

Higher National Unit Specification

Sociology: Thematic and Critical Approaches (SCQF level 8)

Unit code: J7D6 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.

This edition: August 2024 (version 2.0)

© Scottish Qualifications Authority 2023, 2024

Unit purpose

This unit builds on learners' knowledge and understanding of the sociological imagination, applied perspectives, and related concepts and theories.

Learners assess the contribution of theories, theorists, and studies to the development of sociological thinking on specific themes, and critically analyse and evaluate opposing sociological contributions to those themes.

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

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 sociology, for example National Qualifications at SCQF levels 6 or Higher National (HN) Qualifications at SCQF level 7, PDA in Sociology 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 evaluate the contribution of a theory, theorist or study to the development of sociological thinking on a theme
- 2 critically analyse opposing key sociological theories on a theme
- 3 critically evaluate opposing key sociological theories on a theme

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 and 3,000 words, and oral responses must be 18 to 22 minutes in duration. In terms of evidence, the assessment must focus on one theme, although inevitably other themes may overlap.

Learners study four themes in total: two from the approved course themes list, and a further two from the subject-specific list. Learners taking this 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:

- ◆ Social theory (contested knowledge)
- ◆ Society and welfare
- ◆ Religion
- ◆ Post colonialism
- ◆ Sport and leisure
- ◆ Public health and pandemics
- ◆ Society, risk and security

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

- ◆ The body and self
- ◆ Ageing and the life course

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

Learners' responses must include:

- ◆ an evaluation of the contribution of one theory, theorist, or study to the development of sociological thinking on one theme, to include:
 - the identification of a theory, theorist or study that has contributed to sociological thinking on the specific theme
 - an explanation of that theory, study, or work of a theorist relevant to the chosen theme
 - an evaluation of the theory, theorist, or study in terms of its contribution to sociological thinking on the chosen theme
- ◆ a critical analysis of two opposing key sociological theories that inform a debate on the chosen theme. These theories can either support or refute the sociological thinking on the chosen theme of the main theorist, theory or study
- ◆ a critical evaluation of the two opposing theories that inform a debate on the chosen theme, using relevant studies and evidence to support or refute the arguments made on that theme

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 should:

- ◆ contribute information that is complex, accurate and relevant to its purpose and audience
- ◆ present complex ideas clearly and coherently
- ◆ use a structure that is appropriate to the purpose
- ◆ select the most appropriate sources of information and accurately reference source materials

Knowledge and skills

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

Knowledge	Skills
<p>Outcome 1 Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ the development of the different paradigms and perspectives that have characterised sociology ◆ how sociological thinking has developed over time for specific themes ◆ the contribution of particular theorists, theories and studies to understanding of specific themes 	<p>Outcome 1 Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ identify a theorist, theory or study that has contributed to sociological thinking on a theme ◆ evaluate the contribution of the chosen theory, theorist, or study to the development of sociological thinking on a theme
<p>Outcome 2 Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ opposing sociological theories and perspectives that inform debates around specific themes ◆ relevant studies that support sociological perspectives and theories around specific themes ◆ concepts, ideas, and viewpoints that support or contest arguments underpinning the chosen theories and studies for specific themes ◆ how to critically analyse theories or studies 	<p>Outcome 2 Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ critically analyse opposing theories on a theme
<p>Outcome 3 Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ how to critically evaluate theories using related studies, evidence, concepts, ideas, or other viewpoints ◆ how studies or evidence support or refute sociological thinking 	<p>Outcome 3 Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ critically evaluate key sociological theories that inform debates around a theme ◆ use relevant studies to support or refute sociological thinking on a theme

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 vary depending on the chosen topics and assessment method.

