

Next Generation Higher National Unit Specification

Social Sciences: An Evidence-Based Approach to Social Problems (SCQF level 7)

Unit code: J6EM 47
SCQF level: 7 (24 SCQF credit points)
Valid from: session 2024 to 2025

Prototype unit specification for use in pilot delivery only (version 3.0) December 2023

This unit specification provides detailed information about the unit to ensure consistent and transparent assessment year on year.

This unit specification is for teachers and lecturers and contains all the mandatory information required to deliver and assess the unit.

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Unit purpose

This unit develops learners' knowledge and skills on how the social sciences are relevant to present day society. It provides the opportunity for learners to plan a research investigation and initiate a 'pilot' social science study.

The unit demonstrates how the social sciences produce a body of knowledge on contemporary social problems within a broader context of social change. This social change has shaped the social sciences and the lives of people in society. The unit provides learners with knowledge and skills that allow them to demonstrate how the social sciences are relevant today, particularly in relation to sustainability. Learners focus on sustainability and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), relating their knowledge and understanding of social sciences to a specific sustainability-related issue. The unit covers key developments in social science research and also how to develop an evidence-based approach to solving social problems through a research investigation.

Learners also reflect on their own personal development and development of meta-skills.

Learners should possess communication and literacy skills appropriate to study at SCQF level 7, and some knowledge and skills relating to social sciences would be beneficial before starting the unit.

Learners normally study the unit as part of Higher National Certificate (HNC) Social Sciences. They can also study it on a stand-alone basis.

Unit outcomes

Learners who complete this unit can:

- 1 explain the significance of a social sciences evidence-based approach to solving social problems
- 2 explain the relevance of selected key developments in social science and social science research
- 3 apply social sciences knowledge, understanding and skills to a sustainability-related issue and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- 4 evaluate the sources and forms of data and methods of data collection in the social sciences
- 5 plan a research investigation proposal
- 6 apply a research method activity in a pilot study
- 7 apply data handling techniques
- 8 analyse key findings and information derived from data handling techniques
- 9 develop their own meta-skills in an academic or vocational context

Evidence requirements

Learners must provide evidence to demonstrate their knowledge and skills across all outcomes. You must assess the unit holistically through two open-book assessments. One assessment covers outcomes 1 to 8, and the other covers outcome 9. Learners must provide written or oral evidence for both assessments.

Learners must produce a written response for outcomes 1 to 8 of between 2,000 and 2,500 words, or an oral response that is 12 to 18 minutes in duration. Learners should submit their work for marking on a date that you have provided or agreed with them.

You must assess outcomes 1 to 8 by a research investigation project, and outcome 9 using any appropriate method.

For outcomes 1 to 8, the assessment is about a proposal for research. The only part of the research proposal that the learner carries out is testing a research method.

Outcomes 1 to 8

The research investigation project is an open-book assessment. Learners must agree their sustainability-related issue with you; it must be related to social sciences and allow them scope for carrying out the research investigation. It must also be related to two UN SDGs.

The research investigation project involves:

- ◆ planning a research proposal
- ◆ carrying out a pilot study
- ◆ analysing and interpreting data from the pilot study, and evaluating how the data applies to a social science problem related to sustainability

- ◆ evaluating the efficacy of the chosen method from the pilot study that contributes to the final research investigation proposal

Evidence must include a literature review looking at a suitable sustainability-related issue and related social science explanations covered in outcomes 1 to 3.

Learners' responses to the task set must include:

- ◆ an identification of a sustainability-related issue and explanation of why they chose it
- ◆ an explanation of why an evidence-based approach to researching the issue would be useful
- ◆ a literature review related to the sustainability-related issue that contains existing literature, related social science theories and any relevant social policies that have an impact on the issue. The issue must be related to at least two UN SDGs
- ◆ a proposal for specific research into a sustainability-related issue, showing a plan with a basic research process, and identifying specific steps to be taken, with reasons for choices made
- ◆ evidence of carrying out a pilot of a selected research method in the research proposal
- ◆ analysis and interpretation of data from that pilot — applying two data handling techniques
- ◆ evaluation of the pilot study and its implications for the overall proposal

The standard of evidence produced for the research investigation project must be consistent with SCQF level 7. Learners must fully reference their assessment using reliable sources appropriate for SCQF level 7, and they must list all sources in a submitted bibliography or reference list, in a recognised standard format such as Harvard or APA.

