

# Next Generation Higher National Unit Specification

## Economics A: The Nature of Economic Study (SCQF level 7)

**Unit code:** J72L 47  
**SCQF level:** 7 (8 SCQF credit points)  
**Valid from:** session 2024–25

### **Prototype unit specification for use in pilot delivery only (version 2.0) 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 introduces learners to economics as a social science by examining different approaches to the nature of economic study. It introduces and explains the main methods used in the study of economics. It also analyses the key ideas of economists from history.

The unit is aimed at learners who have a general interest in economics, as well as those who want to 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 economics, for example, National Qualifications at SCQF levels 5 or 6, or other similar qualifications
- ◆ other knowledge, skills and experience relevant to the unit

This unit works well alongside Economics B: Economic Systems, Markets and Objectives.

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

If learners study the unit as part of HNC Social Sciences, they may be able to progress to HND Social Sciences or a degree programme in a related subject.

## Unit outcomes

Learners who complete this unit can:

- 1 explain different approaches and methods used in the study of economics
- 2 analyse key ideas of economists from history

## Evidence requirements

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

Written responses must be approximately 1,500 words, and oral responses must be 10 to 12 minutes in duration.

Learners' responses must:

- ◆ explain positive and normative approaches to economics
- ◆ distinguish between positive and normative statements
- ◆ explain the basic economic problem and the choices the basic economic problem leads to
- ◆ explain the main methods used in economic study, explaining two economic models using words and, for each, a diagram or graph as appropriate
- ◆ explain how and why economists use statistical data
- ◆ analyse the key ideas of two economists from history, including justified criticism and/or support

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

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><b>Outcome 1</b> Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ positive and normative economic approaches and statements</li> <li>◆ key economic concepts</li> <li>◆ the basic economic problem and the choices the basic economic problem leads to</li> <li>◆ different economic models</li> <li>◆ the use of statistical data in economics</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcome 1</b> Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ explain different approaches to the nature of economic study</li> <li>◆ explain the main methods used in economic study</li> <li>◆ explain, using words, diagrams and/or graphs, different economic models</li> <li>◆ explain how and why economists use statistical data</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outcome 2</b> Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ key ideas of economists from history</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcome 2</b> Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ analyse key ideas of different economists from history with justified criticism and/or support</li> </ul>

## 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 throughout 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: developing self-discipline and focus when studying economic topics; processing, understanding, filtering and sorting knowledge to complete the unit assessment task by a clear deadline
- ◆ adapting: using a virtual learning environment (VLE) to seek knowledge and understanding of economic issues and approaches; considering different and sometimes conflicting ideas, concepts and values, which requires openness and critical reflection; reflecting on and adapting views and perspectives
- ◆ initiative: thinking, planning and considering different approaches to learning about economic concepts and ideas; seeking relevant information from a variety of sources; making decisions about which economists and models to include in the assessment evidence

### Social intelligence

This meta-skill includes:

- ◆ communicating: listening to and reading information on theories and concepts; conducting individual and group investigations using a variety of sources; sharing information, opinions and views about economic concepts and different economists from history with peers; producing appropriate assessment responses; sharing written or oral ideas and opinions on theories and topics
- ◆ feeling: sharing and discussing opinions, values and perspectives about different economic approaches, concepts and thinkers; developing understanding, empathy and respect for other viewpoints in discussions
- ◆ collaborating: working together to research economic topics, approaches and economists, as well as creating formative presentations; taking account of others in planning to help build and establish collaborative relationships

## **Innovation**

This meta-skill includes:

- ◆ curiosity: seeking knowledge of economic approaches, concepts and thinkers; seeking information from different sources; discussing and sharing findings with others; questioning peers' views, opinions and perspectives
- ◆ sense-making: participating in class discussions and group activities, respectfully considering the views, opinions and perspectives of others; encouraging synthesis and analysis of information; developing a stance on economic thought, concepts and approaches
- ◆ critical thinking: making logical connections and reasoned judgements through discussion, debate and drawing conclusions based on evidence; discussing the contribution of economists from history and economic models; making constructive comments based on research and developed perspectives

Learners could also develop other meta-skills in the unit, depending on the learning and teaching activities you carry out. These include:

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

## **Literacies**

Learners develop core skills in the following literacies:

### **Numeracy**

Learners develop numeracy skills by studying how and why economists use statistical data. This can help learners to understand facts and statistics related to data, and analyse its validity.

