Higher National Unit specification: general information

Unit title: Social Science: Research Issues

Unit code: FM0J 35

Superclass:	ED
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Version:	02

Unit purpose

This Unit introduces candidates to the concepts that assist in understanding the aims and practice of social science research and the relationship between theory in social science and social science research. Issues of values and ethical considerations will also be examined.

It is intended for candidates who have a general interest in Research Issues as well as those who would use it as a basis for further study.

On completion of the Unit the candidate should be able to:

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

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 Social Sciences: Research and Methodology. Ultimately, entry is at the discretion of the centre.

General information (cont)

Credit points and level

1 Higher National Unit credit at SCQF level 8: (8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 8*)

*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

There are opportunities to develop the Core Skills of Communication at SCQF level 6, Working with Others at SCQF level 6 and Information & Communication Technology at SCQF level 5 in this Unit, although there is no automatic certification of Core Skills or Core Skills 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.

Assessment

The assessment will be open-book. This means that candidates will be allowed access to materials (eg text books, notes, VLE). The task will be handed out to be completed at a date specified by the centre. It should be completed according to a prearranged format and could take the form of an open-book essay or set of structured questions with an expected candidate response of approximately 2000 words or an individual oral presentation or poster exhibition with expected candidate's response of 15 minutes in presentation or explanation of poster, a pod cast or any other method that is appropriate to meet the Evidence Requirements. It is recommended that oral presentations are recorded in some form for external verification purposes. Candidates could also provide the Evidence Requirements in the form of an individual Blog, or creation of a website, with approximately 2000 words.

Higher National Unit specification: statement of standards

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

The sections of the Unit stating the Outcomes, Knowledge and/or Skills, and Evidence Requirements are mandatory.

Where evidence for Outcomes 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. Candidates should not know in advance the items on which they will be assessed and different items should be sampled on each assessment occasion.

Outcome 1

Analyse the concepts that assist in understanding the aims and practice of social science.

Knowledge and/or Skills

♦ Objectivity and subjectivity.
♦ Reliability and validity.
♦ Empiricism and Rationalism.
♦ Positivism and Anti-Positivism.
♦ The debate over whether social science research can be value free or not.

Outcome 2

Analyse the relationship between theory in social science and social science research.

Knowledge and/or Skills

♦ Link between methodology and method.
♦ The influence of theoretical perspective on research.
♦ Deduction from theory.
♦ Induction of theory.
♦ Concept of 'falsification'.
♦ The notion of a 'paradigm'.

Outcome 3

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

Knowledge and/or Skills

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

Higher National Unit specification: statement of standards (cont)

Unit title: Social Science: Research Issues

Evidence Requirements

Candidates will need to provide evidence to demonstrate their Knowledge and/or Skills by showing that they can:

♦   analyse correctly the ways in which three from the five concepts/conceptual groupings
♦   assist in understanding the aims and practice of social science research (ie three concepts/conceptual groupings from: objectivity and subjectivity; reliability and validity; empiricism and rationalism; positivism and anti-positivism; whether or not social science can be value free)
♦   explain correctly the link between methodology and method
♦   explain correctly the concepts of deduction and induction
♦   explain correctly the concept of falsification
♦   evaluate correctly the notion of paradigm and its influence on social research
♦   analyse the importance of professional integrity and awareness of responsibilities to research participants including anonymity, privacy and confidentiality.

The assessment will be open-book. This means that candidates will be allowed access to materials (eg text books, notes, VLE).

Regardless of the assessment method chosen, the candidate must submit a bibliography presented in a standard referencing format, such as Harvard.

Assessment Guidelines

There is a wide variety of methods of assessment that would allow candidates to meet the Evidence Requirements. The following are suggestions and there may be other methods that would be suitable. Centres are reminded that prior verification would help to ensure that the national standard is being met.

The task will be handed out to be completed at a date specified by the centre. It should be completed according to a prearranged format and could take the form of an open-book essay or set of structured questions with an expected candidate response of approximately 2000 words or an individual oral presentation or poster exhibition with expected candidate's response of 15 minutes in presentation or explanation of poster, a pod cast or any other method that is appropriate to meet the Evidence Requirements. It is recommended that oral presentations are recorded in some form for external verification purposes. Candidates could also provide the Evidence Requirements in the form of an individual Blog, or creation of a website, with approximately 2000 words.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes

Unit title: Social Science: Research Issues

Guidance on the content and context for this Unit

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.