Learners must:

- ◆ contribute information that is complex, accurate and relevant to its purpose and audience
- ◆ present ideas clearly and coherently
- ◆ use a structure that is appropriate to the purpose
- ◆ provide supporting evidence or references

Outcome 9

You must assess this outcome in open-book conditions using any suitable assessment method. Learners gather evidence that demonstrates that they have:

- ◆ carried out a self-assessment of their own meta-skills baseline
- ◆ created a plan for their own meta-skills development
- ◆ carried out activities to develop and demonstrate meta-skills
- ◆ used reflective practice to monitor and assess the meta-skills they have improved or developed

[Skills 4.0: A skills model to drive Scotland's future](#) outlines three categories of meta-skills: self-management, social intelligence and innovation. These each contain four meta-skills and

a number of sub-skills. We do not expect learners to develop or reference all of these, and none are in themselves mandatory. There are many interrelationships and dependencies between these skills, and at SCQF level 7 the focus should be on holistic development in an academic or vocational context. Learners should be able to reflect on the meta-skills they are developing and the relationships between them in depth, and include references to course projects, outputs and experiences that contribute to that development. It is the depth of reflection that is important, not the number of meta-skills referenced.

The standard of evidence produced must be consistent with SCQF level 7. Learners must provide:

- ◆ evidence of reflection on their current meta-skills baseline
- ◆ an action plan that provides an outline of targets set; demonstrates effective monitoring of progress made on an ongoing, regular basis; and links learning and activities to the development of meta-skills
- ◆ an ongoing reflection on meta-skills development, including a final statement on where further learning and development should take place

Knowledge and skills

The following table shows the knowledge and skills covered by the unit outcomes:

Knowledge	Skills
<p>Outcome 1 Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ the significance of using an evidence-based approach to solving social problems in the social sciences ◆ what social policy is and its role in developing solutions to social problems ◆ the difference between common sense and social science as forms of knowledge ◆ the issue of misinformation and efficacy of evidence in an era of mass information and post-truth reality 	<p>Outcome 1 Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ explain why an evidence-based approach to researching an issue would be useful ◆ debate and communicate different perspectives and positions on social science as a form of knowledge
<p>Outcome 2 Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ the relevance of selected key developments in social science and social science research ◆ selected social science developments and approaches to research and evidence that have occurred between the period of Enlightenment in the 18th century, through the changing conditions of modernity in the 19th and 20th centuries, to contemporary areas of research in the 21st century 	<p>Outcome 2 Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ use information retrieval skills in searching, identifying and reviewing existing literature, theories and studies ◆ use interpersonal skills, including empathy, in discussions

Knowledge	Skills
<p>Outcome 3 Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ what sustainability is ◆ the UN SDGs ◆ how social sciences relate to their knowledge and understanding of sustainability ◆ subject-specific sustainability issues, how these relate to the UN SDGs, and potential improvements to the issues identified 	<p>Outcome 3 Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ review the UN SDGs to identify a sustainability-related issue relevant to social sciences ◆ apply knowledge and understanding of social sciences, sustainability and the UN SDGs to make appropriate connections
<p>Outcome 4 Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ the different sources and forms of data ◆ research methods of data collection ◆ strengths and weaknesses, and advantages and disadvantages of research methods of data collection 	<p>Outcome 4 Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ justify the use of a selected research method ◆ evaluate sources of data and methods of data collection
<p>Outcome 5 Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ how to use a research process model to carry out an academic investigation of a contemporary sustainability-related issue in the social sciences, including a review of related literature and existing theories and studies ◆ what professional and ethical conduct is for a social scientist 	<p>Outcome 5 Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ carry out research investigation planning for the project ◆ use problem solving skills ◆ make appropriate decisions regarding which sustainability-related issue to study and which literature and theories are suitable for the topic ◆ use time management skills in line with the research plan ◆ demonstrate professional and ethical conduct in planning a research investigation

