

Proposed GCE AS and A Level Subject Content for Sociology

The criteria

Introduction

AS and A level subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all AS and A level specifications in a given subject.

They provide the framework within which the awarding organisation creates the detail of the specification.

Aims and objectives

1. The study of *A Level Sociology* must focus on contemporary society. Studying sociology must foster the development of critical and reflective thinking with a respect for social diversity. It must provide an awareness of the importance of social structure and social action in explaining social issues. Learners must be encouraged to develop their own sociological awareness through active engagement with the contemporary social world.

2. GCE specifications in sociology must encourage learners to:

- acquire knowledge and a critical understanding of contemporary social processes and social changes;
- appreciate the significance of theoretical and conceptual issues in sociological debate;
- understand and evaluate sociological methodology and a range of research methods through active involvement in the research process;
- develop skills that enable individuals to focus on their personal identity, roles and responsibilities within society; and
- develop a lifelong interest in social issues.

Subject content

3. GCE AS and A level specifications in sociology must provide learners with an awareness of social structure and social action which emphasises different interpretations of social experiences. The specifications must build on skills established at GCSE but must not exclude learners studying sociology for the

first time.

Knowledge and understanding

The nature of sociological thought

4. GCE AS and AS and A level specifications will require learners to study the following concepts and theoretical issues:

- social order, social control;
- social change;
- conflict and consensus;
- social structure and social action;
- the role of values; and
- the relationship between sociology and contemporary social policy.

Methods of sociological enquiry

5. GCE AS and A level specifications will require learners to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a range of methods and sources of data and to understand the relationship between theory and methods, particularly the way sociologists deal with:

- the collection of primary and secondary data;
- the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data using appropriate concepts;
- factors influencing the design and conduct of sociological research; and
- practical, ethical and theoretical issues arising in sociological research.

Themes

6. GCE AS and A level specifications will require learners to study two themes:

- socialisation, culture and identity; and
- social differentiation, power and stratification.

7. The themes must be understood and applied to a range of particular substantive areas of sociology, in a global context where appropriate.

However, these themes are to be interpreted broadly as threads running through many areas of social life and should not therefore necessarily be regarded as discrete topics. For example, the theme of 'socialisation, culture and identity' might be addressed through aspects of 'families' but equally through aspects of the 'the media' or 'youth culture'. Similarly, the theme of 'social differentiation, power and stratification' might be addressed through aspects of 'social class' but equally through aspects of 'gender'.

Skills

8. In order to demonstrate the skills outlined in this section, learners must relate them to their sociological knowledge and understanding, as specified in sections 4, 5, 6 and 7.

Collection and recording of evidence*

9. GCE AS and A level specifications will require learners to demonstrate their ability to:

- analyse and evaluate the design of sociological investigations; and
- analyse and evaluate the method(s) used in these investigations to collect and record evidence.

10. This could be achieved by learners designing and conducting sociological investigation.

Interpretation and evaluation of evidence*

11. GCE AS and A level specifications will require learners to demonstrate their ability to:

- distinguish between facts, opinions and value judgements;
- select and apply a range of relevant concepts and theories;
- interpret qualitative and quantitative data;
- identify and evaluate significant social trends shown in evidence; and
- evaluate theories, arguments and evidence.

* The term *evidence* should be understood to include both primary and secondary sources, as well as both quantitative and qualitative data.

Presentation of evidence* and argument

12. GCE AS and A level specifications will require learners to demonstrate their ability to:

- organise evidence and communicate arguments in a coherent manner;
- demonstrate an awareness and understanding of theoretical debates in sociology; and
- use evidence to support and sustain arguments and conclusions.

Additional requirements

13. In addition, GCE A level specifications will require learners to demonstrate:

- a wider range and greater depth of knowledge and understanding than at AS; and
- more highly developed skills of application, analysis, interpretation and evaluation than at AS.