

Next Generation Higher National Unit Specification

Sociology A: The Sociological Imagination (SCQF level 7)

Unit code: J6EW 47
SCQF level: 7 (8 SCQF credit points)
Valid from: session 2024–25

Prototype unit specification for use in pilot delivery only (version 3.0) August 2024

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 understanding of the discipline of sociology, exploring the historical and intellectual foundations of sociology and the key features of the sociological imagination.

The unit is aimed at learners who have a general interest in sociology, as well as those who would use it as the basis for further study.

Entry to the unit is at your centre's discretion. However, we recommend that learners have one or more of the following:

- ◆ good communication skills
- ◆ previous study of sociology, for example National Qualifications (NQ) at SCQF levels 5 or 6, or similar qualifications
- ◆ other knowledge, skills and experience relevant to the unit

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

Unit outcomes

Learners who complete this unit can:

- 1 explain the foundations of sociology
- 2 analyse the relationship between the individual and society using sociological perspectives and concepts

Evidence requirements

Learners should provide written or oral evidence covering all unit outcomes, produced under open-book conditions. You should give learners the task at an appropriate point of delivery of the unit. Learners should submit their work for marking on a date that you have provided or agreed with them.

Learners must produce a written response of approximately 1,500 words, or an oral response that is 10 to 12 minutes in duration.

Learners' responses must include:

- ◆ a description of the historical and social contexts from which sociology developed
- ◆ an explanation of the key features that characterise a sociological imagination and sociological thinking
- ◆ an analysis of the relationship between the individual and society using sociological perspectives and the three key sociological concepts of power; social order; and structure and agency (one concept per perspective)

You can choose to use a mix of methods of assessment across a cohort, depending on what is most suitable for each learner; for example, some could give a written response, others could give an oral response and others could respond in the form of a blog.

Learners must fully reference their assessment, using reliable sources appropriate for SCQF level 7. They must list all sources in a bibliography or reference list, in a recognised standard format such as Harvard or APA.

The SCQF level of the unit provides additional context relating to the quality of evidence. Learners should:

- ◆ 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

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"> ◆ how sociology was founded 	<p>Outcome 1 Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ describe the historical and social context for the development of sociology ◆ explain key features that characterise a sociological imagination and sociological thinking
<p>Outcome 2 Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ key sociological concepts of power, social order, structure and agency ◆ key sociological perspectives relevant to relationships between individuals and society ◆ how to analyse ◆ how to apply key sociological concepts and perspectives to an analysis 	<p>Outcome 2 Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ explain how sociologists identify the relationship between the individual and society ◆ explain the influence of sociological concepts on the relationship between the individual and society ◆ apply sociological perspectives to analyse the relationship between the individual and society

Meta-skills

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

The unit helps learners develop the meta-skills of self-management, social intelligence and innovation. Learners should develop meta-skills naturally as you deliver the unit. You should encourage learners to develop a minimum of one area in each of the three categories, but they do not need to cover all suggested subsections. The following suggestions may help shape delivery and assessment, and vary depending on the chosen topics and assessment method.

Self-management

This meta-skill includes:

- ◆ focusing: completing assessments and projects to clear deadlines; producing appropriate work
- ◆ integrity: acting in an ethical way when producing assessments and carrying out project work; referencing assessments appropriately
- ◆ adapting: developing new knowledge and skills; using different technologies and digital means of communication
- ◆ initiative: starting work as early as possible; decision making; self-motivation; making decisions about what is valuable information and what is misinformation; using library facilities

Social intelligence

This meta-skill includes:

- ◆ communicating: listening to information; explaining ideas; producing suitable, understandable assessment responses; sharing ideas and opinions
- ◆ feeling: discussing perspectives and expressing opinions; understanding and respecting other perspectives
- ◆ collaborating: working with other learners, for example on formative debates and project work

Innovation

This meta-skill includes:

- ◆ curiosity: seeking knowledge about perspectives and research; participating in discussion and debates in class; questioning motives, ideas, information and research evidence
- ◆ sense-making: participating in discussion to understand why people behave as they do; blending a range of ideas; considering and evaluating different ideas
- ◆ critical thinking: making logical connections and reasoned judgements; evaluating research evidence; comparing and contrasting different approaches

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

- ◆ social intelligence: leading
- ◆ innovation: creativity

Literacies

Learners develop core skills in the following literacies:

Communication

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

Digital

Learners can 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 can give them guidance on appropriate sources. Using a virtual learning environment (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 while studying the topics of power, social order, structure and agency. Learners develop an understanding of the issues of diversity and equality, linking to the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#).

The unit fits with the following UN Sustainable Development Goals:

- 3 Good health and well-being: through exploring how social structures lead to social change.
- 4 Quality education: through using a range of sources to explore, explain and analyse.
- 10 Reduced inequalities: through exploring how sociological thinking can result in changes in power and social order.