Self-management

This meta-skill includes:

- ◆ focusing: showing good time management when completing assessments and team tasks; completing assessments and project work to clear deadlines
- ◆ integrity: acting in an ethical way to complete assessments; developing good working relationships with peers; including citations and referencing for assessments; considering plagiarism and intellectual property
- ◆ adapting: acquiring new ideas and knowledge about concepts; using different digital technologies to complete assessments; reflecting on own performance to improve approach
- ◆ initiative: developing own ideas and areas of enquiry; making informed decisions on which aspects, theories or evidence to study; gathering information using library facilities

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 ideas and opinions on theories and unit themes
- ◆ feeling: demonstrating self- and social-awareness, and highlighting empathy in discussion and submissions; respecting other viewpoints in discussions
- ◆ collaborating: working together on formative presentations; taking account of others in planning and carrying out tasks; building relationships with peers
- ◆ leading: taking responsibility; taking account of others, sharing information; being proactive in leading tasks and organising group work

Innovation

This meta-skill includes:

- ◆ curiosity: gathering and sourcing information independently; using tools, such as Google Books and Google Scholar, in library research time; taking part in class discussion and debates; questioning assumptions, ideas, information and research evidence
- ◆ sense-making: participating in discussion; gaining an understanding of why people behave as they do; synthesising and evaluating a range of ideas and evidence
- ◆ critical thinking: making logical connections and reasoned judgements through discussion; 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:

- ◆ innovation: creativity

You can find more information on how to develop these in the Educator Guide.

Literacies

Learners develop core skills in the following literacies:

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 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 sociological themes, theorists, related studies and source materials. You can give them guidance on appropriate sources and presentation software. 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 the unit, there are opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding of social sustainability while studying themes, particularly social class, race and ethnicity, poverty and social exclusion, health and medicine or crime and deviance, with links to [the UN Sustainable Development Goals](#).

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

- 1 No poverty: relevant to themes of society and welfare, and ageing and the life course
- 3 Good health and well-being: relevant to the themes, pandemics and public health, the body and self, and ageing and the life course
- 5 Decent work and economic growth: relevant to the themes of society and welfare; and society, risk, and security
- 10 Reduced inequalities: relevant to the themes of society and welfare; society, risk and security; and ageing and the life course
- 12 Peace, justice, and strong institutions: relevant to the themes of society and welfare; social theory (contested knowledge); and society, risk and security

Delivery of unit

This 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 you allocate to each outcome is at your discretion; however, you should consider all outcomes together when you deliver the unit.

Additional guidance

The guidance in this section is not mandatory.

Content and context for this unit

The unit aims to give learners skills to analyse and critically evaluate sociological theories and associated studies and to demonstrate their relevance to different course and sociological themes, sub themes or intersections. You should introduce learners to sociological theories and four different themes to help them acquire knowledge and a critical understanding of historical and contemporary social processes and social changes.

We can draw relevant theories and studies from ‘classical’ sociology — such as functionalism, Marxism, and Weberian and social action theories. In this unit, however, you should emphasise contemporary sociology — such as postmodernism, cultural studies, post-structuralism and feminism. Learners’ understanding should extend beyond structure and agency, and whether the objective study of society is possible. You could emphasise the post- and late-modernity approaches, enabling you to cover the outcomes and help prepare learners for progress to a degree programme. You can find further suggestions in the individual subject themes later on in this section.

You should encourage learners to engage with post-structural and postmodern perspectives to critically evaluate sociological contributions to chosen themes, such as those of:

- ◆ Anthony Giddens
- ◆ Zygmunt Bauman
- ◆ Manuel Castells and Grahame Thomson
- ◆ Simon Bromley

Classical approaches are still relevant and can be used in learning and teaching. You can also introduce learners to perspectives that seek to look beyond seemingly irreconcilable differences, such as those of George Ritzer and Douglas Goodman. They believe these boundaries are breaking down, and note that different theories concentrate on different levels of analysis. If learners can achieve a sound level of understanding at this level, it sets a good foundation for the type of critical engagement and evaluation they need to demonstrate should they choose to progress onto SCQF level 9.

Learners must provide evidence of having engaged with debates in sociology on the basis of sociological literature. They should cite theorists, authors, studies and dates in their evidence. They should also demonstrate skills of critical analysis and evaluation. For example, they should show that they have moved beyond straightforward dichotomous debates — such as structure versus agency, and consensus versus conflict — to consider theories and relevant studies that aim to critique, reconcile or synthesise such dichotomies. They can debate, for example, a theoretical tradition, such as humanist versus structuralist Marxism or debates that are central to a chosen topic.

