

# Next Generation Higher National Unit Specification

## Psychology: Critical Analysis and Research of Themes (SCQF level 8)

**Unit code:** J7D5 48  
**SCQF level:** 8 (24 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.

The information in this unit specification may be reproduced in support of SQA qualifications only on a non-commercial basis. If it is reproduced, SQA must be clearly acknowledged as the source. If it is to be reproduced for any other purpose, written permission must be obtained from [permissions@sqa.org.uk](mailto:permissions@sqa.org.uk).

This edition: August 2024 (version 2.0)

© Scottish Qualifications Authority 2023, 2024

## Unit purpose

This unit builds on learners' knowledge and understanding of psychological thinking and theories related to specific themes. It enables learners to:

- ◆ critically analyse psychological theories
- ◆ design an investigation
- ◆ conduct research
- ◆ analyse data using inferential statistics
- ◆ report on their findings for a selected theme

The unit is aimed at learners who want to further their knowledge and skills in psychology.

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 psychology, for example National Qualifications at SCQF levels 6 or Higher National (HN) Qualifications at SCQF level 7, PDA in Psychology at SCQF level 7 or other similar qualifications
- ◆ other knowledge, skills and experience relevant to the unit

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

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

## Unit outcomes

Learners who complete this unit can:

- 1 critically analyse key psychological contributions to a theme
- 2 design an investigation in psychology
- 3 conduct research into a psychological topic related to a theme, using a recognised research process
- 4 analyse data produced using inferential statistics and report on findings

## 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.

Learners must produce a written response of between 2,500 to 3,000 words, or an oral response that is 18 to 22 minutes in duration.

Learners study four themes in total: two from the list of approved course themes and a further two from the subject-specific list. Learners taking the unit as a stand-alone unit also study these four themes.

Learners must study two from this list of approved course themes:

- ◆ History and social change
- ◆ Power and control
- ◆ Our changing world
- ◆ Deviance
- ◆ Inequalities
- ◆ Globalisation
- ◆ Culture and identity
- ◆ Human environments
- ◆ Ethics
- ◆ Origins of behaviour

Learners must study a further two from this list of subject-specific themes:

- ◆ Debates in psychology
- ◆ Theoretical diversity of psychology
- ◆ Subjectiveness of individual experience
- ◆ Sociohistorical influences on the psychology of childhood development
- ◆ Cognitive processes
- ◆ Applications of psychological research

You assess learners on one theme from the four they study in the unit.

Learners' responses must include:

- ◆ a clear and coherent explanation of how the theme relates to psychology
- ◆ identification of relevant conflicting psychological theories that relate to the specific theme
- ◆ a critical analysis of the contribution of relevant conflicting psychological theories to the theme
- ◆ an evaluation of research evidence appropriate to the psychological theories
- ◆ a plan for an investigation into a psychological topic related to the chosen theme, including design, method of analysis and procedures to be followed
- ◆ their own primary research into a psychological topic, related to the chosen theme, including identification of the investigation design's ethical implications using British Psychological Society (BPS) Practice Guidelines
- ◆ an analysis of the data produced using inferential statistics
- ◆ an evaluation of methods used, including ethical implications
- ◆ a report based on their findings and related to current literature

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 8. 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 must:

- ◆ contribute information that is complex, accurate and relevant to its purpose and audience
- ◆ present ideas clearly and coherently
- ◆ carry out primary research using an accepted confidential, legal and ethical process
- ◆ produce a report using a structure that is appropriate to the purpose
- ◆ provide supporting evidence and references