### **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 academic references where appropriate. You can give learners opportunities to carry out oral presentations and engage in discussions.

### **Digital**

Learners develop digital skills and computer literacy by using digital packages to produce assessments, and internet sources to research information on theorists, concepts and ideas. You can give them 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 while studying basic economic problems and choices, using topics such as environmental issues, income and welfare that link to [the UN Sustainable Development Goals](#).

This unit fits with the following UN Sustainable Development Goals:

- 8 Decent work and economic growth: through understanding the need for inclusive and sustainable economic growth in societies
- 10 Reduced inequalities: through understanding how economic policy can support the reduction in income inequality within and among countries
- 12 Responsible consumption and production: through examining sustainable consumption and production patterns

## 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 Economics units within HNC Social Sciences. This unit works well alongside Economics B: Economic Systems, Markets and Objectives.

The overall unit delivery time is a notional 40 hours of contact time for delivery and assessment. 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 discretion; however, you should consider both outcomes together during delivery. We suggest the following distribution of time, including assessment:

**Outcome 1** — Explain different approaches and methods used in the study of economics (25 hours).

**Outcome 2** — Analyse key ideas of economists from history (15 hours).



## **Additional guidance**

The guidance in this section is not mandatory.

### **Content and context for this unit**

This unit aims to provide an interesting and engaging introduction to economics that serves as a foundation for subsequent Economics units. The unit provides an overview of the nature of economic study by introducing learners to the general approaches taken in the discipline, the main methods of deduction and induction used to study economics, and some of the political economic thinking that underpins the discipline.

### **Explain different approaches and methods used in the study of economics (outcome 1)**

Definitions of economics should include both content-based and methods-based definitions. Learners discuss a range of definitions to stimulate thinking and establish how broad, interesting and engaging economics is. You should introduce positive and normative approaches to allow discussion of economic topics such as markets, income and welfare, and environmental issues, illustrating that the discipline of economics has a wide and varied application within everyday life. You can introduce factors of production, their incomes, the three fundamental choices of what, how and for whom, and opportunity cost when discussing the basic economic problem and the choices that it leads to.

Learners study economic methodology and how it can be used as a vehicle to look at economics as a social science. You can analyse models such as the circular flow of income, the production possibility curve and perfect competition. Learners should describe the models in words, and in diagrammatic or graphical form as appropriate. If you teach all three models, you can then allow learners a choice or you can choose one model for them for the assessment. Statistical data is also important in economics. You should introduce learners to the Office for National Statistics website and direct them to other useful websites such as the EU gateway and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) website. Learners should investigate a wide variety of statistical information and you should encourage them to look for trends and possible relationships in the data.

### **Analyse key ideas of economists from history (outcome 2)**

You introduce learners to key economists, for example, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, John Maynard Keynes, Alfred Marshall, Thorstein Veblen, Frederick Hayek and Vilfredo Pareto. When examining the key ideas of chosen thinkers, it is useful if you set their thinking in historical and cultural context. You can make comparisons between thinkers, though this is not essential for assessment. The unit provides time for developing skills beyond those that are specifically being assessed.

### **Approaches to delivery**

You should structure the learning and teaching programme to allow time for learners to develop meta-skills, and academic and other transferable skills. You should also allow for assessment practice within the notional 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 they need to progress to the next level of study.

Learners can benefit from a varied and active learning approach, where they engage in supported, independent and collaborative learning. You should encourage learners to take a participative and practical approach. Delivery methods could include:

- ◆ 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

It would be useful for learners to have access to a laptop or other digital device.

It is possible to teach the unit outcome by outcome, or teach the outcomes at the same time, with economists from history being introduced at appropriate points when discussing economic theory, concepts and models.