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 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 aspects suggested under each theme and you can introduce other appropriate theories or areas of study as you think appropriate. You can cover themes independently or choose themes that intersect well to enhance learners' understanding.

Approved course themes

Learners must study two from this list.

History and social change

History and social change are inherent aspects of the social sciences, and sociology can deal with both, directly and indirectly. The study of any aspect allows learners to see how knowledge and understanding has developed as both a consequence of history and of social change.

No society has ever remained the same. Change is always happening. We accept change as inevitable. Sociologists typically define social change as changes in human interactions and relationships that transform cultural and social institutions. These changes occur historically over time, and often have profound and long-term consequences for society and individuals. Historical examples of social change often, but not exclusively, result from social movements. These include the activist groups fighting for female suffrage, civil rights, women's rights, and LGBTQIA+ rights, to name just a few. As a consequence, social relationships have changed; institutions have changed; and cultural norms, values and behaviours have changed. Learners see how sociology addresses and explains such changes.

Power and control

This is a recurring theme across the social sciences. The narrative of power and control is central to sociological history, and both concepts are important in sociology — typically referred to as 'social order' in sociology textbooks. Despite this, the precise meaning and nature are disputed and there is still no agreement or consensus on an exact definition of either. Broadly speaking, they refer to the ability of some individuals, groups, societies and nations to pursue their own agenda, or to achieve their goals, against challenges and resistance from those who oppose them. Some forms of power and control are coercive, and some have authority and are rooted in legitimacy.

The source of power and control is also broadly defined in sociology as either something people can hold, give away or take from others, or as a product of the social relations running through societies. Power and control shape the discourses, which then provide frameworks and lenses through which we understand the world. The concepts of power and control, however defined, are critical to sociology and you should encourage learners to form their own opinions through the study of these concepts, using sociological perspectives.

Our changing world

This theme is broad enough to allow you to develop it across sociology. Moreover, there is scope to address contemporary issues, including technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence or advances in biotechnologies. You can use theories, such as the social construction of technology (SCOT) or technological determinism, to analyse the profound impact technology has on society.

You can explore what it is to be human, using post-humanism to support debate around the blurring of lines between human and non-human actors. You can also consider issues concerning sex and gender using perspectives and theories such as feminism, symbolic interactionism or queer theory.

There is also scope to address groups' and societies' resistance to change. Human structures and developments — such as the family, education and the political economy — adapt to the changing world, but they also resist change and maintain many similarities over time. A key objective of sociology is to understand change and its absence.

Learners can look at how sociology addresses the following questions:

- ◆ Why do people in poverty typically remain in poverty, even as new technologies create new opportunities for wealth and well-being?
- ◆ Why do individuals and groups of different religions still engage in conflict, even though their belief systems advocate for peace, understanding and fraternity?
- ◆ Why are women still subordinate to men in so much of the world, even as women continue to press for full equality in their societies?

Deviance

Often related to criminality, in sociology deviance refers to actions that do not conform to society's widely accepted norms or values. Deviance is much broader than crime, however, which only accounts for non-conformist conduct that breaks a law. The concept and theme of deviance also applies to both individual behaviour and group activity. It concerns issues of power: when we look at deviance, we must consider whose rules are being broken. No single theory has emerged as dominant in the study of deviance; several theoretical perspectives remain relevant and useful.

The theme of deviance forces us to consider the roles of many social actors, including deviants and criminals, opinion formers and moral entrepreneurs, police forces, courts and politicians. It is an important concept, which links 'bad' or transgressive and subversive behaviour to the social context in which it takes place. Studying deviance forces us to think differently about society's current values and standards of 'normality'. Learners see how sociology addresses these questions, and how it seeks to define and understand the concept.

Inequalities

The state of not being equal — especially in status, rights, wealth and opportunities — is a concept central to sociology. This is largely due to work such as Wilkinson and Pickett's *The Spirit Level*, which demonstrates how inequality in society is detrimental to all. Nonetheless,

public debate and discourse on the subject is prone to confusion, as inequality means different things to different people. Some distinctions are common, however. Many authors differentiate between economic inequalities — such as inequalities in wealth and incomes — or, more generally, inequalities in living conditions or access to resources and opportunities. Others further distinguish a rights-based, legalistic approach to inequality — such as when people are not equal before the law, or when people have unequal political power.