## Knowledge and skills

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

| Knowledge  | Skills   |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Outcome 1</b><br/>Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ how a specific theme relates to psychology</li> <li>◆ relevant conflicting psychological theories that relate to a specific theme</li> <li>◆ how published research can be used to critically analyse psychological theory</li> </ul>   | <p><b>Outcome 1</b><br/>Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ explain how the chosen theme relates to psychology</li> <li>◆ identify relevant conflicting psychological theories that relate to the chosen theme</li> <li>◆ critically analyse key contributions that relevant conflicting psychological theories make to a chosen theme</li> <li>◆ evaluate research evidence appropriate to psychological theories</li> </ul>         |
| <p><b>Outcome 2</b><br/>Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ how to carry out research using the research process</li> <li>◆ how to select an appropriate research design</li> <li>◆ what inferential statistics are</li> <li>◆ how to select an appropriate method of analysis</li> <li>◆ how to apply variables, formulate hypotheses, and develop aims for primary research</li> <li>◆ how to define a population and select participants</li> <li>◆ what BPS guidelines for ethical standards are</li> </ul> | <p><b>Outcome 2</b><br/>Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ design a research investigation, including appropriate procedures to be used</li> <li>◆ select an appropriate method of analysis of data to be gathered</li> <li>◆ develop an aim, hypotheses and variables for primary research</li> <li>◆ select participants from a population</li> <li>◆ apply BPS guidelines for ethical standards in the research design</li> </ul> |

| Knowledge  | Skills  |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Outcome 3</b><br/>Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ how to operationalise a plan for a research investigation</li> <li>◆ how to deal with unexpected variables when carrying out primary research</li> <li>◆ how to record data appropriate to the research design</li> <li>◆ what to do with any ethical concerns that arise as they carry out primary research</li> </ul> | <p><b>Outcome 3</b><br/>Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ conduct primary research into a psychological topic related to a specific theme</li> <li>◆ use a recognised research process</li> <li>◆ demonstrate good ethical conduct when carrying out primary research</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Outcome 4</b><br/>Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ how to conduct data analysis on a data set, using inferential statistics</li> <li>◆ how to state research findings clearly</li> <li>◆ how to reach a conclusion and relate to current literature</li> </ul>   | <p><b>Outcome 4</b><br/>Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ analyse gathered data using inferential statistics</li> <li>◆ explain the findings in relation to the hypothesis</li> <li>◆ evaluate the methods used in the primary research, including any ethical implications</li> <li>◆ produce a report based on findings and related to current literature</li> </ul> |

## Meta-skills

Throughout the 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 will vary depending on the chosen topics and assessment method.

### Self-management

This meta-skill includes:

- ◆ focusing: completing the assessment and project work to clear deadlines; being proactive in planning and developing assessment responses
- ◆ integrity: studying ethics as a theme or in outcomes 2 and 3; acting in an ethical way to complete assessments and carry out work for projects; developing good working relationships with peers; including citations and referencing for assessments; showing ethical behaviour in primary research
- ◆ adapting: acquiring new knowledge and skills; using different technologies to communicate and complete assessments; using a virtual learning environment (VLE); reflecting on performance to improve approach
- ◆ initiative: starting work as early as possible; decision-making; self-motivation; reading and thinking about psychological theories, research evidence and sources; using library facilities; setting own deadlines

### Social intelligence

This meta-skill includes:

- ◆ communicating: listening to information on theories, research and sources; explaining ideas and producing suitable, understandable assessment responses; sharing written or oral ideas and opinions on psychological theories and topics covered in the unit
- ◆ feeling: discussing psychological theories and expressing opinions; understanding other perspectives; respecting other viewpoints in discussions
- ◆ collaborating: working together on formative presentations and project work; taking account of others in planning and carrying out of tasks; building relationships with peers
- ◆ leading: taking account of others; sharing information in a useful way

## **Innovation**

This meta-skill includes:

- ◆ curiosity: seeking knowledge about psychological theories and research, making the most of library research time; taking part in class discussions and debates, questioning motives, ideas, information and research evidence
- ◆ creativity: developing new ways of working and approaching tasks; providing novel and individual analyses of case studies
- ◆ sense-making: participating in discussions, blending a range of ideas; considering and evaluating ideas
- ◆ critical thinking: making logical connections and reasoned judgements; drawing conclusions based on evidence; reviewing and evaluating research evidence

## **Literacies**

Learners develop core skills in the following literacies:

### **Numeracy**

Learners develop numeracy skills by understanding facts and statistics related to research findings with different topics in psychology. They analyse their own curated data in outcome 4 where they have conducted and analysed their own quantitative research.

