# Next Generation Higher National Unit Specification

## An Investigation in the Social Sciences
## (SCQF level 7)

**Unit code:** J74C 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.

This edition: August 2024 (version 2.0)

# Unit purpose

This unit develops learners' knowledge and understanding of research and investigation techniques central to the methodology of social science research and presentation.

Learners have the opportunity to develop insight, knowledge and understanding of a specific social science theme or issue relating to one social science discipline. You encourage them to develop an independent approach to social science studies through planning, and to nurture organisational and interpersonal skills through investigation activities.

The unit is aimed at learners who have a general interest in social sciences and research, as well as those who want to use it as the basis for further study.

Entry to this 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 social science subjects, for example National Qualifications at SCQF levels 5 or 6, or similar

♦ other knowledge, skills and experience relevant to the unit

Before starting this unit, we recommend that learners complete or be in the process of completing the appropriate named social sciences units relating to HNC Social Sciences, to give them sufficient underpinning knowledge.

# Unit outcomes

Learners who complete this unit can:

1. develop a research plan on a particular social science theme or issue related to one social science discipline
2. develop a report from an investigation of a particular social science theme or issue from one social science discipline using different perspectives
3. evaluate the effectiveness of the investigation approach and findings

## Evidence requirements

Learners should provide written or oral evidence covering all outcomes in an assessment under open-book conditions. The assessment task is a research investigation project, and 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 between 2,500 and 3,000 words, and oral responses must be 18 to 22 minutes in duration.

Learners must agree their topic with you; it must be related to one social science discipline.

The research investigation project involves:

♦ planning a research proposal
♦ carrying out research
♦ analysing and interpreting data, and reaching a conclusion
♦ evaluating the effectiveness of the chosen research method
♦ ensuring the report has a logical structure with subheadings covering:
— an introduction
— research methods and sources
— results or findings
— analysis and discussion including modifications
— conclusions and recommendations

Learners' responses must include:

♦ a clear rationale for selecting the social science theme or issue they are researching
♦ a research question or hypothesis that clearly relates to the chosen social science theme or issue
♦ aims and objectives of the investigation, including whether they plan to use primary or secondary data sources and why
♦ timescales for achieving the aims and objectives
♦ identification of resources required for the investigation, including people, texts, materials and equipment
♦ evidence of meeting ethical standards

- ◆ collection and collation of relevant information and data
- ◆ interpretation and analysis of information and data
- ◆ summary of findings and conclusions drawn
- ◆ an evaluation of the investigation and findings that includes
  - — effectiveness of the research methods used
  - — suggested modifications to the approach or alternative approaches and methods
- ◆ recommendations drawn from conclusions of the investigation; these could include suggestions for improvement, further work or more investigation
- ◆ strengths and weaknesses in the effectiveness of their own approach to the investigation

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 this 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 |
|---|---|
| **Outcome 1**<br>Learners should understand:<br><br>♦ how to use information-retrieval skills<br>♦ how to plan a research investigation<br>♦ the research process model<br>♦ ethical concerns with carrying out research<br>♦ specific features related to a particular social science theme or issue | **Outcome 1**<br>Learners can:<br><br>♦ develop a research plan on a particular social science theme or issue in a social science discipline, including identifying ethical concerns |
| **Outcome 2**<br>Learners should understand:<br><br>♦ the theoretical perspectives of a chosen social science theme or issue<br>♦ how to research a chosen theme or issue | **Outcome 2**<br>Learners can:<br><br>♦ carry out a research investigation into a specific social science theme or issue<br>♦ demonstrate professional and ethical conduct in planning a research investigation<br>♦ develop a report from an investigation of a particular social science theme or issue from one social science discipline using different perspectives |
| **Outcome 3**<br>Learners should understand:<br><br>♦ how to evaluate a research investigation<br>♦ typical strengths and weaknesses of various methods of research<br>♦ how to identify strengths and weaknesses in the effectiveness of their overall approach to the investigation | **Outcome 3**<br>Learners can:<br><br>♦ evaluate the effectiveness of the investigation approach and findings<br>♦ comment on the effectiveness of their own approach to the investigation |

# 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: meeting deadlines and correctly interpreting instructions to produce appropriate work

♦ integrity: carrying out work for the investigation in an ethical way; correctly using academic referencing for the project

♦ adapting: acquiring new knowledge and skills, as well as using different technologies to communicate and carry out research; working through a virtual learning environment (VLE); reflecting on own performance

♦ initiative: getting started on research and projects promptly; making good decisions and staying motivated; reading and thinking about theories and research evidence, and sources; using library facilities; checking in with lecturers to discuss coursework; setting and meeting own deadlines

## Social intelligence

This meta-skill includes:

♦ communicating: listening to information on theories, research and sources; explaining ideas; producing suitable, understandable assessment responses; sharing written or oral opinions on topics and ideas

♦ feeling: discussing theories, expressing opinions, and understanding other perspectives, respecting other viewpoints

♦ collaborating: working together on projects; taking account of others in planning and carrying out tasks; building relationships with peers

## Innovation

This meta-skill includes:

♦ curiosity: seeking knowledge about theories and research; having library research time, class discussion and debates; questioning motives, ideas, information and research evidence

- ♦ sense-making: making the most of opportunities for discussion; blending a range of ideas; considering and evaluating different ideas
- ♦ critical thinking: making logical connections and reasoned judgements through discussion, debate and drawing conclusions based on evidence; reviewing and evaluating research evidence

Learners could also develop other meta-skills 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:

## Numeracy

Learners develop numeracy skills by working with facts and statistics related to data, as they carry out research using secondary data. They can analyse data from their own research if they use a method that produces quantitative data.