The Unit is primarily intended to introduce the candidate to the complexity of social science theory and research, the issues raised therein 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 and candidates should therefore be aware of the need to treat subjects with respect and professional integrity. 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 examples of key research from more than one social science discipline as a framework to examine the issues raised in the Unit.

This Unit sets out to explore the philosophical foundations of social science by charting the development of our understanding of the possibility of 'objective knowledge' from the Sophists through Rationalism, Empiricism and Positivism, as exemplified in Karl Popper's notion of Falsification, and finally back to a neo-sophism in the form of Thomas Kuhn's notion of a Paradigm.

Outcomes 1 and 2 are concerned with the stages in this journey and the issues that arise from them. An examination of this journey will provide a framework into which the various disciplines and perspectives within the social sciences can be located. For example, Structuralist theories across the social sciences operate within the paradigm of Positivist approaches to explaining human behaviour and social phenomena by recourse to empirical analysis and the creation of law-like explanations. From this premise, theoretical perspective influences the choice of research method employed.

Positivists seek to establish empirical means to obtaining quantitative data in order to establish statistical trends and patterns at the macro level of analysis. Deductions are similarly influenced in that explanations arrived at exclude internal, non-measurable processes such as thinking, emotional interpretations and social action operating at the micro level. By contrast the Anti-Positivist approach rejects the claims and methods of Positivism and with them the pursuit of 'objective knowledge'. It seeks simply to recount the meaning giving activities of ordinary social actors. This path leads us away from the possibility of objective knowledge to Cultural Relativism and Postmodernism.

Examples of key research that raise ethical questions could be useful in order to discuss the issues raised in Outcome 3. In Psychology, 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, as would James Patrick's study 'A Glasgow Gang Observed', in Sociology.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Social Science: Research Issues

Limited glossary:

♦ Validity – Are we actually measuring what we think we are measuring?
♦ Reliability – If a particular research method has a very high probability of producing consistent results when replicated by someone else the method is said to be reliable.

Guidance on the delivery and assessment of this Unit

The Unit forms part of the HND Social Sciences 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. Therefore 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 and contemporaneously studied.

Aside from the specific requirements of the Unit, lecturers may find it useful to inform candidates that:

Although science is often thought of as being a coherent body of thought over which there is broad consensus; the actual practice is such that differing perspectives are applied to any single topic area. 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. Generally speaking Paradigms remain unchallenged until a 'revolution' in social thought occurs i.e. Kuhn's notion of 'paradigm shift' whereby the dominant paradigm is replaced by a new way of approaching social research.

Tutors should make candidates aware of the importance of the judicious selection of appropriate academic sources in researching the topics. They should be encouraged to choose academic sources rather than generic search engines, to enable them to be more confident of information and to be more equipped to progress to further study.

Centres should structure the teaching programme to allow time for development of Core Skills and other transferable skills and for assessment practice within the notional hours suggested.

Centres should design an appropriate assessment instrument based on a method that is suitable in allowing candidates to meet the Evidence Requirements. This can be written or oral (depending on the needs of the candidates and the organisational aspects for the centre in choosing particular methods). If an oral method is chosen, it is recommended that centres record this (either by DVD or digital recorder etc.) or provide assessor notes on the presentation for external verification purposes. Oral presentations must be done individually as each candidate has to show evidence of meeting all Evidence Requirements, so a group presentation would not be suitable.

Unit title: Social Science: Research Issues

If the centre is using a Blog or creation of a website as the way of gathering evidence, this should not be in the public domain. Rather it should be on an Intranet or private area of a VLE to reduce the likelihood of plagiarism. Authentication of the candidate's work is essential. It would be helpful to collect notes or PPT presentation materials from the candidate as further evidence of meeting SCQF level 8 in the presentation.

A centre can choose to use a mixture of methods across a cohort, as it may be more suitable for some candidates to give a written response and for others to use an oral method.

Centres should make sure they can authenticate a candidate's work. This may be done by questioning a candidate about their work, by seeing drafts of work under construction, by having partial write-up in presence of assessor or by using an anti-plagiarism tool, such as Turnitin or SafeAssign, which checks Internet sites.

Remediation and Reassessment

If the candidate does not pass on the first attempt they should have a chance to remediate on the original question. This could be by oral questioning or by amending the original assignment. The amendments should be incorporated within the assignment and not added at the end with numerous asterisks. Lecturers and tutors should use their professional judgement with regards to the number of words that can be added.