### **Communication**

Learners develop communication skills during 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 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 themes, theories concepts and research evidence. You can give them guidance on appropriate sources. Using a VLE also supports digital skills. You can use computer packages to create posters and visual stimulus, word-processed documents for written tasks and digital statistical packages or spreadsheets for calculations.



## Learning for Sustainability

Learning for Sustainability aims to build 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 psychologists' theories and research evidence related to their work on human behaviour that link to [the UN Sustainable Development Goals](#).

The unit fits with the following UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

- 3 Good health and well-being: through covering themes related to individual behaviour that consider mental health, treatment for mental health issues and maladaptation due to childhood experiences.
- 4 Quality education: through using a range of sources to explore, explain and analyse; learners carry out and analyse their own research.
- 5 Gender equality: through covering themes relating to inequality in women's services or in the workplace.
- 10 Reduced inequalities: many of the themes in the unit can relate to this SDG.

## Delivery of unit

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

The unit works well if delivered alongside Social Sciences: Social Policy, the mandatory unit from HND Social Sciences.

The overall unit delivery time is a notional 120 hours of contact time for delivery and assessment. We expect learners to commit a further 120 hours of self-directed study.

The amount of time allocated to each outcome is at your discretion. We suggest the following distribution of time:

- Outcome 1** Critically analyse key psychological contributions to a theme (60 hours)
- Outcome 2** Design an investigation in psychology
- Outcome 3** Conduct research into a psychological topic related to a theme, using a recognised research process
- Outcome 4** Analyse data produced using inferential statistics and report on findings

You should consider outcomes 2, 3 and 4 together when you deliver the unit (a total of 60 hours). You can decide how to allocate the 60 hours of time to outcomes 2, 3 and 4, equally or with more in a particular outcome, as required to meet learners' needs.

## Additional guidance

The guidance in this section is not mandatory.

### Content and context for this unit

The unit aims to provide an interesting and engaging introduction to the critical analysis of psychological theories, and how to apply this information to a selected theme.

The unit provides an overview of four themes. Whether you are delivering the unit as a freestanding unit or as part of the group award, you should deliver two themes from the approved course themes list and a further two from the subject-specific list. Where possible, learners should influence the topics chosen for delivery. You select one of the four themes for summative assessment. You can find further details of the course themes in the Educator Guide.

We suggest areas of study in the following list of themes. This is an indicative list. You are not expected to cover all the aspects suggested under each theme, and you can introduce theories or topics as you think appropriate.

### Approved course themes

Learners must study two from this list.

#### History and social change

Social change is inevitable and constant. Social psychologists are interested in the transformation of human interactions, behaviours and relationships that have had an impact on social and cultural institutions throughout history. Areas within this theme could include:

- ◆ Cultural identity
- ◆ Evolutionary theory
- ◆ Conflict theory
- ◆ Functionalist theory
- ◆ Social identity theory
- ◆ Developmental psychology
- ◆ Gender

#### Power and control

Power and control relate to the uneven balance of social resources and an individual's ability to exert their influence. Power dynamics explain how power affects relationships. Power and control are often described as situational and contextual as no one individual can obtain absolute power. Topics within this theme could include:

- ◆ Power dynamics in relationships
- ◆ Locus of control, including theories of motivation
- ◆ Personality theory
- ◆ Institutional power (education, workplace, politics)

### **Our changing world**

Psychology investigates how we can begin to make sense of ourselves in a continuously changing world. Some of the main areas of interest are based around understanding personal and collective identities, and how individuals respond psychologically to natural disasters or difficulties caused by social interactions in contemporary society.

- ◆ Human development
- ◆ Personality
- ◆ Cognition
- ◆ Cultural change
- ◆ Attitudes and values

### **Deviance**

Deviance has significant importance within psychology, as it relates to the infringement of approved rules and laws, as well as established norms. The study of deviance involves studying individual behaviour and why people are deviant, as well as how society responds in particular social contexts. Areas of interest could include:

- ◆ Trait theory
- ◆ Biological theory (addictive, risk-taking behaviours) — genetics
- ◆ Symbolic interactionism (labelling theory)
- ◆ Psychopathology and/or atypical behaviours
- ◆ Attribution theory
- ◆ Personality theory
- ◆ Forensic psychology