Knowledge	Skills
<p>Outcome 6 Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ the process of operationalising a pilot study of a research method to investigate a chosen contemporary sustainability-related issue linked to the social sciences 	<p>Outcome 6 Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ carry out research based on a planned approach ◆ interact positively with participants in the research, using interpersonal skills including empathy ◆ use time management skills in line with the research plan ◆ demonstrate professional and ethical conduct in carrying out a pilot study
<p>Outcome 7 Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ how to apply data handling techniques for both quantitative and qualitative data ◆ graphs and charts, for example pie charts, bar charts, histograms, scattergrams ◆ tables of results ◆ measures of central tendency ◆ measures of dispersion ◆ content analysis 	<p>Outcome 7 Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ apply appropriate data handling techniques to primary quantitative data and/or qualitative data
<p>Outcome 8 Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ how to analyse and interpret key findings and information 	<p>Outcome 8 Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ analyse and interpret key findings and information from data handling techniques used for the pilot study data ◆ evaluate the pilot study in terms of the impact on the overall research investigation proposal

Knowledge	Skills
<p>Outcome 9 Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ meta-skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — the categories of self-management, social intelligence and innovation, and associated meta-skills, as described in Skills 4.0 — the importance of developing — meta-skills: employability, adaptability, effectiveness — specific meta-skills relevant to a vocational or social sciences context: the most relevant meta-skills from categories of self-management, social intelligence and innovation ◆ approaches to developing meta-skills ◆ self-awareness: analysing preferences, strengths and weaknesses; meta-skills self-assessment ◆ goal setting and action planning ◆ reflective practice: principles of reflective practice; tools and approaches for effective reflective practice 	<p>Outcome 9 Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ plan a strategy for meta-skills development ◆ implement and review plans for meta-skills development ◆ assess their own meta-skills development

Meta-skills

Throughout this unit, learners develop meta-skills to enhance their employability in the social sciences sector.

You assess the meta-skills outcome across all the outcomes in the unit. You can also draw evidence from other units or sources. Learners can develop the following skills during the unit and throughout HNC Social Sciences.

Self-management

This meta-skill includes:

Integrity

You can help learners develop the skill of integrity by encouraging them to act in an ethical way when they produce assessments and carry out work for projects. Identifying this skill when introducing class discussions supports good working relationships between peers. In addition, it is useful to highlight integrity when introducing citations and referencing for the literature review, covered in outcome 2. You also cover ethics as a topic in outcome 5.

Adapting

Learners develop the skill of adapting as they acquire new knowledge and skills, and use different technologies and digital means of communicating and carrying out assessments. Working through a virtual learning environment (VLE) can support development here. You should encourage learners to reflect on their performance, in particular meta-skills, to support improvements in their approach.

Initiative

You can help learners develop the skill of initiative by encouraging them to start on things as early as possible. This supports the development of decision making and self-motivation. Reading and thinking about theories, and researching evidence and sources, helps learners make decisions about what is valuable information and what is misinformation. You should make sure learners know how to use the library facilities. Having regular check-ins for coursework ensures they stick to tasks and make sufficient progress. Getting learners to set their own deadlines as they carry out the project tasks can work well.

Social intelligence

This meta-skill includes:

Communicating

You can help learners develop their communicating skills by encouraging them to listen to information on theories, research and sources. Asking learners to explain ideas can help them to produce suitable and understandable assessment responses. Giving formative work where they are asked to share their ideas and opinions on theories and topics covered in the unit, in written or oral form, is useful in developing this skill.

Feeling

Learners develop the skill of feeling through discussing theories and expressing opinions. This helps them to understand other perspectives, demonstrating empathy. You should ask learners to respect each other's viewpoints in discussions.

Collaborating

Learners develop the skill of collaborating through activities that give them the opportunity to work together, such as formative presentations and project work. Being able to take account of others in their planning and carrying out of tasks is useful. You could run an ice breaker at the start of the unit to help learners build relationships with each other.

Innovation

This meta-skill includes:

Curiosity

Learners develop the skill of curiosity through seeking knowledge about theories and research. You can support them by teaching them how to find information and giving them library research time. Having discussions and debates in class encourages learners to question motives, ideas, information and research evidence.