If the candidate does not pass on remediation then they should be reassessed using a different question. In oral work, candidates can be questioned by the assessor at the end of their presentation or explanation, where minor omissions occur, or where clarity is required. This would help to reduce the need for reassessment. However, where more work is required to meet the evidence requirements (eg where the quality of evidence is poor in a presentation) another presentation of the same duration, on the same topic or question as the original would be required. Only where a different topic or question is attempted would this be classed as reassessment.

Opportunities for developing Core Skills

The delivery and assessment of this Unit may contribute towards the development of Core Skills of *Communication*, *Working with Others* and *Information and Communication Technology.* It can also support the development of other transferable skills, such as, essay writing, referencing, citation and bibliography skills and thinking, analytical and critical skills.

It is possible to develop *Communication* at SCQF level 6 if the assessment takes the form of an essay/report or oral presentation. **For written communication at SCQF level 6 the skill is: produce well structured written communication on complex topics.** To develop this skill candidates can be encouraged in both formative and summative assessment to present all essential ideas/information and supporting detail in a logical and effective order; use a structure that is organised and use paragraphing to make distinctions between facts, opinions, arguments and conclusion, use a format, layout, and word choice which are appropriate to the content and context, and use spelling, punctuation, vocabulary and sentence structures which are consistently accurate.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Social Science: Research Issues

The candidates could be tasked with producing a written communication which presents, analyses, and evaluates a substantial body of information. These skills can be developed through formative activities, such as shorter essays on each of the key issues/concepts and related theorists, without being formally assessed for certification of Core Skill. The topics that centres can choose are complex so should easily fit with SCQF level 6.

It is important to develop report writing or essay-writing skills for candidates' future progression. In doing this candidates should also be encouraged to use an appropriate referencing method, such as Harvard, for any formative or summative essays. Referencing, citation and bibliography skills are best developed using the vehicle of formative essay writing.

For oral communication at SCQF level 6 the skill is: produce and respond to oral communication on a complex topic. In both formative and summative assessment the candidate could be encouraged to give a detailed oral presentation on any issue within the Unit as these would be sufficiently complex. The specific skills of using an appropriate level of vocabulary, consistent spoken language structures and formality, conveying all essential information, opinions, or ideas with supporting detail accurately and coherently, and with varied emphasis as appropriate and responding to others, taking account of their contributions would be developed in an oral presentation. Although a summative assessment would require individual work and individual presentation, a formative assessment could be constructed that would encourage candidates to work in a small group, with a few people contributing to a presentation on one of the key issues/concepts and related theorists. This may allow a candidate to experience the demands of oral presentation before choosing this as an option for summative assessment of the Unit (if the centre is able to give that choice).

As it is important that candidates recognise the need to use a bibliography (or reference section) in a standard format, such as Harvard, for citation purposes then even oral assessment methods should consider incorporating an appropriate bibliography to encourage development of this skill.

For the Core Skills of *Working with Others* at SCQF level 6, the skills are 'Working Co-operatively with Others' and 'Review Co-operative Contribution'. Candidates will be involved in complex interactions. Formative activities could be used to encourage candidates to work co-operatively with others. A group presentation task or information gathering task could be the basis of developing specific skills relevant to this Core Skill. It would be appropriate to encourage candidates to reflect on their own contribution to any group activity, whether that is a formative oral presentation or research for a topic or debate, which may be done as a group activity.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Social Science: Research Issues

For the Core Skill of *Information and Communication Technology* at SCQF level 5 the skills are: 'Accessing Information, use ICT independently, effectively, and responsibly to access information within a range of tasks' and 'Providing/Creating Information, use ICT independently, effectively, and responsibly to carry out a range of processing tasks'. This Unit can help to develop such skills by the use of mini formative presentations using PowerPoint or other ICT presentation tool that will also support the development of oral communication. A summative assessment using ICT presentation methods is also possible. Specific areas of accessing information using Internet searches or VLE use and providing and creating information can be developed in such tasks. Creating a Blog or a website for the summative assessment is another way in which this Core Skill can be developed. This could be used where candidates (and their lecturer) have particular skills and interest in ICT.

Thinking, analytical and critical skills could be developed by posing questions at appropriate points in the delivery, enabling discussion and promoting the need for candidates to take responsibility for learning by encouraging the development of research skills via the Internet or using text books.

