

Sociology: Social Issues

SCQF: level 5 (6 SCQF credit points)

Unit code: J2DG 75

Unit outline

The general aim of this Unit is to develop learners' sociological understanding of contemporary social issues. Learners will develop knowledge of sociological theories and the terminology used to explain social issues. 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 Explain social issues
- 2 Apply research evidence to gain a sociological understanding of 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 4 People and Society Course or relevant component Units
- ◆ National 4 Modern Studies Course or relevant component 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 Explain social issues by:

- 1.1 Describing a contemporary social issue with reference to evidence from different sources
- 1.2 Explaining the social issue using sociological theories, one of which takes a structural perspective
- 1.3 Describing one similarity and two differences in how the theories can be used to explain the chosen social issue

Outcome 2

The learner will:

2 Apply research evidence to gain a sociological understanding of social issues by:

- 2.1 Explaining the role of research evidence in sociology
- 2.2 Interpreting research evidence and using the interpretation to support sociological explanations of a contemporary social issue

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.

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:

- ◆ For Assessment Standard 1.1, only one source is required.

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

1.3 Listening and talking

3 Health and wellbeing

3.1 Personal learning

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

The purpose of this section is to provide general advice and guidance on approaches to learning and teaching.

Overarching guidance

A wide variety of learning and teaching approaches can be used to deliver the *Social Issues* 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' 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 learners to achieve the best they can. This could include approaches which include:

- ◆ Development of investigative skills
- ◆ Development of simple evaluative skills by discussing the relative merits of different ideas
- ◆ 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

Examples of learning and teaching contexts and opportunities

Explain social issues

Learners should be encouraged to recognise the nature of sociological thought, particularly that contrasting theories may offer different yet arguably valid explanations for a social issue, such as social inequality. A simple 'one is right and one is wrong' approach does not work in sociology, and for some learners this may present a challenge.

Describing a social issue with reference to evidence from different sources provides opportunities for personalisation and choice. Social issues can be selected from any aspect of human social life — for example, poverty, education, crime or employment. Learners should develop a glossary of sociological terminology and develop confidence in using this language when describing social issues. Learners can contribute by finding their own examples of social issues. There will be opportunities to help learners to evaluate the quality of evidence. Examples of sources of evidence to be used for assessment could include official statistics or media reports.

Explaining the social issue using two sociological theories, at least one of which takes a structural perspective, allows the learner to understand that theories arise from

different theoretical perspectives. A broad overview of perspectives will set the context, and then two theories, one of which should be structural, should be used to explain the issue. Theories that present contrasting ideas will give the best possible basis for comparing the two theories.

Describing one similarity and two differences in relation to the chosen issue enables learners to develop simple analytical skills. Learners are required to recognise the similarities and differences between contrasting theories. Ideally, learners should discover these through discussion, and in the context of the chosen social issue, rather than approach this as rote learning and being given information.

Discussion and activities: Games that include an element of inequality (eg a task in which one team has more resources than the others) can open the subject up in a realistic way. Learners can be encouraged to discuss their feelings as either the privileged team or the disadvantaged team. Prepared source material from the media and official statistics can be used to make the nature of inequality more real. Discussion about different groups and their experience of inequality will help learners to recognise complex relationships eg race, gender, and disability. Theories can be presented as explanations for inequality, and learners can discuss how convinced they are by the explanations.

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. This encourages analytical thought at a level that most learners can engage with.

Finding similarities and differences is a more challenging task. Learners will benefit from, with support attempting to work these out themselves rather than be presented with them as facts to be learned. Once again, this approach fosters analytical skills and prepares students for assessment and more advanced study. Formative assessment opportunities will enable learners to become confident in their knowledge and understanding prior to Unit assessment.

For example, learners could investigate the topic of income inequality using current events. For this topic it may be useful to compare two structural theories (conflict and consensus). Teaching could begin with learning and teaching activities on Marxism and Functionalism to lay down the necessary understanding. The very real conflict between workers and the financially powerful owners or controllers of workplaces can be illustrated with media reports of strikes and demonstrations. The functionalist or New Right view is also clearly in evidence with statements made by government concerning cuts to benefits and the need for the general population to 'tighten belts'. The sources available to illustrate these ideas are numerous.

Official statistics will also demonstrate the impact of the downturn on the general population.

Debate and discussion can usefully be employed to encourage learners to take a more analytical approach.

Learning can be extended by introducing interactionist ideas, eg do social media have an impact on people's perceptions of what is happening? Do cartoons posted on the internet regarding the inequalities in society have an impact on people's ideas? Some of these cartoons may be shown in the classroom to demonstrate their impact.

