



Department
for Education

Sociology

Draft GCSE subject content

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The content for sociology GCSE

Introduction

1. GCSE subject content sets out the knowledge, understanding and skills common to all GCSE specifications in a given subject. They provide the framework within which awarding organisations create the detail of the subject specifications.
2. This document sets out the knowledge, understanding and skills common to all GCSE specifications in sociology.

Aims and objectives

3. GCSE specifications in sociology should inspire and engage students through a challenging, broad, coherent and rigorous course of study. Students will develop a critical understanding and explore and debate contemporary social issues so that they are able to challenge everyday understandings of social phenomena from a sociological perspective. Specifications will develop students' ability to think sociologically in relation to their experience of the social world around them, so that they are better able to play a positive, active and informed role within society. The knowledge, understanding and skills developed through the study of GCSE sociology will also provide a basis for further learning and career choices.
4. GCSE specifications in sociology must enable students to:
 - apply their sociological knowledge, understanding and skills to develop an understanding of the interrelationships between individuals, groups, institutions and societies, within a UK and global context
 - critically analyse information and use evidence in order to make informed arguments, reach substantiated judgements and to draw conclusions
 - use and apply their knowledge and understanding of how social structures and processes influence social control, power and inequality
 - use sociological theories to explain social issues and debates
 - understand and evaluate sociological methodology and a range of research methods
 - use sociological terminology appropriately and make connections between the key areas of subject content

Subject content

5. GCSE specifications in sociology must reflect the aims and learning outcomes.

Knowledge and understanding

6. All specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following topic areas (in a UK context except where otherwise stated):

6.1 The sociological approach

- students will have an understanding of some of the theories and approaches to the study of society including:
 - structuralist approaches that focus on the way in which society influences our everyday lives, including the ideas of Emile Durkheim
 - interactionist approaches that concentrate on the way people behave within society, including the ideas of Howard Becker
 - consensus theories that focus on the notion of key norms and values, including functionalism
 - conflict theories that emphasise a view of society as organised and structured to give power to some groups over others, including Marxism (the ideas of Karl Marx) and feminism (the ideas of Ann Oakley)
- students should consider these theoretical approaches through other classical and contemporary sociologists in addition to the named sociologists above
- students should understand how these sociological approaches and ideas of key thinkers relate to the topic areas of social inequality, social control and power, and social structures and institutions as indicated below
- students must understand and be able to use key sociological terms and concepts appropriately to explain phenomena in society:
 - social structures (including families, education system, the media, criminal justice system and social stratification systems)
 - social processes (including socialisation, norms, values, roles, labelling, discrimination, exercise of power and globalisation)
 - social inequalities (relating to social class, gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, age, disability, religion and belief)

6.2 Social inequality

- patterns of inequality relating to the following social factors: social class, gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, age, disability, religion and belief; with an understanding of how these social factors can impact upon the life chances of individuals in society
- how functionalist, Marxist and feminist theories explain patterns of inequality

- patterns of social mobility and the usefulness of different sociological theories of social mobility including functionalism and Marxism
- the prevalence of poverty, including the impact of globalisation. Students should understand the concepts of the culture of poverty and material deprivation
- welfare reforms and social policy initiatives to address inequalities and facilitate social mobility in society. These will include the contemporary welfare state and social policies relating to discrimination

6.3 Social control and power

- different forms of power in contemporary society including formal and informal sources of power, including the state and its institutions and interpersonal relationships
- the usefulness of key sociological theories on the use and distribution of power, including the ideas of Karl Marx
- the inequality of power based on social class, gender, ethnicity and race, age, religion and beliefs
- the role and function of the contemporary welfare state
- the nature and significance of power in relationships involving intimate relationships, parents and children, school teachers and students, members of the public and the police

6.4 Social structures and institutions

- the role and function of key institutions in society, including families, the education system, the media, and the criminal justice system

Families

- the sociological theories of 'the family'. Students will understand the ideas, strengths and weaknesses of the key approaches of functionalism, Marxism and feminism
- different types of family that exist, including: nuclear families, lone parent families, extended families, reconstituted families and single sex families. Students will also understand the concept of family diversity within a UK and global context
- changes in the patterns of marriage and divorce in the UK since 1945. This will include explanations relating to changes in the law, changes in social attitudes, and changes in the position of women
- gender roles and relationships in the family, including: the nature of gender roles and relationships, and how roles and relationships have changed over time
- current issues and concerns relating to families in the UK, including domestic violence and forced marriages
- social policy initiatives relevant to families, and their strengths and weaknesses

Education system

- the sociological theories of the role and function of education. Students must understand the ideas, strengths and weaknesses of the key approaches of functionalism and Marxism
- different types of schools, and their strengths and weaknesses, including: independent schools, grammar schools, faith schools, academies, free schools
- the different patterns of educational achievement based on social class, gender and ethnicity
- influences on educational achievement, including: type of school attended; family background; material deprivation; and processes within schools, including streaming, labelling and the self-fulfilling prophecy
- contemporary social policy initiatives relating to education, including their strengths and weaknesses

The media

- the sociological theories of the media as a source of power and control in contemporary society. Students will understand the ideas, strengths and weaknesses of the key approaches of functionalism, Marxism and feminism
- the role the media plays in the socialisation of individuals in society, and how different groups are represented in the media
- how the media can influence the attitudes and behaviour of audiences. Students must be able to assess the usefulness of the following key sociological theories: the hypodermic syringe approach, the uses and gratifications approach, and the decoding approach
- the impact on society of technological change and the globalisation of the media

Criminal justice system

- the sociological theories relating to social order. Students will understand the ideas, strengths and weaknesses of the key theories, including functionalism, Marxism and feminism
- the different concepts of crime and deviance and how such concepts can be seen to be socially constructed
- the different methods of social control, both formal and informal methods, including the criminal justice system and unwritten rules and sanctions
- the patterns of crime relating to social class, gender and ethnicity, and the different sociological explanations of criminal behaviour, including labelling theory and relative deprivation
- the usefulness of the main sources of data on crime, including official statistics recorded by the police, victim surveys, and self-report studies

6.5 Sociological research methods

- the processes involved in research design, including the establishment of appropriate aims and relevant hypotheses, the use of pilot studies, the selection of appropriate sampling methods, and the analysis of data
- qualitative and quantitative methods including: questionnaires, interviews, observations
- the value, application, and strengths and weaknesses of different methods
- the usefulness of different types of data, including qualitative and quantitative data, and official and non-official statistics
- primary and secondary sources of data
- how to interpret graphs, diagrams, charts and tables, and how to discern patterns and trends in statistical data
- practical issues, including time, cost and access
- ethical issues, including consent, confidentiality and harm to participants and how the issues can be addressed

Students are expected to understand how research methodology can be applied within the contexts listed in 6.2 – 6.4.

Skills

7. GCSE specifications in sociology must require students to:
 - draw on information and evidence from different sources and demonstrate the ability to synthesise them
 - analyse and evaluate different research methods used in sociological investigations and assess, critically, the appropriateness of their use
 - analyse and evaluate information and evidence presented in different written, visual and numerical forms
 - apply their understanding to explore and debate current sociological issues
 - use theories and evidence to present reasoned arguments, make substantiated judgements, and to draw conclusions
 - use sociological theories to explain social issues and debates
 - demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the connections between the different topic areas studied



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