Delivery of unit

This unit is in the 'named social sciences' section of HNC Social Sciences. You can deliver it as part of the group award or as a stand-alone unit.

It is one of two units that cover sociology in HNC Social Sciences. The unit is a good foundation for Sociology B: Applied Sociology at SCQF level 7, which explores different sociological themes.

The overall unit delivery time is a notional 40 hours of contact time for delivery and assessment, and we expect learners to commit a further 40 hours of self-directed study.

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

Outcome 1 — Explain the foundations of sociology (10 hours)

Outcome 2 — Analyse the relationship between the individual and society using sociological perspectives and concepts (30 hours)

Additional guidance

The guidance in this section is not mandatory.

Content and context for this unit

You should deliver this unit in a way that provides learners with an understanding of the development of sociology and its:

- ◆ historical progress
- ◆ mode of thinking
- ◆ perspectives and key concepts

The aim of the unit is to provide an interesting and engaging introduction to sociology that serves as a foundation for subsequent sociology units.

The unit starts with a look at the historical and social context for the development of sociology and sociological thinking. You should provide an outline of how political, industrial and scientific revolutions have had an influence on the development of sociology. You should make the link between social change and the emergence of sociology clear. This historical and social context also offers the opportunity for learners to make connections with other social science subjects they may be studying, such as history, politics, philosophy, psychology, economics, social anthropology, criminology and geography. This should help learners develop a stronger sense of the social sciences. Learners should also be encouraged to use various forms of evidence to analyse sociological perspectives and concepts. Evidence used to support claims or arguments made in sociology should come from a range of sources — primary and secondary, and qualitative and quantitative. Learners are not limited to ‘empirical evidence’ in a narrow methodological sense. For example, documentary evidence, public inquiries and social policy also help develop learners’ skills in terms of critical thinking, and written and oral communication.

Developing a sociological imagination

Mills’ *The Sociological Imagination* is a fundamental text for sociology and social scientists. A sociological imagination is a state of mind that allows us to draw parallels between ‘history and biography and the relations between the two within society’. In practice, this allows us to understand the relations between large-scale historical processes and the experiences of individuals. By inspecting individual action, we can explore how institutions can change or continue to be the same. Moreover, as soon as we understand how social structures influence human conduct, we can identify why humans think and act the way they do. It is through the mastery of this complicated form of cognition that social scientists examine human nature.

The sociological imagination is a way of understanding the world. It is a unique lens for inquiry, creativity, asking questions and imagining answers. This way of thinking can be difficult for learners to develop, so you should encourage it where possible.

A useful place to start would be to consider the macro and micro models of society. This allows learners to develop their own sociological imagination by contrasting key perspectives in sociology. You should focus on ensuring that learners gain an understanding of sociological perspectives by considering the relationship between the individual and society. The three key sociological concepts you cover are:

- ◆ power
- ◆ social order
- ◆ structure and agency

Specific perspectives could include:

- ◆ functionalism
- ◆ Marxism
- ◆ feminism
- ◆ social action (which can include symbolic interactionism, Weber and ethnomethodology)

The sociological imagination requires learners to consider the connections between private troubles and public issues. This inevitably means that many of the areas we ask learners to consider are emotionally sensitive and could be upsetting for some. You should deal with this sensitively; for example, with trigger warnings in advance and reassurance regarding which material is required and which is optional.

Approaches to delivery

You should structure the learning and teaching programme to allow time for the development of meta-skills, and academic and other transferable skills. You should also allow for assessment practice within the hours suggested.

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.

A varied and active learning approach would be beneficial, whereby supported, independent, and collaborative learning takes place, and you encourage learners to take a participative and practical approach. You can use a range of delivery methods to enable learners to gain knowledge, understanding and skills, such as:

- ◆ demonstration
- ◆ tutorial question and answer sessions
- ◆ debate
- ◆ individual and group research tasks
- ◆ presenting findings
- ◆ VLE
- ◆ digital tools and social media

- ◆ film and visual images
- ◆ close reading of sources

Approaches to assessment

You can generate evidence using different types of assessment. Methods could include individual biographies, image essays and blogs. There may be other methods that would be more suitable for learners. You can find more advice on alternative assessment methods in the Educator Guide. Whatever method learners use, you should assess the outcomes holistically in one assessment. Assessments must meet the standard for SCQF level 7.

We recommend that you assess the unit holistically, as that is best to reduce learners' assessment burden. You can decide to use a portfolio approach with two or more assessment tasks issued at different times in the unit delivery, if that is better for your learners.

You should design an appropriate assessment based on a method that allows learners to meet the evidence requirements. This can be written or oral, depending on the needs of learners and your centre. If learners choose an oral method, we recommend that you record this in some form or provide assessor notes on the presentation for external verification purposes. Learners must show evidence of meeting all evidence requirements. Ideally, they would complete oral presentations or poster exhibitions individually. If a group presentation is used, individual learners must show coverage of all evidence requirements. To do this, they may need to provide additional responses to structured questions or an essay. Learners should submit their work for marking on a date that you have provided or agreed with them. You can choose to use a mix of methods across a cohort, depending on what is most suitable for each learner; for example, some could give a written response, others could give an oral response and others could respond in the form of a blog.