### **Inequalities**

The theme of inequalities could take account of the dynamics of inequality, injustice and marginalisation demonstrated in the differences between the Global Majority (refers to most of the population of the world that live in what is often referred to as 'developing countries' or 'the Global South') and the Global Minority (refers to the smaller population of the world that live in wealthier nations, often described as 'the West' or 'the Global North'). Inequalities and poverty within and between nations can influence our cognitions, mental health, general well-being, and have an impact on social cohesion. Areas of psychological investigation could include:

- ◆ Social identity
- ◆ Culture
- ◆ Personality
- ◆ Behaviour — risky behaviours (for example, gambling)
- ◆ Power

## **Globalisation**

Globalisation has altered and challenged cultural interconnectivity, and changed societies and interactions around the world. From a psychological perspective, individuals are influenced by complex, challenging processes relating to cultural interaction, identity, sense of self, and adaptation and integration. These influences determine how they develop social, cultural, personal and individual identities. Areas of interest could include:

- ◆ Multicultural societies
- ◆ Cognition
- ◆ Diversity
- ◆ Behaviour
- ◆ Identity
- ◆ Personality theory

## **Culture and identity**

Globalisation has widened the lens through which individuals from different cultures consider their cultural identity. Culture and identity take account of national identity as well as the complex process of understanding the development of an individual's cultural identity. Areas of focus could include:

- ◆ Human development
- ◆ Childhood development
- ◆ Cultural adaptation (coping strategies — assimilation or separation)
- ◆ Cultural identity and self-esteem
- ◆ Social identity theory
- ◆ Nature and nurture

## **Human environments**

Human environments is an area of psychology that investigates the interrelationship between the external world and humans. Environments have an impact on and influence individual behaviour, perceptions, thinking processes and emotions. Areas you could investigate include:

- ◆ Environmental stressors (linked to performance at work, education, neighbourhoods, institutions)
- ◆ Nature therapy (environments can lower anxiety and depression)
- ◆ Climate change and mental health (cognitions)
- ◆ Ownership of space (personal space and privacy)
- ◆ Health psychology
- ◆ Organisational psychology
- ◆ Place attachment (emotional bond between a person and place)

### **Ethics**

Psychologists aim to help those they work with and safeguard individual rights. Ethical standards provide a framework of professional codes that guide professional conduct and ethical judgements. Ethical principles and codes aid decision-making processes in relation to a diversity of approaches, contexts and methods. Psychology as a discipline exists within the context of human society. Those working in this field must, therefore, adhere to and acknowledge a duty of care to minimise harm. Ethical areas you could investigate include:

- ◆ Contemporary ethical challenges (innovation in science, global conflicts and technology)
- ◆ Ethical principles in research
- ◆ Cultural and geographical considerations
- ◆ Research ethics (Milgram and others)

### **Origins of behaviour**

Behaviour relates to actions and thinking processes that influence reactions in response to environmental stimuli and internal tendencies. Origins of behaviour includes genetic and biological elements. Behaviour takes account of both thinking processes and actions that influence behaviour. Origins of behaviour as a psychological theme also considers individual differences to understand and predict behaviour in a social context. This theme could consider:

- ◆ Nature versus nurture
- ◆ Evolutionary theory (Darwin)
- ◆ Intelligence (cognitive abilities)
- ◆ Personality (motivational traits, tendencies)
- ◆ Individual differences

### **Subject-specific themes**

Learners must study two from this list.

### **Debates in psychology**

Psychology endeavours to challenge and identify many underlying assumptions made about human behaviour and human nature and how these can be researched based around scientific study. These debates include:

- ◆ Nature versus nurture
- ◆ Reductionism versus holism
- ◆ Mind-body debate
- ◆ Idiographic versus nomothetic
- ◆ Is psychology a science?
- ◆ Free will versus determinism

### **Theoretical diversity of psychology**

Theoretical diversity recognises the range of perspectives across psychological theories. These include:

- ◆ Constructivism (Lev Vygotsky, John Dewey, Jerome Bruner)
- ◆ Gestalt psychology
- ◆ Cognitive neuropsychology (Alzheimer's, stroke dementia)
- ◆ Contemporary psychodynamic theory (Erik Erikson, Harry Sullivan, Erich Fromm)
- ◆ Behaviourism (Clark L. Hull, Edwin Ray Guthrie, Jacob Robert Kantor)
- ◆ Existentialism (Rollo May, Viktor Emil Frankl and Irvin D. Yalom)

### **Subjectiveness of individual experience**

Subjectivity can be defined by units of emotions and symbolical processes generated throughout human experience. This could include:

- ◆ Personality (Sigmund Freud and Hans Eysenck)
- ◆ Intelligence (Howard Gardner)
- ◆ Psychopathology
- ◆ Emotions and emotional intelligence
- ◆ Group processes and intergroup relationships

### **Sociohistorical influences on the psychology of childhood development**

Sociohistorical context can have significant impact on childhood development. Specific circumstances can influence not only childhood but also development in adolescence. Areas of study could include:

- ◆ Attachment and separation (John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth)
- ◆ Gender development (biological psychology, cognitive psychology, socialisation theory)
- ◆ Forensic psychology (Cesare Lombroso and biological influences)
- ◆ Cognitive and moral development (Jean Piaget, Carol Gilligan, Lawrence Kohlberg)
- ◆ Childhood, adolescence and lifespan development (Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, John Bowlby, Lawrence Kohlberg)

### **Cognitive processes**

Cognitive processes relate to the scientific study of mental processes. Areas of study could include:

- ◆ Memory
- ◆ Attention
- ◆ Language
- ◆ Perception and thinking
- ◆ Learning

## **Applications of psychology**

Psychologists contribute to the accumulation of knowledge within various fields in psychology. They embrace scientific methods of research to promote rigorous and evidence-based enquiry, to produce work that is valid, reliable, and can be replicated. Their research contributes to development of theories, giving a better understanding of human behaviour and solving of real-world problems. Systematic, structured investigation is at the heart of psychology.

This theme could cover:

- ◆ importance of scientific enquiry in psychology
- ◆ the use of inferential statistics in psychological research, including the difference between descriptive and inferential statistics, parametric and non-parametric tests
- ◆ how to choose which test and how to calculate examples of these
- ◆ type 1 and type 2 errors
- ◆ practical applications of inferential statistics, interpreting research findings and drawing conclusions
- ◆ impactful research, such as Mary Ainsworth's The Strange Situation (Attachment Theory), The Marshmallow Test by Walter Mischel (delayed gratification), the Bystander Effect (Social Psychology). There are many more depending on what learners already know and can discuss. You can use examples from the other themes that you choose in the unit
- ◆ future directions of psychology enquiry

The theme works well in partnership with the theme of Ethics.

## **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 do not need to spend an equal time on each of the four themes. You can choose to focus more on some of the themes.

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



NextGen: HN published prototype unit specification for use in pilot delivery only (version 2.0)  
August 2024

- ◆ 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.

Learners will find it useful to study the unit as a progression from HN unit Psychology A: The Shaping of Modern Psychology, and HN unit Psychology B: Applied Psychology. This unit can be delivered as a freestanding unit, but learners must read the relevant background theory and previous research for the themes. Learners still study four themes (two from the course themes list and a further two from the subject-specific list). They should be familiar with the necessary research skills from their study of Psychology B: Applied Psychology. The unit enhances learners' research skills by developing their knowledge of inferential statistics.

We recommend that you deliver outcome 1 first, delivering all four themes before choosing one for assessment.

### **Critically analyse key psychological contributions to a theme (outcome 1)**

Outcome 1 requires learners to engage with a theme, using research evidence that both supports and challenges theory to support them in critically analysing their chosen theme. This ensures learners gain the required breadth of information to critically analyse theories and research evidence (sometimes referred to as a literature review). You should deliver different theories within each topic so that learners can choose to include those most relevant to their theme and subsequent research.

Articulation routes to higher education degrees are dependent on learners engaging with the breadth and depth of the unit.

Learners could engage in debates to explore the strength of their respective evidence. One group could present the contribution of one psychological theory and apply this information to a selected theme, and another group could challenge them using an alternative theory. For example, one group could highlight the importance of biological psychology in understanding deviance, while another could provide opposing arguments from a cognitive approach.