In terms of understanding inequalities, much of the debate aligns to two broad viewpoints. One is primarily concerned with the inequality of outcomes in the material dimensions of an individual or group's life course. This is, typically, the result of environment and circumstances beyond an individual's control, such as ethnicity, family background and gender — so-called 'ascribed statuses'. The second viewpoint is concerned with the inequality of opportunities, concentrating on the circumstances beyond an individual's control that affect their or a group's prospective outcomes. These are typically inequalities in standards of living, such as inequalities in income and/or wealth, education, skills, health and nutrition. There is opportunity across the course and subjects to address inequalities. Learners understand how inequalities change over time, what factors contribute to inequalities, the impact they have on both societies and individuals, and how social science can explain inequalities.

Globalisation

The growing interdependence of the world's economies, cultures and populations — brought about by cross-border trade in goods and services, technology, and flows of investment, people and information — has created a global society. We can trace the idea of a worldwide human society back to discourses about 'humanity' as a whole during the 18th century Enlightenment period. You can also find extracts on globalisation in Lenin's writings on imperialism, Marx's 19th century ideas on the exploitative tendencies of capitalism, and Durkheim's views on the geographical spread of the division of labour. It is an area of focus particularly in sociology, politics and geography.

Although most social scientists can accept the definition above, many disagree on the underlying causes of globalisation and whether it is a positive or negative development. It is a historical process and has economic, political, and cultural dimensions. Contemporary debates stem from a perceived acceleration of globalisation from the 1970s, caused by:

- ◆ the growth and power of multinational corporations
- ◆ concerns about the decline of the nation-state
- ◆ the rise of supranational trading blocs, and regional economic and political entities, such as the European Union
- ◆ cheaper travel leading to more accessible foreign tourism and migration
- ◆ the development of the Internet and other technologies that facilitate rapid global communication

By the 1990s, the concept of globalisation had entered the social science mainstream. This is likely to be evident to learners as globalisation is likely to feature in the course of their studies, even if it is not the specific focus or theme.

You should encourage learners to form their own opinions about the consequences of globalisation. They could study theories such as:

- ◆ Immanuel Wallerstein's (1979) world-systems theory, in which he argues that core countries exploit periphery countries
- ◆ Manuel Castells' (1996) network society theory, in which he considers the democratisation of communication and new social organisation and power
- ◆ Herbert Schiller's (1973) cultural imperialism theory, in which he contends that Western cultural values dominate over other cultures across the world

Culture and identity

Culture and identity can refer to most things and, as such, is difficult and complex to define. In sociology, it broadly refers to a way of life — including knowledge, customs, norms, laws, and beliefs — that characterises a particular society or social group. It is mediated by the social relations and the structures of society. The 1980s 'cultural turn' in the social sciences brought the study of culture into the mainstream. Much of this work is insightful, exploring the roles of cultural production or reproduction and consumption in shaping culture in the form of life chances, social relations, norms and values.

Identity is linked to culture and broadly refers to distinctive aspects of an individual's or group's character, which relates to their sense of self. Identities are made, not given at birth. A person's identity is, at root, their own understanding of who they are as an individual. But identities have clear social aspects because they are formed through the processes of social interaction. Identities are complex and fluid, changing as people gain new roles or leave behind old ones. It also means that identity is rarely fixed but is in a constant process of change. An important consequence is that identities mark out similarities and differences and can be a source of pride and group solidarity or even shame. You should encourage learners to form their own opinions through the study of different approaches, such as:

- ◆ symbolic interactionism, which emphasises the role of language and symbols in identity
- ◆ postmodernism, which questions ideas of a fixed identity
- ◆ intersectionality, which highlights the understanding of privilege and oppression when different aspects of identity (race, sex, class) intersect

Human environments

To deal with issues such as deforestation, desertification, pollution and global warming, people often need to apply natural science research methods and evidence. Nonetheless, as global warming makes explicit, many issues facing the environment are the product of human activity — such as industrialisation, urbanisation and globalisation processes — and the experts in these areas are often sociologists. If we are to correctly understand and challenge those issues that are having an impact on human environments, then sociologists and natural scientists need to improve their shared understanding.