It is possible to combine a poster exhibition with an oral presentation. For example, a learner could produce a detailed poster of the foundations of sociology and the sociological imagination, and cover the sociological concepts and perspectives in an oral presentation using presentation software or a mind map as a visual aid. In this case, the time across both outcomes and all evidence requirements would be 10 to 12 minutes in total. So, the learner would spend 10 to 12 minutes on the poster exhibition and the oral presentation together, not 10 to 12 minutes on each. They should also be done on the same occasion.

Whichever method learners choose, they must be able to access notes, textbooks and other materials, as it is an open-book assessment.

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 generic search engines, to enable 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 the 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.

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Authenticating a learner's 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 the presentation. You should monitor learners' progress throughout to authenticate submitted work. Where possible, you should use plagiarism detection software. Regardless of the assessment method chosen, learners must submit a bibliography citing appropriate sources, presented in a standard referencing format such as Harvard or APA.

It is important that learners' responses to the assessment are at SCQF level 7.

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 your centre wants 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

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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 unit introduces you to the discipline of sociology by looking at the way it has emerged from an historical context of social change. You explore the historical and intellectual foundations of sociology and the key features of the sociological imagination.

You should have good communication skills and an interest in sociology. It would also be helpful to have some basic digital skills.

You learn about the sociological imagination and how to think sociologically by contrasting different models of society. Then, you begin to develop your own sociological imagination through applying key sociological concepts and key features from different sociological perspectives so that you develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between the individual and society. You are encouraged to develop an enquiring and critical mind throughout the study of the unit. It would be useful for you to think about ideas such as:

- ◆ the birth and development of sociology as a subject in the study of social sciences
- ◆ the key features that characterise a sociological imagination and sociological thinking
- ◆ the structure of society in terms of institutions
- ◆ the relationship between the individual and society
- ◆ applying sociological perspectives to understand the relationship between the individual and society

On completing the unit, you can:

- 1 explain the foundations of sociology
- 2 analyse the relationship between the individual and society using sociological perspectives and concepts

You are assessed using an open-book assessment that focuses on explaining the foundations of sociology, and applying key sociological concepts and key features from different sociological perspectives to an analysis of the relationship between the individual and society. This means that you have access to materials such as textbooks, notes and your virtual learning environment (VLE). You can give your assessment response in writing or orally. If your assessment response is written, it must be approximately 1,500 words, and if it is oral, it must be 10 to 12 minutes long.

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During the unit, you develop academic skills, such as time management, multi-tasking ability, digital skills, essay writing skills and questioning ability.

You also develop key literacies such as communication, developed in formative and summative assessment. You learn to convey complex ideas in a well-structured and coherent way, with references where appropriate. Oral presentations and discussions may also be used to help you improve your communication skills. You develop digital skills and computer literacy by using digital packages to produce assessments, and internet sources to research information on theorists, sociological concepts and other sociological ideas.

During the unit, you are introduced to Learning for Sustainability ideas, with links made to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly while studying the topics of power, social order, and structure and agency. You develop an understanding of the issues of diversity and equality.

The unit can support learning in other related units, such as Sociology B: Applied Sociology at SCQF level 7. You may be able to study 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 this unit, you develop meta-skills to enhance your employability in the social sciences sector.

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

You develop these 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) and communicating ideas clearly (social intelligence) is useful for future study and employment, as well as during the unit.

Administrative information

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Superclass: EE

History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date
2.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Change of focus for unit from theories to perspectives. Changes made to outcomes to reflect this, as well as in 'Evidence requirements', 'Knowledge and skills', 'Meta-skills', 'Delivery of unit', 'Additional guidance' and 'Information for learners'. ◆ In 'Evidence requirements', the length of written and oral responses was increased. List of requirements reworded for clarity. ◆ Two bullet points in 'Knowledge and skills' were changed to fit better with the evidence requirements. ◆ In 'Content and context for this unit', theoretical models were deleted as they are not covered here. Change of sociological concept (social control to social order) to match the evidence requirements. ◆ In 'Approaches to assessment', additional information allowing group presentations was added. ◆ Rewording or additional sentences to standardise statements across HNC Social Sciences units in 'Evidence requirements', 'Meta-skills', 'Delivery of unit' and 'Information for learners'. 	June 2023
3.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Removed reference to the requirement to use holistic assessment in 'Evidence Requirements', and in 'Information for Learners'. ◆ Deleted bullet point on 'macro and micro models of society' in 'Evidence Requirements' and 'Information for learners'. ◆ In 'Approaches to assessment', additional words to clarify that a holistic or a portfolio approach can be used were included. 	April 2024

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