You could use group research tasks, involving question-and-answer sessions, to explore and debate ethical issues in the context of research evidence. You should introduce or re-introduce learners to British Psychological Society (BPS) Practice Guidelines (first introduced in HNC unit Psychology B: Applied Psychology) and encourage them to question research evidence, and to use the evidence to question the theories. Where early research is ethically or culturally inappropriate and risks distressing learners, you should deal with it sensitively. For example, you could issue 'trigger warnings' in advance and reassure learners about which material is required and which is optional.

### **Design an investigation in psychology (outcome 2)**

In outcome 2, you give learners a brief introduction to experimental design, building on their learning from outcome 1. This should contain information on design and include details about

participants, apparatus or materials, procedures and identifying ethical considerations and implications using BPS Practice Guidelines.

We suggest that the course team use a process for approving research plans, and that learners use a checklist to ensure they have considered ethical concerns. You can find further information in the Educator Guide.

### **Conduct research into a psychological topic related to a theme, using a recognised research process (outcome 3)**

For outcome 3, learners need to know how to implement a design for an investigation and conduct research into a psychological topic related to their chosen theme. You must ensure learners understand the importance of:

- ◆ using good research procedures
- ◆ control of variables
- ◆ ethical implications of the design using BPS Practice Guidelines
- ◆ sampling method
- ◆ accurate recording of data

Learners could use templates to develop academic posters that represent the research design (outcome 2) and analysis of the data (outcome 3) using tables and graphical data. They could also use visual representations to highlight ethical considerations.

### **Analyse data produced using inferential statistics and report on findings (outcome 4)**

Outcome 4 requires learners to analyse the data they gathered for outcome 3 using inferential statistics, and to report on their research findings. You should teach learners how to select an appropriate statistical test, based on levels of measurement, size of sample, and the parametric or non-parametric distinction. You need only, however, teach them the steps of the actual test required to analyse their own data. For example, they could use the t-test, the chi-square test, or perhaps the Mann-Whitney-U test, and use computer programs for the calculation. This area of work fits well with the theme of Applications of psychological research.

You should ensure that the learning and teaching for the unit allows time for learners to make appropriate choices for their own data. Learners research a topic that has already been covered. You should therefore devote the allocated time for this outcome to teaching them about inferential statistics, including levels of significance., You should also build in time for them to carry out the research and complete the reporting required. You should ensure that learners have the skills to use appropriate descriptive statistics in their research and in their analysis, as well as inferential statistics.

Learners should report what their findings mean while evaluating the methods. They should analyse ethical implications to draw conclusions around the current research findings in relation to the critical analysis of theories and previous research (their literature review).

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**

Although four themes are studied, you must assess only one theme. 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.

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. Learners can choose to submit their assessment evidence in any format that meets each outcome.

The assessment could take the form of a formal written laboratory report in a standardised structured format consisting of 2,500 to 3,000 words. Alternatively, learners could produce an individual oral presentation using a digital presentation or poster exhibition of 18 to 22 minutes in duration.

You can use other methods that appropriately meet the evidence requirements. For example, learners could provide evidence in the form of an individual blog or website, consisting of 2,500 to 3,000 written words, or 18 to 22 minutes in duration if orally presented. If the blog or website has both oral and written responses, you can split the time; for example, 1,250 written words and 9 minutes presented orally.

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 and 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 one submission 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 on research methods and analysis of data and cover the critical analysis of theories and previous research (literature review) in an oral presentation. In this case, the total time across all outcomes and all evidence requirements would be 18 to

22 minutes, with the learner spending those 18 to 22 minutes orally presenting the poster content.

Outcome 2 requires learners to design and plan an investigation in psychology. Learners follow and apply the design section of the research process, building on the critical analysis of theories and previous research on a theme they carried out for outcome 1. Learners select or identify:

- ◆ research design
- ◆ method of analysis
- ◆ variables to be investigated
- ◆ aims of the research and hypotheses
- ◆ population under study and selection of sample
- ◆ outline of procedures to be followed
- ◆ materials or apparatus to be used

You must verify that planned research materials and participant-sampling methods follow an ethical code of practice. You should give learners advice about approaching participants, briefing, debriefing, and ethical conduct as they plan and conduct their research.