For some, issues regarding human environments remain at the margins of social sciences compared to long-established social issues, such as inequality, poverty, crime, and health. For others, the human environment is one of several new 'central problems' — including risk, terrorism, and globalisation — which are reshaping the social sciences.

Studying human environments requires an understanding of both social relations and natural phenomena, because issues that have an impact on human environments are a product of both human society and the natural environment. This is evident when we consider oil and air pollution, the genetic modification of foods, and global warming. In the early 20th century, the work of Robert Park led to the development of the Chicago school (sometimes known as the ecological school) specialising in urban sociology. In 1974, Henri Lefebvre developed the concept of the social construction of space, based on values and social meanings. Learners could consider how to understand issues concerning human environments in an interdisciplinary way.

Ethics

Ethics refers to the philosophical study of the concepts of moral right and wrong; moral good and bad; and to any system or code of moral rules, principles, or values. The latter may be associated with particular religions, cultures, professions, or virtually any other group that is at least partly characterised by its moral outlook. Ethical ideals and ethical decision-making and approaches, therefore, are central and important. They are contributing factors in terms of social development, and are, moreover, themselves effects and symptoms of social conditions. Ethics is also a critical component of sociology research, as carrying out research has a strong ethical element. Research and knowledge have the potential to impact on people's lives. In that sense, conducting sociology research comes with responsibilities. Like any scientists, sociologists must consider their ethical obligation to avoid harming subjects or groups while conducting their research.

Research conducted on other human beings creates a variety of ethical problems. The trauma and outrage after the discovery of the concentration camps and experiments conducted by the Nazis during World War II led to the creation and agreement of the Nuremberg Code (1947), which laid out ethical research guidelines to help prevent similar atrocities from happening ever again. Learners can consider how ethics applies to their research, or examine how to apply ethical principles in different social contexts — including workplaces, educational settings, and healthcare systems. They can analyse how ethical dilemmas are resolved in these settings and how conflicts between ethical principles are navigated. You can encourage learners to refer to the following important work:

- ◆ Max Weber (1864–1920) on ethics and social action
- ◆ Michel Foucault (1926–1984) on underlying power dynamics and authority
- ◆ Carol Gilligan (1936–) on the ethics of care

Origins of behaviour

This theme deals with the latent and manifest capacity — mentally, physically and socially — of human individuals or groups, to react to internal and external stimuli throughout their life course. Human behaviour is driven by genetic and environmental factors that tend to shape individuals. Human behaviour is also motivated, to some extent, by thoughts and emotions, which provide insight into individual psyche, and can also shape things such as identity, attitudes, and values.

Sociologists can be interested in how genetic factors influence behaviour within specific social contexts or cultural environments. They may examine how genetic traits interact with social norms, values, and institutions to produce certain types of behaviour or outcomes.

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

Sociologists may also explore how social factors — such as socioeconomic status, race, or gender — interact with genetic factors to shape behaviour and influence social outcomes. You can encourage learners to read:

- ◆ Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002), known for his work on the importance of social and cultural factors shaping patterns of human behaviour
- ◆ Sarah Richardson (1970–), who has written extensively on social and cultural dimensions of genetics and biology
- ◆ Nikolas Rose (1947–), who has argued that genetic knowledge has the potential to reshape social identities

Subject-specific themes

Learners must study two from this list.

Social theory (contested knowledge)

Social theories are frameworks, or paradigms, typically used to define and understand social phenomena. They relate to historical debates over the validity and reliability of different methodologies and approaches, such as positivism and interpretivism, and the primacy of either structure or agency.

You can introduce learners to the key post-structuralists or postmodernists. For example, they could look at Michel Foucault, who studied power and discourse around themes such as deviance, the body and identity. This then developed into the postmodernism of Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard and Zygmunt Bauman. They questioned the so-called ‘meta narratives’ and conceptions of society that sociology had historically relied on to develop understanding.

They could contrast these with more contemporary theories of globalisation — such as those of Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, Scott Lash and John Urry — that challenge the postmodern view and traditional sociological perspectives.