You should deliver the unit in a learner-centred manner and always encourage a questioning approach. In doing so, you engage learners and encourage them to think like social scientists and be analytical and enquiring, rather than passively accepting facts. Developing essential transferable skills also helps learners access further study and employment.

Throughout the unit, you should structure teaching to give learners opportunities to do individual and group activities. For example, learners could individually investigate definitions of economics, positive and normative economic statements, the basic economic problem, models, and economists, and then participate in mini presentations, debates and discussion.

You can use exercises to reinforce learning, providing formative assessment. Exercises can be in digital format, which learners could complete using a VLE or other online channels in or outside class. Some exercises could be completed individually, and others done in pairs or small groups. Exercises can be simple in nature; for example, distinguishing between positive and normative statements, or assessing the impact of changes in injections and withdrawals on the circular flow of income. You could integrate them with an investigation; for example, you could ask learners to investigate different economists while answering a set of predetermined questions. You could follow this with a mini presentation to help share findings, providing an opportunity for the class to discuss and debate those findings. Discussions could take place in class or online.

A mix of lecturer input, learner investigations, exercises, discussions and debate set within an appropriately structured delivery plan, and using a VLE or other digital resources, can

help learners engage with the subject, develop knowledge and understanding, and develop meta-skills.

The section on meta-skills provides further guidance on incorporating different skills into delivery and evidence.

## **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.

Learners can choose to submit their assessment evidence in any format that meets each outcome. We recommend that you assess the unit holistically, as that is best to reduce the 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.

The assessment could take the form of an open-book essay question or a set of structured questions. Learners must provide a response of approximately 1,500 words, or an individual oral presentation or poster exhibition of 10 to 12 minutes in duration, or any other method that appropriately meets the evidence requirements. For example, learners could provide the evidence in the form of an individual blog or website, consisting of approximately 1,500 words.

You can choose to use a mix of methods across a group, as it may be more suitable for some learners to give a written response and for others to use an oral method. Whichever method learners choose, they must be able to access notes, textbooks and other materials, as it is an open-book assessment.

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 an essay or additional responses to structured questions. Learners should submit their work for marking on a date that you have provided or agreed with them.

Learners can combine a poster exhibition with an oral presentation. For example, a learner could produce a detailed poster of two economists' key ideas and cover the other evidence requirements in an oral presentation. In this case, the total time across both outcomes and all evidence requirements would be 10 to 12 minutes. So, the learner would spend 10 to 12 minutes orally presenting the poster content.

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.

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If learners are creating a blog or website for their assessment, 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. You could collect notes or visual presentation materials from learners as further evidence of meeting SCQF level 7. You should monitor learners' progress throughout to authenticate submitted work. Where possible, you should use plagiarism detection software.

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](http://www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements).

## Information for learners

### Economics A: The Nature of Economic Study (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 unit introduces you to economics as a social science by examining different approaches to the nature of economic study. It introduces and explains the main methods used in economic study. You also analyse key ideas of economists from history.

Before you start the unit, you should have good communication skills and an interest in economics. It would also be helpful to have some basic digital skills.

During the unit, you learn how to explain and analyse economic methods, concepts and different economic perspectives.

On completing the unit, you are able to:

- 1 explain different approaches and methods used in the study of economics
- 2 analyse key ideas of economists from history

You are assessed using an open-book assessment covering both unit outcomes. 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 between 10 and 12 minutes long.

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. 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 complete assessments, and internet sources to research information on theorists, economic concepts and other economic ideas.

The unit introduces you to Learning for Sustainability ideas, with links made to UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly while studying the basic economic problem and the choices the basic economic problem leads to.

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The unit can support learning in other related units, such as Economics B: Economic Systems, Markets and Objectives. 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 HNC Social Sciences.

## **Meta-skills**

Throughout the 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 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 current and future study, and employment.

# Administrative information

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**Superclass:** EB

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## History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date
2.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Removed reference to the requirement to use holistic assessment in 'Evidence requirements', and in 'Information for learners'.</li><li>◆ In 'Approaches to assessment' additional words that a holistic or portfolio approach can be used were added. Also, additional information allowing group presentations was included.</li></ul>	May 2024

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