Sense-making

Learners develop their sense-making skills through class discussion. This encourages learners to understand why people behave as they do. You should encourage learners to blend the range of ideas they discuss, considering and evaluating them all.

Critical thinking

Throughout the unit, learners develop their critical thinking skills by making logical connections and reasoned judgements through discussion and debate, and drawing conclusions based on evidence. It can be helpful to introduce research evidence and evaluate it by comparing it with alternative research.

There are other meta-skills that learners could develop in this unit, depending on the learning and teaching activities you carry out. These include:

- ◆ self-management: focusing
- ◆ social intelligence: leading
- ◆ innovation: creativity

You can find more information on how these meta-skills can be developed in the Educator Guide.

Literacies

Learners develop core skills in the following literacies:

Numeracy

Learners develop their numeracy skills by understanding facts and statistics related to data. They do this through consulting secondary data gathered from existing examples of research. They may be involved in analysing data in pilot research if the method adopted produces quantitative data.

Communication

Learners develop communication skills in formative and summative assessment. It is part of the evidence requirements for this unit to ensure learners convey complex ideas in a well-structured and coherent way, with references where appropriate. You should give learners opportunities to give oral presentations and participate in discussions to improve their communication skills.

Digital

Learners develop digital skills and computer literacy by using digital packages to produce assessments, and internet sources to research information on theorists, concepts, structures and ideas. You should offer guidance on appropriate sources. Using a VLE also supports digital skills.

Learning for Sustainability

Learning for Sustainability aims to build the values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and confidence needed to develop practices and make decisions that are compatible with a sustainable and equitable society. In this unit, there are opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding of social sustainability when studying developments in social sciences research. Many of the topic examples for outcomes 2 and 3, such as climate change, health and public health, the future of cities and urban development, no poverty, food poverty, inequalities, and social mobility, touch on or directly link to the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#). The focus for outcome 3 is sustainability and related issues, which directly relate to at least two UN SDGs.

Delivery of unit

You should deliver this unit from the start of the HNC Social Sciences programme. This gives learners underpinning knowledge and skills to support the subject units. It would be beneficial to deliver the unit throughout the year to allow for stop-and-review meetings on meta-skills and to support the delivery of the project. You should continue to deliver meta-skills throughout the HNC programme to allow learners to develop their meta-skills and complete their meta-skills profile. You may signpost meta-skills gained from work carried out in other subject units.

The amount of time you allocate to each outcome is at your centre's discretion. However, we suggest the following distribution of time, including assessment:

Outcomes 1 and 2 — 20 hours

Outcome 3 — 10 hours

Outcomes 4 to 8 — 70 hours

Outcome 9 — 20 hours

Additional guidance

The guidance in this section is not mandatory.

Content and context for this unit

The aim of this unit is to introduce learners to an evidence-based approach that is central to the social sciences in terms of subject matter and research methodology. This is put into practice by planning a research investigation proposal that demonstrates the contribution of the social sciences to a selected area of research, development or social policy. The area of research, development or social policy should be relevant to the social, cultural, economic and political changes occurring in 21st century society and must be related to at least two UN SDGs. Throughout the unit and across the HNC award, learners reflect on their own personal development and development of meta-skills.

Social sciences address social problems that are inherently complex, considering a number of factors that may interact in interesting ways. How we define social problems and the difference between common sense and the social sciences as forms of knowledge is important, and learners develop an understanding of issues of misinformation, the efficacy of evidence, and bias in an era of mass information where truth and reality are constantly questioned.

An evidence-based approach sets out to make decisions and come to conclusions based on conscientious, clear and rational use of the best available evidence arising from a range of sources. The professional role and ethical conduct of social scientists is key in supporting the significance and validity of evidence. You could use sources from the [British Psychological Society \(BPS\)](#) and the [British Sociological Association \(BSA\)](#) as examples of standards of professional practice and codes of conduct.