These theoretical disagreements and creation of new perspectives are likely to form the foundation for most of the debates around the themes, broadly defined as:

- ◆ involvement
- ◆ detachment
- ◆ synthesis

Society and welfare

This theme also intersects with many others, including history and social change, inequalities, and globalisation. Learners should already be familiar with theories of stratification, and relative and absolute poverty and mobility.

Good places to start to understand established sociological thinking on issues like the consequences of globalisation and implications for society and welfare and inequalities are

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

debates around globalisation and studies from sociologists such as Ulrich Beck (1992) and William Robinson (2004).

You could lead into arguments about the relevance of class at both the local and global level and the growing importance of consumption, social fragmentation and individualisation.

Religion

This theme also intersects with many others, including power and control, culture and identity, and globalisation. Learners may already be familiar with many of the historical aspects of religion associated with social order and socialisation. As such, theories around religion as a force for social change are a good place to start. You could look at the work of Otto Maduro (1982) around the idea that religious movements can in fact promote social change and counter ruling-class ideologies and interests:

You could then contrast this with Casanova's (2004) research, which asserts that religion continues to be irrational and remains a major source of societal conflict. You could look at the impact of globalisation and commodification on religion and religious cultures, and on identities in postmodernist accounts, such as those of Hervieu-Léger (2000) and Lyon (2000).

You could also look at the growth of denominations, sects, or cults and so-called New Age Movements (NAMs). And you could look at secularisation, globalisation and fundamentalism.

Postcolonialism

This theme also intersects well with many others, including history and social change, power and control, and social theory (contested knowledge). Although sociological thinking developed late regarding issues around postcolonialism; postcolonialism is a developing field when compared with anthropology, cultural and literary studies, and history.

Starting in the 1950s, sociologists pioneered the study of colonies as historical formations and started questioning how to apply Western social scientific concepts and theories to the global majority — that is to say, most of the world's population that live in developing countries or the 'global south'. Sociologists ask how sociology itself has been shaped by empires.

You could also look at current sociological research debates on areas such as capitalism, war and violence.

Sport and leisure

This theme also intersects well with many others, including culture and identity, postcolonialism, and globalisation. In recent years, sport has developed significantly in terms of social importance. Economically, the sport industry has expanded globally as leagues and competitions sell television rights for increasing amounts. Sport increasingly attracts elites, both sportspeople and fans, and global capital.

Cities and nations seek to market and 'brand' themselves through hosting sports teams and events. In cultural terms, sport is a key driver in the expansion of the mass and social media,

and socially, sport dominates much of public discourse and anchors many of our social identities.

There is much available research on the sociological analysis of sport within capitalist societies, with respect to class divisions, ideologies, and conflicts. You could look at how sports can enfranchise or disenfranchise marginal or dominated social groups. You could also use the lens of colonialism and postcolonialism to consider the position of minority communities within sport.

Public health and pandemics

This theme also intersects well with many others, including inequalities; society, risk, and security; and globalisation. Sociological thinking has demonstrated that, in terms of sociological study, the rise of both the nation-state and industrial development means the size, composition and dynamics of human populations are of much greater importance. The health and well-being of a population has an impact on a society's productivity, prosperity, defensive capabilities, and rate of growth. A good place to start is Michel Foucault's analysis of European states' regulation and disciplining of human bodies.

Public health aimed to eradicate diseases from the population or 'social body', and the state also assumed responsibility for improving people's living conditions. Since the 1990s, a 'new' public health model has emerged, with the emphasis shifting from the state back onto the individual. This model puts the emphasis on self-monitoring, illness prevention and 'care of the self', so health becomes a responsibility attached to citizenship.

Research into the effect of pandemics continues to emerge. Alan Peterson and Deborah Lupton (2000) highlight how risks are mediated on a global, national, and everyday level. They also show how socio-cultural knowledge, institutions, and resources shape responses.

In all countries, people have had to manage the experience of an uncertain new threat under very different conditions. And how this affects them depends on, for example, how they earn their income, whether they are part of a stigmatised group, and how efficiently pandemics are governed.

Society, risk and security

This theme also intersects well with many others, including deviance, power and control, and society and welfare. There is a lot of scope for coverage here, as risk in sociology is a broad concept, as are security and society. Society, risk and security links well to social theory (contested knowledge), as the extent to which society is indeed postmodern or a 'risk' society is one of the more significant contemporary debates. In this context, the theme refers to the notion that advanced industrial societies have created many new, or certainly previously unknown, hazards or manufactured risks, such as global warming or, more broadly, uncertainty.

The belief that industrial societies had resolved issues of scarcity and social class led to the development of the postmodern turn and the so-called 'death of class'.

Others argue that, although industrial societies are undergoing a transformation, they are not becoming postmodern, rather, society is changing to a risk society. Research from

sociologists such as Ulrich Beck considers people's material needs not being met, and decreasing security at the individual and societal level:

Life chances for many individuals and social groups are increasingly unequal and undermined by a lack of resources. The risks associated with late modernity leads to increased uncertainty.

The body and self

This theme intersects well with many others, including ageing and the life course, deviance, and culture and identity. Historically, people viewed the body as biological, outside the domain of sociology. Michael Foucault's work changed that. The main debates centre around the degree to which bodies are public or private, and to what extent the body is self-defined by our actions and context. There is an increasing understanding of how social factors interact with the body to influence shape and health.

Reshaping or redefining the body has an impact on people's identity and their experience of the world. Increasingly, the body and self are seen as social and physical constructions. Anthony Giddens (2001) suggests that bodies are tools that can be used — for example, through fashion, modification and exercise — to be instrumental in particular ways of life or lifestyles.

The body becomes part of an ongoing project central to identity and notions of the self. It is both something we are and something we have. It is often our primary means of expressing our individuality and desires as well as our social cleavages. Sarah Nettleton and Jonathan Watson (1998) suggest that, by focusing on our bodies and working on them for public consumption, we turn ourselves into our own 'project'.

Ageing and the life course

This theme intersects well with many others, including society and welfare, inequalities, and our changing world (science and technology). Traditionally seen as biological and psychological, ageing and the life course is a growing theme in sociology. Sociologists argue that we cannot understand ageing and the life course without reference to social context. For example, the meanings, roles, and identities associated with stages of the life course vary from society to society. Changes in welfare and society, inequality and the unequal distribution of science and technology means many social groups, due to the accumulation of risks, have vastly different experiences. The concept of the life course in sociology captures this variation in life stages, generational experience and shifting social conditions.

People's experience of the stages of life varies, both in different societies and over time in the same society. Cultural norms and the material circumstances of people's lives in given types of society influence stages of the life course.

There are, however, increasing arguments that modern forms of the life course are breaking down. Phases are becoming obtuse as the boundaries between appear to blur. Postmodern sociological thinking contrasts choice and fluidity with the impact of diversity and fragmentation, and rapid social change.

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.

The themes are designed to be broad and inclusive, able to accommodate you and your learners' interests (or specialities), and to encourage and facilitate some development of subject themes across the course.

The subject themes outlined here provide a good place to start noting key theorists and debates. Any of the main texts for sociology at this level allow development of these themes and highlight key theorists, debates and studies.

A good starting point for delivery of the unit is the theme of social theory (contested knowledge). You could introduce learners to the theorists, theories and studies they need to be aware of to meet outcomes. You could then develop this, a phase that is likely to intersect into other themes or form a foundation for other selected course or subject themes.

Evaluate the contribution of a theory, theorist or study to the development of sociological thinking on a theme (outcome 1)

Learners should identify a theorist, theory or study that has contributed to sociological thinking on a theme. The theme of social theory (contested knowledge) is a useful place to start. Not only is it a theme, but it also provides a good introduction to possible theoretical approaches, main studies and the broad debates that characterise sociology and form the basis for the opposing theories. It can also lead into other themes that you might develop.

The debates highlighted here can form the basis for opposing theories in the other themes, such as:

- ◆ Are we the creators of society or created by it?
- ◆ Is society orderly or defined by persistent conflict?
- ◆ Is it outdated to see things in these terms?
- ◆ Do we need some kind of synthesis of approaches?

The choice between these alternatives is often not so clear and many contemporary theories seek to show the relationship between these approaches.