## Communication

Learners develop communication skills as they work through their projects. 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 concepts and theories. 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 take 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 carrying out research and writing up the investigation report. Many of the themes or issues that learners can use in the investigation — such as climate change, health and public health, poverty, inequalities, or crime and deviance — touch on or directly link to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

# Delivery of unit

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

The overall unit delivery time is a notional 40 hours of contact time for delivery and assessment. We expect learners to commit to 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 all three outcomes together when you deliver this unit.

# Additional guidance

The guidance in this section is not mandatory.

## Content and context for this unit

The unit aims to help learners develop in-depth knowledge and understanding of a particular social science theme or issue. They may find it helpful to have recently studied topics related to one social science discipline.

The unit's three outcomes relate to the three main stages of the investigation. Learners can develop meta-skills particularly in the planning stage as they choose a suitable social science theme or issue and carry out a preliminary literature search. They must have a clear rationale for choosing a particular theme or issue, and demonstrate its relevance to the chosen social science discipline. The research investigation should be related to a social science discipline that learners are familiar with.

In the investigation, learners respond to a formulated research question or hypothesis.

Learners must demonstrate an organised and structured approach to their investigation.

For outcome 1, learners develop clear aims and objectives, as well as a timescale for achieving these.

Learners can carry out primary research using established social science research methods or secondary sources of data, which should include different theoretical perspectives and existing studies. They must submit a bibliography of the preliminary literature search in a standard academic format, such as Harvard, with the completed plan.

For outcome 2, learners must produce a report consisting of a discussion that analyses the investigation's data and findings as they relate to the research question or hypothesis.

Learners can demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of relevant theoretical perspectives and studies relating to their chosen social science discipline and theme or issue, as they identify them through the research process. They can analyse and discuss any findings from primary research as they relate to the research question or hypothesis.

Finally, for outcome 3, learners must reflect on and evaluate the effectiveness of the investigation's approach and findings. They must assess the strengths and weaknesses of their contribution to the investigation and suggest any recommendations for alternative approaches and sources of evidence.

## 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 time for individual meetings with learners to agree their topics, and research question or hypothesis.

As learners investigate a particular social science theme or issue in one social science discipline, we recommend that you deliver the unit only once learners have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the social science discipline within which they carry out their investigation, possibly by studying other social science units.

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
♦ 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.

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.

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 should take the form of a report on the investigation. Learners must provide a written response of approximately 2,000 words, or an individual oral presentation or a poster exhibition of 12 to 15 minutes in duration, or any other method that appropriately

meets the evidence requirements. For example, learners could provide the evidence in the form of a formal research report or a poster presentation.

The assessment covers three outcomes in the form of a planned investigation, report and evaluation. Learners should complete the planning stage in outcome 1 before starting on the report in outcome 2.

You can choose to use a mix of assessment 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. The time across all evidence requirements covered would be 12 to 15 minutes in total. For example, if using a poster and an oral presentation, it would be 12 to 15 minutes for both together, not 12 to 15 minutes each.

The final report should have a clear structure. If it is written, we recommend that it includes the following subheadings, usually in this order:

♦ Title page
♦ Abstract
♦ Table of contents
♦ Introduction
♦ Methodology
♦ Results or findings
♦ Discussion
♦ Conclusion and recommendations
♦ References
♦ Appendices

If the report is delivered orally, we recommend that it is structured in this order:

♦ Introduction
♦ Research methodology and sources
♦ Results or findings
♦ Analysis and discussion including modifications
♦ Conclusion and recommendations

Learners should hand in references and appendices with any copies of their presentation.

You could deliver this unit before delivering Social Sciences: An Evidence-Based Approach to Social Problems, or combine with it in an enhanced project combined 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 learners are creating a blog 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.

# Information for learners

## An Investigation in the Social Sciences (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 develops your knowledge and understanding of research and investigation techniques central to the methodology of social science research and presentation. You gain insight, knowledge and understanding of a specific social science theme or issue relating to one social science discipline. You develop an independent and organised approach to social science studies through planning and carrying out a research investigation.

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

On completing the unit, you are able to:

1 develop a research plan on a particular social science theme or issue related to one social science discipline

2 develop a report from an investigation of a particular social science theme or issue from one social science discipline using different perspectives

3 evaluate the effectiveness of the investigation approach and findings

You are assessed using an open-book assessment covering all three 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 2,000 words, and if it is oral, it must be between 12 and 15 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.

You may be able to study HND Social Sciences or a degree programme in a related subject if you study this 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:**  ED

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## History of changes

| Version | Description of change | Date |
|---------|----------------------|------|
| 2.0 | ♦ Removed reference to the requirement to use holistic assessment in 'Evidence requirements', and in 'Information for learners'.<br>♦ In 'Approaches to assessment' additional words that a holistic or portfolio approach can be used were added. Also, additional information allowing group presentations was added. | May 2024 |
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