Sources of evidence in the social sciences can include:

- ◆ data from original experiments
- ◆ scholarly books and articles that interpret data from original experiments and from other researchers' studies
- ◆ results from field research such as interviews, observations and surveys
- ◆ scholarly articles that report findings from experiments
- ◆ statistics from government agencies
- ◆ critical essays that analyse original works
- ◆ primary sources such as photographs, letters, maps and government documents
- ◆ details from images, films or works of art

You should introduce learners to key developments in the social sciences and social science research, including a brief exploration of the foundations of the social sciences from the period of Enlightenment in the 18th century, through the changing conditions of modernity in the 19th and 20th centuries, to contemporary areas of research in the 21st century. Recent developments in social science research could include changes in the boundaries of social science disciplines and the emergence of multidisciplinary approaches to social problems and areas of crossover between social science disciplines.

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Websites of universities and their social science departments, as well as organisations and initiatives such as the [Economic and Social Research Council](#), the [Campaign for Social Science](#) and the [SHAPE](#) campaign, are useful sources for providing context to contemporary social science developments and research.

You should give learners the opportunity to consider the relevance of the social sciences in producing knowledge on contemporary social problems within a broader context of social change.

You should introduce broad areas that demonstrate key developments and contemporary areas of social science research. You should also introduce these in the context of social policy and its role in developing solutions to social problems.

Broad developments and areas of research can include:

- ◆ public health and social care
- ◆ post-COVID economic recovery
- ◆ the emergence of Society 4.0 and the impact of digital technology on everyday lives
- ◆ technology and the future; technologies having an impact on society; consequences and impact of artificial intelligence; digitisation and automation changing work and employment
- ◆ the impact of social circumstance on biology
- ◆ wellbeing and mental health
- ◆ social neuroscience, consciousness and the social brain
- ◆ future of cities and urban development; future of housing; urban planning and cultural democracy
- ◆ financialisation and its increase in influence owing to its impact on housing, labour, consumerism, inequality and mental health
- ◆ social policy: welfare, health and public health, education, housing; data-driven transformation of public services
- ◆ the Fourth Industrial Revolution and its impact on the future of work and employment
- ◆ globalisation, geopolitics and international relations
- ◆ migration and immigration: dynamics of globalisation, diaspora and diversity
- ◆ the dynamics of citizenship, participation and inclusion
- ◆ identities: perspectives on, voices of, difference in
- ◆ the rise of right-wing movements
- ◆ populism and 'culture wars'
- ◆ consequences of climate change
- ◆ inequalities and regional economic challenges; low levels of social mobility or regional growth; food poverty
- ◆ citizen social science and social media
- ◆ decolonisation of the social sciences and education

You should clearly communicate the idea that the world is a rapidly changing place and that social sciences play a key role in understanding social change and associated social problems. You should briefly look at the role of social policy to show how societies attempt to meet human needs for security, education, work, health and wellbeing, addressing how states and societies respond to global challenges of social, demographic and economic change, drawing examples from those broad developments and areas of research.

It is important to introduce the issue of misinformation and efficacy of evidence to encourage learners to be aware of its impact on opinions, belief and behaviours.

The broad developments listed above are examples of the types of areas you could introduce, but they are not exclusive. We do not expect you to include all of these areas in the learning and teaching; rather, you can introduce areas as examples in discussions with learners and shape your input to fit their local or global interests. You can draw topics from any of the social science disciplines:

- ◆ geography
- ◆ history
- ◆ politics
- ◆ psychology
- ◆ criminology
- ◆ social anthropology
- ◆ sociology
- ◆ philosophy
- ◆ economics

Topics should not be exclusive to one social science discipline.

You should aim to provide a context that stimulates further investigation.

Once you have established the significance of an evidence-based approach to social problems and introduced broad areas that demonstrate key developments and contemporary areas of social science research, you should move focus to sustainability and sustainability-related issues that social sciences help to inform.

Introduce learners to research skills, evaluating:

- ◆ both primary and secondary sources of data or reading
- ◆ qualitative and quantitative forms of data
- ◆ methods of research and data collection, which could include experiments, observations, surveys and questionnaires, as well as structured and in-depth interviews

Learners should adopt an evidence-based approach through a research investigation proposal of a selected sustainability-related issue, linked to developments in the social sciences and to at least two UN SDGs.

You can reinforce the importance of collaboration in the social sciences by encouraging learners to work with others to apply a research method activity as a pilot study. If learners take a collaborative approach, the contribution of each individual is important to the success of the investigation, and participation from everyone is required. However, learners must evaluate the choice of research method and carry out data handling of subsequent results as individuals.

You should introduce a range of data handling techniques, including:

- ◆ graphs and charts, for example pie charts, bar charts, histograms, scatter grams
- ◆ table of results
- ◆ measures of central tendency
- ◆ measures of dispersion
- ◆ content analysis

Approaches to delivery

You should structure the learning and teaching programme to allow time for learners to develop meta-skills, academic, and other transferable skills, and summative assessment in the hours suggested.

A varied and active learning approach would be beneficial, where supported, independent, and collaborative learning takes place and learners are encouraged to take a learner-centred, participative and practical approach. You can use a range of delivery methods to enable learners to gain knowledge, understanding and meta-skills, such as:

- ◆ demonstration
- ◆ debate
- ◆ individual and group research tasks
- ◆ presenting findings
- ◆ VLE
- ◆ digital tools and social media
- ◆ film and visual images
- ◆ close reading of sources

You should introduce meta-skills from the start of delivery, using Skills Development Scotland's [Skills 4.0: A skills model to drive Scotland's future](#). Learners should start the process of engaging with meta-skills by developing a meta-skills profile as directed in outcome 9. This involves learners doing a self-assessment of their meta-skills baseline and providing an outline of activities to develop and demonstrate meta-skills throughout the unit and HNC in Social Sciences.

There are many interrelationships and dependencies between these meta-skills. At SCQF level 7, you should focus on holistic development in the context of social science knowledge and skills throughout the HNC, and specifically in terms of this unit, in the context of a social science research investigation proposal. Learners should be able to reflect in depth on the meta-skills they are developing and the relationships between them, and include references

to course projects, outputs and experiences that contribute to that development. It is the depth of reflection that is important, not the number of meta-skills referenced.

You can shape delivery and assessment to support learners to develop their academic skills such as time management, multi-tasking ability, digital skills, essay-writing skills and questioning ability. You can design formative and summative activities and assessments that encourage learners to practise the skills that they need to progress to the next level of study.

Input for outcomes 1 and 2 should focus on giving learners an appreciation of the value of social sciences to society. It should introduce an evidence-based approach to social problems and how social sciences can be applied to selected areas of social science developments and contemporary research. The area of social policy should be introduced to make a link between social problems and possible solutions to these problems. Selected topics can be used to illustrate the interconnections between social sciences, for example, how sociology and politics intertwine to allow us to understand poverty; or how contemporary public health can be looked at ideologically in terms of social policy from a political perspective.

The unit should help learners develop a questioning and evidence-based approach to social science subjects and topics. Encouraging learners to engage with social science-based research is crucial. They should understand that social science provides more reliable and valid explanations than 'common sense'. You should explore misinformation and its effects, particularly in online sources, to enable learners to recognise the issue in the context of social sciences.

You should focus on the UN SDGs, and make learners aware of the three pillars of sustainability — social, economic and environmental. Encourage learners to consider what improvements could be made to the sustainability-related issues you discuss with them.

You should hold discussions with learners to help them choose a sustainability-related issue as the subject matter for a project that includes the research investigation proposal and the associated pilot study. The issue chosen should relate to one of the core social science subjects covered in HNC Social Sciences — geography, history, politics, psychology, criminology, social anthropology, sociology, philosophy or economics — and should be related to at least two of the UN SDGs.

Although it is possible to investigate from two social science disciplines, given the complex nature of the sustainability-related issue and the work required, we advise that learners should focus on one social science discipline. However, where appropriate, learners can investigate ideas from across social science disciplines.

An important objective is to improve learners' professional practice and behaviours in carrying out social science research. This develops the meta-skills of integrity (by considering ethics) and initiative.

You should provide input that covers sources and forms of data and research methods suitable for data collection to allow learners to choose an appropriate method for their research investigation proposal and the pilot study, including an evaluation of these sources and forms of data and methods of data collection in the social sciences.