Curriculum for Excellence

The Curriculum for Excellence aspires to place learners at the centre of the curriculum and develop their capacities as Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors. The four capacities will be developed throughout this Unit.

This Unit will develop the literacy and communication skills of the learners by way of formative and summative assessments. Independent learning is required throughout this Unit, whilst the opportunity is available for group learning through formative tasks. The subject of Research Issues demands independent thinking, and through reasoned evaluation encourages learners to reach satisfactory conclusions. Further opportunity is offered to develop technological skills by way of researching via the internet, the production of word documents, PowerPoint presentations, blogs and/or the creation of a website. Collectively these skills contribute towards the creation of a **Successful Learner**.

Time management skills should improve during the delivery of this Unit, as should the ability to relate to others through formative tasks. The issues in Research Issues should allow the learner to develop their own thoughts of the world around them, and they will be given the opportunity to express these views within the classroom setting. This should lend to the emergence of a **Confident Individual,** particularly if they gain success in the achievement of the Unit.

Research Issues can also contribute to learners becoming **Responsible Citizens** by allowing the opportunity to develop knowledge and understanding of how knowledge is developed and the nature of the distinction between facts and opinions. Candidates will be encouraged to develop a more critical view of arguments and information, important skills in a democratic society.

Unit title: Social Science: Research Issues

Learners can become **Effective Contributors** to society by learning to work together effectively in teams within the class setting. This can be achieved through group-work where they can apply critical thinking within new contexts. In planning group tasks, evaluating data and presenting their findings, learners will also develop problem solving skills. Both oral and written communication skills will also be developed. This can be achieved through written work, individual PowerPoint presentations, and the creation of blogs and websites.

All these skills can be developed within the Unit

Open learning

This Unit could be delivered by open or distance learning; however, it would require planning by the centre to ensure sufficiency and authenticity of candidate evidence.

A written response in the form of an essay or answers to structured questions could be posted or emailed to the assessor or uploaded onto a VLE. An oral presentation could be used that would be recorded on DVD and sent to the assessor, or could be done using video-conferencing or web-link and observed by the assessor.

Disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs

The additional support needs of individual candidates should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment instruments, or considering whether any reasonable adjustments may be required. Further advice can be found on our website **www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements**.

History of changes to Unit

Version	Description of change	Date
02	Remediation and reassessment arrangements added.	23/07/13

General information for candidates

Unit title: Social Science: Research Issues

This Unit is designed primarily to introduce you to the complexity of social science theory and research, the issues raised therein, and to develop the necessary skills of analysis and evaluation required by the social scientist. Furthermore it highlights that social scientists require the cooperation of people as research participants and you should therefore be aware of the need to treat participants with respect and professional integrity.

On completion of the Unit, you should:

♦   be able to evaluate the concepts that assist in understanding the aims and practice of social science research and the relationship between theory in social science and social science research
♦   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 reality is that different explanations exist on any given topic and the same data can be interpreted and explained in various ways
♦   be able to explain the philosophical foundations of social science in terms of the development of our understanding of the possibility of 'objective knowledge' from the Sophists through Rationalism, Empiricism, and Positivism and finally back to a neo-sophism in the form of Thomas Kuhn's notion of a Paradigm
♦   be able to explain that social science research, as with research in the natural sciences, 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 human behaviour and social phenomena, no single theory can offer an entirely comprehensive understanding and therefore theoretical explanations must be amenable to critique and alternative explanation
♦   be able to evaluate the role that value judgments and ethics play in social science research

The assessment will be open-book. This means that you will be allowed access to materials (eg text books, notes, VLE). The assessment task will cover all Unit Outcomes. The task will be handed out to be completed at a date specified by the centre. It should be completed according to a prearranged format and could take the form of an open-book essay or set of structured questions with an expected candidate response of approximately 2000 words or an individual oral presentation or poster exhibition with expected candidate's response of 15 minutes in presentation or explanation of poster, a pod cast or any other method that is appropriate to meet the Evidence Requirements. Your centre will inform you of the chosen method in good time.

As you progress through the Unit material, you will be encouraged to develop the Core Skills of Communication at SCQF level 6 and Information Communication Technology at SCQF level 5 in this Unit by the types of activities you will experience.

You will also be given opportunities throughout the Unit to develop as a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor.