

Sociology: Social Issues

SCQF: level 6 (6 SCQF credit points)

Unit code: J2DH 76

Unit outline

The general aim of this Unit is to develop learners' sociological understanding of contemporary social issues by enabling them to acquire skills in evaluating and applying sociological theories and research evidence. Learners will develop skills in using a range of sources, including research evidence, to justify points of view.

Learners who complete this Unit will be able to:

- 1 Evaluate contrasting sociological theories used to explain contemporary social issues
- 2 Evaluate sociological research evidence on identified social issues

This Unit is available as a free-standing Unit. The Unit specification should be read in conjunction with the *Unit Support Notes*, which provide advice and guidance on delivery, assessment approaches and development of skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work. Exemplification of the standards in this Unit is given in *Unit Assessment Support*.

Recommended entry

Entry to this Unit is at the discretion of the centre. However, learners would normally be expected to have attained the skills, knowledge and understanding required by one or more of the following or equivalent qualifications and/or experience:

- ◆ National 5 Sociology Course or relevant Units

Equality and inclusion

This Unit Specification has been designed to ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment. The individual needs of learners should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment methods or considering alternative evidence. For further information, please refer to the *Unit Support Notes*.

Standards

Outcomes and assessment standards

Outcome 1

The learner will:

- 1 Evaluate contrasting sociological theories used to explain contemporary social issues by:**
 - 1.1 Selecting and describing a contemporary social issue, with reference to different sources of information
 - 1.2 Applying two contrasting sociological theories to explain the social issue
 - 1.3 Evaluating the explanations of the social issue offered by the theories

Outcome 2

The learner will:

- 2 Evaluate sociological research evidence on identified social issues by:**
 - 2.1 Sourcing and describing sociological studies of an identified social issue
 - 2.2 Evaluating the studies based on practical, ethical and/or theoretical criteria relevant to the research process
 - 2.3 Drawing conclusions from the research findings

Evidence Requirements for the Unit

Assessors should use their professional judgement, subject knowledge and experience, and understanding of their learners, to determine the most appropriate ways to generate evidence and the conditions and contexts in which they are used.

Note that 'contrasting sociological theories' can mean:

- ◆ theories from two different sociological perspectives
- ◆ theories from within the same sociological perspective
- ◆ one traditional theory and one contemporary theory

Exemplification of assessment is provided in *Unit Assessment Support*. Advice and guidance on possible approaches to assessment is provided in the *Unit Support Notes*.

Assessment standard thresholds

If a candidate successfully meets the requirements of the specified number of Assessment Standards they will be judged to have passed the Unit overall and no further re-assessment will be required.

The specific requirements for this Unit is as follows:

- ◆ Candidates do not need to be re-assessed for Assessment Standard 2.3 if they do not meet the requirements.

It should be noted that there will still be the requirement for candidates to be given the opportunity to meet all Assessment Standards. The above threshold has been put in place to reduce the volume of re-assessment where that is required.

Development of skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work

It is expected that learners will develop broad, generic skills through this Unit. The skills that learners will be expected to improve on and develop through the Unit are based on SQA's *Skills Framework: Skills for Learning, Skills for Life and Skills for Work* and are drawn from the main skills areas listed below. These must be built into the Unit where there are appropriate opportunities.

1 Literacy

- 1.1 Reading
- 1.2 Writing
- 1.3 Listening and talking

4 Employability, enterprise and citizenship

- 4.6 Citizenship

5 Thinking skills

- 5.3 Applying
- 5.4 Analysing and evaluating

Amplification of these is given in SQA's *Skills Framework: Skills for Learning, Skills for Life and Skills for Work*. The level of these skills should be at the same SCQF level as the Unit and be consistent with the SCQF level descriptor. Further information on building in skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work is given in the *Unit Support Notes*.

Appendix: Unit support notes

Introduction

These support notes are not mandatory. They provide advice and guidance on approaches to delivering and assessing this Unit. They are intended for teachers and lecturers who are delivering this Unit. They should be read in conjunction with:

- ◆ the *Unit Specification*
- ◆ the *Unit Assessment Support packs*

Developing skills, knowledge and understanding

Teachers and lecturers are free to select the skills, knowledge, understanding and contexts which are most appropriate for delivery in their centres.

Approaches to learning, teaching and assessment

Overarching guidance

There are a wide variety of learning and teaching approaches which can be used to deliver this Unit. The *Unit Support Notes* provide advice and guidance and some examples of approaches that could be used. At all times, teachers/lecturers should provide opportunities for personalisation and choice to ensure that learning is relevant and motivating. Learning should where possible be relevant to the learners' domestic and everyday life, their overall learning programme and/or work and leisure.

Sequencing and timing

The Social Issues Unit consists of two Outcomes, which can be delivered and assessed in a variety of ways to promote personalisation and choice.

Possible approaches to learning and teaching

A rich and supportive learning environment should be provided to enable a learner to achieve the best they can. This could include approaches which include:

- ◆ development of analytical skills
- ◆ development of strategies to both support and refute arguments
- ◆ asking learners to explain or show their thinking
- ◆ collaborative and independent learning
- ◆ discussion around new concepts and how they can be applied
- ◆ using technology where appropriate
- ◆ learners planning and/or participating in real-life activities involving sourcing and identifying valid evidence

When choosing a social issue to study, the issue should be contemporary and relevant to the learner. Resources should be available to support learning at this level.

The following guidance relates to the social issue of **Social Inequality**. Social inequality is a broad topic with ample material for individual or group choice.

Inequality can be considered from a number of angles including gender, disability, age, social class or economic status. Learners should be encouraged to recognise the nature of sociological thought, particularly that contrasting theories may offer different yet arguably valid explanations for social inequality. At SCQF Level 6 learners should be able to understand and express the complex nature of social inequality including multiple inequalities and the impact of inequality on life chances.

Examples of learning and teaching contexts and opportunities

It is possible to assess both Outcomes in one assessment. This gives learners the opportunity to get fully immersed in a topic and draw conclusions about multiple inequalities within the topic.

Outcome 1 Evaluate contrasting sociological theories used to explain contemporary social issues

Theories to explain inequality can be chosen by teachers and lecturers or by learners but at least one contemporary theory is recommended. One approach may be to offer an explanation of several theories and allow learners to argue between them which two offer the most useful explanation. At SCQF level 6 this argument should include sociological concepts and language and make direct reference to the inequality being discussed.

Learners will benefit from attempting to work on evaluation of theories independently with additional teaching given to support the task. Once again this approach fosters analytical skills and prepares learners for more advanced study.

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Selecting forms of inequality that inspire learners to be proactive in bringing about change could make this Outcome more meaningful to learners.

Evaluate a range of sociological research on identified social issues.

Learners need to source sociological studies that support theoretical argument and provide novel or practical insight into the chosen topics. This is a may be a challenging task for learners and needs to be supported by preparatory teaching on sourcing up-to-date and relevant studies.

To achieve this guidance can be given on finding Sociological Journals online, or in Library resources. Further work on search techniques will be useful and can often be gained through library staff.

Discussion of relevance is also pertinent to evaluation of studies and is therefore useful as development of this skill.

The following activities can be used to assess a learner's readiness for Unit assessment.

Outcome 1 — Activity: to explore theoretical ideas

Create a list of different theoretical ideas and ask learners to match them with the relevant theories, eg:

- ◆ Inequality of income motivates people to work harder. (New Right)
- ◆ Market forces are important to a stable economy so those who supply services in highest demand get the best rewards (New Right)
- ◆ All social structures exist to preserve the status quo (Marxist)
- ◆ All social structures maintain the power of the rich and exploit the poor. (Marxist)

- ◆ Inequality is not all about economic power. Sometimes it is about authority, eg charismatic, traditional or legal authority (Weberian)
- ◆ Society is a social system of linked structures. (Weberian)
- ◆ Public and private patriarchy keeps women from getting equal pay and social position. (Feminism)

More can be added to reflect choices of topic.

Outcome 1 — Activity: to explore social inequalities

Choose two or three social issues that concern inequality and ask learners to imagine how different sociological theories might explain them.

Outcome 1 — Activity: to develop knowledge and understanding of theoretical positions

Set up a debate in which one side argues from one theoretical position and the other from another one.

Outcome 2 — Activity: to compare sociological studies

Set a task for individuals or pairs to source as many sociological studies on a given topic as possible. Then:

- 1) Choose two studies with contrasting hypotheses, methods or findings
- 2) Write down as many differences and similarities as possible
- 3) Create a mind map or chart to illustrate the comparison

Outcome 2 — Activity: to develop understanding of ethics

Create a list of ethical points from the British Sociological Association's Ethical Guidelines and ask learners to:

- 1) Come up with examples of how a researcher might fail to meet the guidelines in a research study
- 2) Use real sociological studies to find examples of good ethical practice.

Outcome 2 — Group Activity: to plan a research study

Choose a topic related to social inequality and plan a research study using standard operational procedures as a guide.

Evaluate another group's plan considering practical, ethical and theoretical issues.

All of the above activities may be used to generate evidence of the learner's progress and to prepare the learner for assessment.

Example of using one topic to assess both Outcomes:

'Capitalism on trial'

Economic inequality has been debated amongst sociologists for as long as the subject has existed. Marx claimed that one day the workers would rise up in revolt against the capitalist system. A number of recent events can be used to discuss a contemporary approach to Marxist's argument including anti-capitalist demonstrations in cities across the world, public outrage at bankers' bonuses and the general impact of the economic downturn. Public demonstrations and media descriptions of public outrage provide examples of people questioning a culture of consumerism based on credit and inflated prices. Using questions about capitalism as the basis for this Unit gives many

opportunities to consider different forms of inequality and also to discuss the potential and limits of individual and social action to make change happen.

Suggested sources

Media sources: Anti-capitalist demonstrations in cities across the world/economists calling for tax cuts for the highly paid when the majority struggle under austerity measures (internet searches will find numerous articles on these and other related topics).

Article: Find one or more of many articles on capitalism from a sociological viewpoint.

Theories

New Right and Neo Marxist theories would be useful resources to discuss the topic. Traditional Marxist and Functionalist arguments may be covered as an introduction.

Research articles

Learners at SCQF level 6 should have opportunities to review suitable research studies. This can form the basis of activities that develop analytical and evaluative skills. For example, the following study could be used to form the basis of sociological discussion on poverty and inequality in the UK.

Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2009

Type: IFS Commentaries

Authors: Mike Brewer, Alastair Muriel, David Phillips and Luke Sibieta

ISBN: 978-1-903274-60-6

doi: 10.1920/co.ifs.2009.0109

When thinking about inequality as a social issue, economic inequality will almost certainly be a factor. The Brewer et al research article gives clear evidence of the impact of the economic downturn on income and lifestyle in 2007-08. It would be useful to compare it with the most up to date information available to show the longer term impact on individuals and groups and to discuss economic inequality. Information given in the study is quantitative so additional qualitative evidence would also be helpful to discuss inequality and its impact and also demonstrate the use of different methods to give the fullest possible picture.

Alternative suggestion

'Is Social Mobility Really Declining? Intergenerational Class Mobility in Britain in the 1990s and the 2000s' by Yaojun Li and Fiona Devine

University of Manchester

Sociological Research Online, 16 (3) 4

The skills developed in this Unit will prepare learners for advanced study in social sciences. Emphasis should be on sourcing sociological studies, applying sociological thinking and developing analytical skills to prepare for study at a more advanced level.

Analytical thinking can be encouraged by considering the arguments posed by different theories and commenting on their validity in explaining the chosen social issue. Sociological studies should be evaluated in ethical and operational terms and results compared with outcomes of other studies.

This Unit offers opportunities to exercise personalisation and choice in terms of learning and teaching approaches and social issues studied. Assessment methods may also vary, however assessment standards must be clearly met

To enrich the delivery of this Unit it is recommended that:

- ◆ Learners will develop knowledge of inequality as a sociological concept and multiple inequalities as a concept should be explored.
- ◆ Learners will gain knowledge of at least two sociological theories and the different explanations these theories offer for two forms of inequality. The theories should ideally include at least one contemporary theory.
- ◆ Learners will develop knowledge of sociological studies as evidence and be able to evaluate studies from theoretical, practical and ethical standpoints.
- ◆ More advanced analytical skills will be developed in evaluating theories and explanations from a number of different viewpoints.
- ◆ Learners will also develop skills in interpreting information from different sources to support theoretical explanations.

Possible approaches to assessment and generating evidence of progress

Learners should always be clear about what they are trying to learn and what is expected of them. Evidence of progress can be gathered throughout the Unit. Regular feedback about the quality of work is an important factor in making progress towards Unit Assessment. Structured activities could be used in cooperative learning groups and to enable self -assessment and peer -assessment.

Assessment could be combined in this Unit by holistically assessing all the Outcomes of the Unit in a single assessment. When assessment within the Unit is holistic, teachers and lecturers should take particular care to track the evidence for each individual Outcome.

Administrative information

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Superclass: EE

History of changes to National Unit Specification

| Version | Description of change | Authorised by | Date |
|---------|---|------------------------------------|----------------|
| 2.0 | Page 3 — Assessment Standard 2.2: ‘and theoretical issues’ changed to ‘and/or theoretical criteria’. Page 3 — Assessment Standard 2.3 ‘Draw’ changed to ‘Drawing’. | Qualifications Development Manager | April 2014 |
| 3.0 | Level changed from Higher to SCQF level 6. Unit support notes added. Assessment standard threshold added. | Qualifications Manager | September 2018 |
| 4.0 | Unit code updated | Qualifications Manager | July 2019 |
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Note: readers are advised to check SQA’s website: www.sqa.org.uk to ensure they are using the most up-to-date version of the Unit Specification.

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