unit. Care should be taken to ensure that sufficient time is allowed for remediation and reassessment, if required.

NAB materials provide suitable assessment instruments and guidance to support the national standard. The questions in the NAB are restricted response in nature. Sampling of content in the Unit assessment is acceptable. In the Unit the sampling will be from all theories and methods covered in learning and teaching. Where centres wish to devise their own instruments of assessment, they should refer to the NAB to ensure a comparable standard. It is recommended that centre-devised instruments of assessment should be submitted to SQA for prior moderation.

CANDIDATES WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

This Unit Specification is intended to ensure that there are no artificial barriers to learning or assessment. The additional support needs of individual candidates should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment instruments or considering alternative Outcomes for Units. For information on these, please refer to the document Guidance on Assessment Arrangements for Candidates with Disabilities and/or Additional Support Needs (SQA, 2004).
National Unit Specification: appendix to the statement of standards

UNIT Studying Human Society: The Sociological Approach (Higher)

NB: This Appendix forms part of the Statement of Standards, ie requirements that are mandatory.

The sociological approach: an introduction
The Unit should begin with an introduction to common sense explanations and how sociology provides a studied response to such views on human behaviour and social life. This will provide candidates with an appropriate introduction to what is meant by sociology. The means by which the sociological approaches can be reinforced should be through C. Wright Mills’ ‘The Sociological Imagination’.

Features, analysis and evaluation
The key features and analytical and evaluative points relating to each theory below, must be covered. Candidates must cover the following structural and action theories as part of learning and teaching:

Structural theories
Consensus theory: functionalism. A range of features, analytical and evaluative points, along with appropriate key theorists will be required, as specified above.

Conflict theories: Marxism, neo-Marxism, feminism. Only two of these theories will feature in each instrument of Unit assessment, as achievement with regards to one of these theories will infer that candidates would have knowledge and understanding of the other conflict theories. Similarities and distinctions between Marxist and neo-Marxist explanations should be clear to candidates. Feminism will be addressed as a conflict theory. As such, a range of feminist theories will be covered, including Marxist feminist, liberal feminist and radical feminist theories. Other feminist theories may additionally be used by candidates, and they will be able, where appropriate, to apply these to their Unit or Course assessment responses. A range of features, analytical and evaluative points, along with appropriate key theorists will be required, as specified above.

Consensus versus conflict theories
A requirement to compare and contrast consensus and conflict theories will arise in all Unit and Course assessment. However, the requirements may be more specific and could require a direct comparison of one of the above three conflict theories with functionalism. For questions that do not specify a particular conflict theory, candidate responses that seek to answer the question with reference to a particular conflict theory, as appropriate, should be credited.

Action theories
Candidates will be expected to demonstrate knowledge of either Weberian theory or symbolic interactionism in Unit assessment.

Weberian theory. Weber will be addressed as a sociologist whose theories provide a ‘bridge’ between structuralist and action theories. Appropriate attention should be given to both the structural aspects of his theory (eg class, bureaucracy) and the social action aspects of it (eg meaning and interpretation verstehen).

Symbolic interactionism. A range of features, analytical and evaluative points, along with appropriate key theorists will be required, as specified above. Labelling theory at some superficial level should be introduced in general learning and teaching when action theories are being addressed. This will help provide candidates, through the use of appropriate examples, with a context with which they may be familiar.
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Structural versus action theories
A requirement to compare and contrast structuralist and action theories will arise in all Unit and Course assessment. However, the requirements may be more specific and could require a direct comparison between a particular structuralist and a particular action theory. For questions that do not specify a particular theory, candidate responses that seek to answer the question with reference to a particular structuralist or action theory, as appropriate should be credited.

The research process/strategy
The following model for a sociological research strategy should be adopted:
- theory
- hypothesis
- operationalisation
- fieldwork
- processing of results

Research methods that generate quantitative data
The main features and relative advantages and disadvantages of the following research methods that generate quantitative data will be covered in learning and teaching for the Unit:
- postal questionnaires*
- structured interviews*
- surveys*
- use of secondary sources — official statistics

*NB. The term, survey, is often used instead of either postal questionnaires or structured interviews. It is appropriate to use the terms postal questionnaire and survey interchangeably. It is also possible to use the terms structured interview and survey interchangeably.

Any one of these quantitative methods can be sampled for Unit and Course assessment, as knowledge and understanding of the other three methods will be inferred from a correct description of one of these methods. An evaluation of the relative advantages and disadvantages of the same method will also infer knowledge and understanding of the other methods for gathering quantitative data.

Research methods that generate qualitative data
The main features and relative advantages and disadvantages of the following research methods that generate qualitative data will be covered in learning and teaching for the Unit:
- non-participant observation
- participant observation
- unstructured interviews
- case studies
- use of secondary sources — personal documents (eg diaries, letters and personal accounts)
- use of secondary sources — visual resources (eg film, documentary, newsreel)

Any one of these qualitative methods can be sampled for Unit and Course assessment, as knowledge and understanding of the other five methods will be inferred from a correct description of one of these methods. An evaluation of the relative advantages and disadvantages of the same method will also infer the ability to evaluate the other methods for gathering qualitative data.