Tasks to encourage naturally occurring evidence for Unit Assessment may include presentation of contrasting perspectives in the form of a debate, a dramatic presentation, a large wall diagram using mind mapping or graphic representation. Learners could explain the different points of view, demonstrating that there is an element of truth in both sides of the argument.

Apply research evidence to gain a sociological understanding of social issues
Learners should be encouraged to recognise that modern sociology considers a range of ideas and research methods and the majority of sociologists will take an eclectic approach to research.

To apply research evidence to gain a sociological understanding of social issues learners should develop an awareness of the nature and purpose of research in sociology. Learners should explain the way in which evidence from research offers a sociological rather than individualistic explanation for the social issue. Teaching should focus on research evidence on the chosen type of inequality and the role of research evidence should be explained with specific reference to the issue.

Interpreting information, for example from two secondary sources, and using this to support sociological explanations of the chosen social issue, will enable learners to demonstrate an ability to interpret information from secondary sources which could be presented in two different ways (eg graph/pie chart and report). Interpretation of the sources could include reference to sociological theories.

Teachers should provide learners with a range of secondary sources to choose from.

Discussion and activities: Learners may benefit from attempting to present some given data into graphs or pie charts in order to understand the process in reverse. Interpreting data requires an understanding of the use of the graphical tools used to represent it.

Evidence could be sourced from reputable contemporary media reports on inequality and presented to learners in a range of formats to encourage interpretation of different types of source materials.

The requirement to use **evidence to support sociological explanations** requires the application of sociological thinking. Learners should be encouraged to use the understanding gained throughout the Unit to inform this task, using the sociological explanations from the theories covered. This can be expressed in a straightforward way, and learners should consider how each of the two contrasting theories might interpret the evidence.

For example, the role of research of evidence on income inequality can be discussed in terms of the difference between individualistic and sociological explanations for both the cause and the impact of income inequality.

Research example: The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) has a number of useful resources that may be used. For example 'The riots: what are the lessons from JRF's work in communities' uses a wide range of data to demonstrate the impact of poverty and other social problems. There is discussion of misconceptions and stereotypes that can be used to remind learners of the role of interpretive sociology.

- ◆ **Evidence** from National Statistics can be helpful in encouraging learners to interpret different forms of charts and other graphical methods.

Naturally occurring evidence could be gained from using the JRF study to find different ways in which data has been gathered eg interviews, observation, comparison of different areas, case studies, statistical evidence. Learners could be given a short source passage from the study and examples of National Statistics, and be tasked with interpreting the material using sociological thinking on income inequality. A recognition of the need for different forms of evidence for different uses would demonstrate a high level of understanding.

Assessment could incorporate learning from both Outcomes by presenting a project on the chosen topic. Learners may benefit from being given a 'route map' through the stages of sociological understanding achieved in the outcome, ie:

- ◆ The connection between theory and perspectives.
- ◆ How different theories can give different but equally valid explanations of a social issue.
- ◆ How research evidence can be used both to give an explanation of a social issue and as a means for change.
- ◆ Demonstrating the ability to interpret evidence by explaining what has been shown and how it can make a difference either to attitudes or to social policy.

The project could be a paired or group project but learners must show evidence of personal learning. This could be achieved by:

- ◆ Discussing or presenting the project.
- ◆ Responses to short questions in a controlled setting.

Combining assessment within Units

Centres may deliver the learning and teaching of the unit in a holistic, integrated fashion. Ideally, the assessment approach should also be holistic.

The two Outcomes in this Unit encompass a set of coherent Assessment Standards designed to make it possible to assess learning as a whole. A holistic approach to assessment will enrich the assessment process for the learner, avoid duplication of assessment, provide more time for learning and teaching and allow centres to manage the assessment process more efficiently. Evidence may be therefore be gathered for the Unit as a whole through one assessment and a single context or by using different assessments and more than one context for each Outcome. Whichever approach is used, it must be clear how the evidence covers each Outcome.

Learners' readiness for assessment can be established through learning logs as described earlier. Learners can keep brief records of what they feel secure about and what they need to work on. This approach can be useful in developing autonomous learning. Informal peer assessment can also be used in this context.

For information on assessment and reassessment, teachers and lecturers should refer to [SQA's Guide to Assessment](#), available on the SQA website.

Administrative information

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Superclass: EE

History of changes to National Unit Specification

Version	Description of change	Authorised by	Date
1.1	Unit Support Notes added. Assessment standard threshold added.	Qualifications Manager	September 2018
2.0	Unit code updated	Qualifications Manager	July 2019

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