You should give learners the opportunity to use data handling techniques and interpret key information from graphs, bar charts and tables. This allows them to carry out a statistical analysis of the data they collect during the pilot study.

Approaches to assessment

You can generate evidence using different types of assessment. The following are suggestions only. There may be other methods that would be more suitable for learners.

This unit involves two assessments:

- ◆ an open-book research investigation project covering the evidence requirements for outcomes 1 to 8
- ◆ an open-book assessment generating an assessment of meta-skills in a social science context for outcome 9

For outcomes 1 to 8, the assessment is a project proposal for research. The only part of the research that learners carry out is the pilot study, which informs the final proposal.

The assessment provides the opportunity to gather assessment evidence that explains the significance of an evidence-based approach to solving a sustainability-related issue that has been identified through academic study of the social sciences. Learners provide an explanation that shows the relevance of selected key developments in social science and social science research. From this work, learners choose an area for investigation.

Learners' first task in the investigation is to identify a sustainability-related issue and explain why they chose it and why an evidence-based approach to researching it would be useful. A literature review related to the chosen topic containing existing literature, related theories and studies can provide an academic context for the issue.

The assessment then includes an evaluation of research methods for gathering data and forms of data.

The proposal for specific research on the topic should include a plan with a basic research process, identifying specific steps to be taken and reasons for choices made.

Learners pilot a research method suggested in the research proposal, including the following:

- ◆ analysing and interpreting data from that pilot study — applying two data handling techniques to the data
- ◆ evaluating the pilot study and its implications for the overall proposal, with subsequent changes to the overall proposal, if required

Learners can work together in small groups to plan the research investigation and pilot the research activity. However, they must evaluate the choice of research method and carry out data handling of subsequent results as individuals.

You can assess outcome 9 through any instrument of assessment that allows you to develop and reflect on meta-skills in a social science context. Learners should be able to generate evidence that includes an explanation of meta-skills and how they can apply and develop them through a social science research investigation proposal that uses an evidence-based approach to solve social problems. Learners generate an action plan for developing meta-skills and record reflections on their progress at various stages of the project. They can also record their meta-skills development in other activities, such as other units they study. Learners can present evidence in a written portfolio or blog, or in a podcast or recorded oral presentation, building on it throughout the programme of study. Ideally, this would be available online, to allow learners to record their development when working in their own time.

You should make learners aware of the importance of good judgement in selecting appropriate academic sources. You should encourage them to choose academic sources rather than using search engines to help them to be more confident of information and better equipped to progress to SCQF level 8 units.

If you are using a blog or creation of a website as a way of gathering evidence, it should not be in the public domain. Rather, it should be on an intranet or private area of your VLE to reduce the likelihood of plagiarism.

Authenticating learners' work is essential. It would be helpful to collect notes or visual presentation materials from learners as further evidence of meeting SCQF level 7 in their presentations. You should monitor learners' progress throughout to authenticate submitted work. Where possible, you should use plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin. Regardless of the assessment method chosen for outcomes 1 to 8, learners must submit a bibliography citing appropriate sources, presented in a standard referencing format such as Harvard or APA.

It is important that the language used in the assessment instruments reflects SCQF level 7 in each type of task.

Opportunities for e-assessment

Assessment that is supported by information and communication technology (ICT), such as e-testing or the use of e-portfolios or social software, may be appropriate for some assessments in this unit.

If you want to use e-assessment, you must ensure that you apply the national standard to all evidence and that conditions of assessment (as specified in the evidence requirements) are met, regardless of the mode of gathering evidence.

Equality and inclusion

This unit is designed to be as fair and as accessible as possible with no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment.

You should take into account the needs of individual learners when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment methods or considering alternative evidence.

Guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled learners and/or those with additional support needs is available on the assessment arrangements web page:

www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements.

Information for learners

Social Sciences: An Evidence-Based Approach to Social Problems (SCQF level 7)

This information explains:

- ◆ what the unit is about
- ◆ what you should know or be able to do before you start
- ◆ what you need to do during the unit
- ◆ opportunities for further learning and employment

Unit information

This is a core unit in Higher National Certificate (HNC) Social Sciences. It sets out how the social sciences are relevant to the present day and encourages you to engage with the work of social scientists. It does this by introducing you to key developments in the social sciences and social science research. The unit introduces an evidence-based approach to solving social problems so that you can gain an understanding of how social scientists carry out their research. You then apply an evidence-based approach to a sustainability issue to solve a social problem through planning a research investigation that includes applying and evaluating a research method activity.