Outcome 3 requires learners to implement the design outlined in outcome 2, and conduct research into a psychological topic relating to the chosen theme. Learners must ensure the planned research is carried out ethically. Learners can work collaboratively to collect data if they can ensure substantively different submissions. The data analysis must be learners' own work. More than one learner could, however, use the same data to answer a different research question. For example, one learner might investigate age differences, while another might investigate social class differences. The research questions and aims would be dependent on a learner's literature review.

A suitable prescribed format for the report could contain the following information in a formal written laboratory report:

- ◆ abstract or summary
- ◆ introduction and literature review (this literature review section, comprising the introduction section of the research, must include theories, and supporting and refuting research evidence to meet the requirements of outcome 1)
- ◆ aim of the research, and research question or hypotheses
- ◆ method containing information on design, participants, apparatus or materials, procedural and ethical considerations
- ◆ results using descriptive and inferential statistics
- ◆ discussion and conclusion (including critical evaluation and ethical implications)
- ◆ bibliography and references
- ◆ materials used and raw data (perhaps as an appendix or appendices)

They could use similar headings to structure an oral presentation.

NextGen: HN published prototype unit specification for use in pilot delivery only (version 2.0)  
August 2024

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 9 study.

Learners could create a blog to 'journal' the process of their research. They could include a range of films, and use visual images and text to support and relate to the literature review. It is important that they present their blog using an agreed format to ensure they meet the knowledge and skills required across all outcomes.

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 8. 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 8.

## **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

### Psychology: Critical Analysis and Research of Themes (SCQF level 8)

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 builds develops your knowledge and understanding of psychological thinking and theories related to specific themes. It enables you to:

- ◆ critically analyse psychological theories
- ◆ design an investigation
- ◆ conduct research
- ◆ analyse data using inferential statistics
- ◆ report on your findings for a selected theme

The unit is aimed at learners who want to further their knowledge and skills in psychology. Before you start the unit, you should have good communication skills and an interest in psychology. You should have previous study of psychology at SCQF level 7 or similar. It would also be helpful to have some basic digital skills.

During the unit, you learn about psychological thinking and theories related to specific themes.

On completing the unit you can:

- 1 critically analyse key psychological contributions to a theme
- 2 design an investigation in psychology
- 3 conduct research into a psychological topic related to a theme, using a recognised research process
- 4 analyse data produced using inferential statistics and report on findings

You should aim to develop an enquiring and critical mind, thinking about ideas such as:

- ◆ how psychological theories develop and how research can support or refute theories or ideas
- ◆ how ethical issues can arise in research

NextGen: HN published prototype unit specification for use in pilot delivery only (version 2.0)  
August 2024

You are assessed using an open-book assessment covering all unit outcomes. This means that you have access to materials such as textbooks, notes and your VLE. You can give your assessment response in writing or orally. If your assessment response is written, it must be 2,500 to 3,000 words, and if it is oral, it must be between 18 and 22 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 analyse data and produce assessments. You also use internet sources and online library sources to research information on psychological theories and concepts and develop your understanding around the themes.

The unit introduces you to Learning for Sustainability ideas, with links made to the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#). These are particularly relevant when you study your chosen themes and psychological theories, related to human behaviour and mental health.

You may be able to study a degree programme in a related subject if you study the unit as part of HND 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 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 current and future study, and employment.



# Administrative information

---

**Published:** August 2024 (version 2.0)

**Superclass:** PK

---

## History of changes

| Version | Description of change  | Date       |
|---------|--|------------|
| 2.0     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Removed reference to requirement to use holistic assessment in 'Evidence requirements' and 'Information for learners'.</li><li>◆ In 'Approaches to assessment', additional words that a holistic or portfolio approach can be used were added.</li><li>◆ Added an additional theme of 'Applications of psychological research' that could be useful in covering inferential statistics in outcome 4.</li></ul> | April 2024 |
|         |  |            |
|         |  |            |
|         |  |            |

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