If you are covering the themes of inequalities; society, risk and security; globalisation; or history and social change, you could introduce studies for discussion and evaluation, such as Ulrich Beck's (1992) work.

This influential study argues that capitalist societies were changing in important ways and suggests risk in contemporary societies characterises all groups, making class an increasingly irrelevant concept for social analysis. Beck's views informed Jan Pakulski and Malcolm Waters' (1996) argument that the concept of class is outdated in a postmodern, globalised consumer society:

Critically analyse opposing key sociological theories on a theme (outcome 2)

In this outcome, learners should critically analyse opposing theories for a specific theme. Ulrich Beck's thesis and the studies that it influenced have promoted a lot of debate, and led to a body of work that provides opposing views and analysis. This includes John Westergaard and Henrietta Resler's (1975) research, in which they argue that class differences are becoming 'hardened' and that your economic position defines your opportunities more than ever:

You could then introduce learners to connected debates, including Michael Savage (2000) and Fiona Devine (2005), who focus on connections between class analysis and culture and opposes the theories of individualisation discussed by theorists such as Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens.

Critically evaluate opposing key sociological theories on a theme (outcome 3)

In this outcome, learners should evaluate key sociological theories that inform debates around one theme, using relevant studies that support or refute sociological thinking on that theme. Although, much of this will be covered in outcomes 1 and 2, you can introduce learners to established examples of evaluation that deal with the sociological approaches used either directly or indirectly. So, for example, although Ulrich Beck and John Westergaard hold opposing views and the focus is broadly on social class, their views also form part of a wider debate in sociology around individualisation, modernity, and globalisation, as well as the shift from industrial to knowledge economy and a society of production or consumption.

You should encourage learners to research and source their own information for evaluation. You can give specific tasks to help them direct their research.

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
- ◆ virtual learning environment (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

Although learners study four themes, 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 an open-book essay question, set of structured questions, case study or portfolio approach. Learners must provide a response of 2,500 to 3,000 words, or an individual oral presentation or poster exhibition of 18 to 22 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, potentially involving a mixed approach (perhaps a written response of 1,500 words and a 10-minute oral presentation).

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 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 for outcomes 1 and 2 and cover outcome 3 in an oral presentation. In this case, the total time across both outcomes and all evidence requirements would be 18 to 22 minutes. So, the learner would spend 12 to 15 minutes orally presenting the poster content and 6 to 10 minutes presenting their response to outcome 3.

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.

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.

Learners could collaborate with each other and you to devise their own focus of study. They could develop this in either an essay, presentation, poster, or oral presentation using presentation software. This should be a substantive piece of work, which allows learners to respond in non-prescriptive ways, and to develop and demonstrate their 'sociological imagination' through critically understanding and evaluating the sociological perspectives, theories and studies on selected themes.

Assessment methods should encourage learners to discuss the themes in the context of contrasting sociological perspectives. Learners have some flexibility in determining the perspectives and area of focus within the theme.

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

Sociology: Thematic and Critical Approaches (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 on your knowledge and understanding of sociological thinking, perspectives, related concepts, and theories. You evaluate the development of sociological thinking on specific themes, and critically analyse and evaluate opposing sociological contributions to those themes.

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

On completing this unit, you can:

- 1 evaluate the contribution of a theory, theorist or study to the development of sociological thinking on a theme
- 2 critically analyse opposing key sociological theories on a theme
- 3 critically evaluate opposing key sociological theories on a theme

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

- ◆ the development of both classical and postmodern sociological theories
- ◆ the contribution theories have made to our understanding of the relationship between the individual and society through the lenses of selected themes
- ◆ whether the differences in sociological perspectives are reconcilable
- ◆ to what extent sociological perspectives differ and why, in respect to understanding the relationship between the individual and society and in relation to selected themes
- ◆ what theories and perspectives ultimately tell us about the relationship between an individual and society, informing our understanding of selected themes

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 virtual learning environment (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.

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

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 sociological perspectives, concepts and theories.

The unit introduces you to Learning for Sustainability ideas, with links made to UN Sustainable Development Goals. These are particularly relevant to many aspects of sociological study, and link directly to several of both the course and subject themes, including: society and welfare; pandemics and public health; and society, risk, and security.

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: EE

History of changes

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

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