You do not need previous experience of social science research or disciplines to study the unit. An inquisitive, enthusiastic and questioning approach to the study of human behaviour and society, as well as good communication skills, prepares you well.

During the unit, you look at some key developments in social sciences, how and when they emerged, and their development to more cutting-edge 21st-century social science research. You can discuss topics from any of the nine social science disciplines — geography, history, politics, psychology, criminology, social anthropology, sociology, philosophy or economics.

On completion of the unit, you can:

- 1 explain the significance of a social sciences evidence-based approach to solving social problems
- 2 explain the relevance of selected key developments in social science and social science research
- 3 apply social sciences knowledge, understanding and skills to a sustainability-related issue and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- 4 evaluate the sources and forms of data and methods of data collection in the social sciences
- 5 plan a research investigation proposal
- 6 apply a research method activity in a pilot study
- 7 apply data handling techniques
- 8 analyse key findings and information derived from data handling techniques
- 9 develop own meta-skills in an academic or vocational context

NextGen: HN published prototype unit specification for use in pilot delivery only (version 3.0)
December 2023

There are two assessments in the unit. One is an open-book project that covers the evidence requirements in the form of a research investigation of between 2,000 and 2,500 words or an oral response of 12 to 18 minutes in duration. The other is an open-book assessment of meta-skills in a social science context. Evidence for this can be generated in a variety of ways.

The project will take the form of a research investigation proposal with a pilot study, covering a sustainability-related issue. It will link to at least two [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs).

During the unit you develop academic skills, such as time management, multi-tasking ability, digital skills, essay-writing skills and questioning ability, based on the formative and summative activities and assessments.

You also develop key literacies such as communication in assessment. You learn to convey complex ideas in a well-structured and coherent way, with references where appropriate. Your lecturer may also use oral presentations and discussions to help you improve your communication skills. You develop digital skills and computer literacy by using digital packages to produce assessment evidence and using internet sources to research information on social science theories, concepts and ideas. You will also develop numeracy skills by reviewing facts and statistics related to data.

The unit introduces you to Learning for Sustainability ideas, with links made to UN SDGs, particularly while studying developments in social sciences research. Many of the topic examples used by your lecturer touch on or directly link to the UN SDGs.

The unit can support learning in other units from the named social sciences section of HNC Social Sciences. You may be able to study the Higher National Diploma (HND) Social Sciences or a degree programme in a related subject if you study the unit as part of the HNC Social Sciences.

Meta-skills

Throughout the unit, you can develop meta-skills to enhance your employability in the social sciences sector.

Meta-skills include self-management, social intelligence and innovation.

You develop these meta-skills naturally as you take part in the range of learning and teaching activities and produce assessment responses. Improving meta-skills such as organising your time (self-management) or communicating ideas clearly (social intelligence) will be useful for future study and employment as well as during this course. You should profile your meta-skills and note when you are developing any over the time you are studying.

Administrative information

Published: December 2023 (version 3.0)

Superclass: ED

History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date
2.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ In 'Evidence requirements', the second paragraph was reworded for clarity and to include an increase in length of written or oral response for outcomes 1 to 7.◆ In 'Delivery of unit', change to suggested time for delivery of each outcome.◆ In 'Information for learners', standardisation of phrases to match other HNC group award units.	June 2023
3.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ The unit now has nine outcomes. A new outcome 3 was added to direct learners to use a sustainability-related issue as the focus for the project.◆ Changes made in most sections to show a focus on a sustainability-related issue.◆ In 'Evidence requirements' and 'Approaches to assessment', wording changed to specify that two data handling techniques should be used for all research, rather than a separate number for qualitative and quantitative data.◆ Some word changes throughout to distinguish the overall research investigation proposal from the pilot study using one research method.	December 2023

Note: please check [SQA's website](#) to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this document.