



Department
for Education

Sociology

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.

Aims and objectives

2. 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 study and career choices.

3. GCSE specifications in sociology must enable students to:

- apply their sociological knowledge, understanding and skills to develop an understanding of relationships and tension between social structures and individual agency within a UK and global context
- critically analyse information and use evidence in order to make informed arguments, reach substantiated judgements and 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 understand social issues, debates, social changes and continuities over time
- 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

4. GCSE specifications in sociology:

- must require students to study the content below in a UK context except where otherwise stated

- for each topic area in paragraph 6 specifications must require students to study, critically evaluate and compare and contrast theories or explanations, including the key features of each theory or explanation in the context of the specific topic and area of sociology

Knowledge and understanding

The sociological approach

5. GCSE specifications in sociology must require that through the study of the topics below students know and understand:

- debates within sociology including conflict versus consensus
- how sociological knowledge and ideas change over time and how these ideas inform our understanding of the social world
- the contextualised work of key classical sociologists Durkheim, Marx and Weber referencing both their view of the world and their contribution to the development of the discipline as specified in paragraph 6
- as outlined in paragraph 6, different sociological perspectives on social structures, social processes and social issues, including those informed by: functionalism, Marxism, interactionism and feminism and key arguments of each of the sociologists specified in the section
- the interrelationships between the core areas of sociology
- how to use sociological research methods outlined in paragraph 7 and how they apply to the contexts in paragraph 6
- key sociological terms and concepts concerned with social structures, social processes and social issues and the explanation of social phenomena including: society, socialisation, norms, values, roles, labelling, discrimination, power and authority

Social structures, social processes and social issues

6. GCSE specifications in sociology must require that students know and understand:

Families

- differing views of the functions of families including Parsons' functionalist perspective on primary socialisation and the stabilisation of adult personalities
- explanations of how family forms differ in the UK and within a global context – nuclear, extended, reconstituted, lone parent, single sex, including the work of the Rapoports on family diversity
- different views of conjugal role relationships including joint and segregated, domestic division of labour, decision making/money management, dual career

- families, child rearing and leisure activities including the feminist perspective of Oakley on the idea of the conventional family
- how relationships within families have changed over time including the theory of the symmetrical family and the principle of stratified diffusion developed from the functionalist perspective of Willmott and Young
 - different criticisms of families including isolation and unrealistic idealisation, loss of traditional functions, lack of contact with wider kinship networks, the status and role of women within families, marital breakdown, dysfunctional families and divorce including the work of Zaretsky on developments in families from a Marxist perspective and Delphy and Leonard's feminist critique of families

Education

- different views of the role and functions of education – serving the needs of the economy, facilitating social mobility and fostering social cohesion – including the functionalist perspective of Durkheim on education as the transmission of norms and values and Parsons on achieved status and the operation of schools on meritocratic principles
- different views of the correspondence principle on the relationship between education and capitalism as developed from a Marxist perspective by Bowles and Gintis
- factors affecting educational achievement such as social class, gender and ethnicity and including the work of Halsey on class based inequalities and Ball on parental choice and competition between schools
- processes within schools affecting educational achievement such as streaming, labelling and the self-fulfilling prophecy and including the work of Ball on teacher expectations and Willis on the creation of counter school cultures

Crime and deviance

- the social construction of concepts of crime and deviance and explanations of crime and deviance – anomie, labelling, structural theories, subcultural theories and interactionist theory, including the work of Merton on the causes of crime from a functionalist perspective and Becker from an interactionist perspective
- formal and informal methods of social control and unwritten rules and sanctions including the work of Heidensohn on female conformity in male dominated patriarchal societies
- factors affecting criminal and deviant behaviour including social class, gender, ethnicity and age including the work of Albert Cohen on delinquent subcultures and Carlen on women, crime and poverty
- the usefulness of the main sources of data on crime including the collection of official data on crime, patterns and trends in crime figures and the 'dark figure'

Social stratification

- different views of the functionalist theory of stratification including the work of Davis and Moore on effective role allocation and performance linked to the promise of rewards
- different views of socio-economic class including the work of Marx and Weber
- different views on factors affecting life chances including social class, gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, age, disability, religion and belief including the work of Devine revisiting the idea of the affluent worker
- different interpretations of poverty as a social issue, the culture of poverty, material deprivation and the impact of globalisation including the work of Townsend on relative deprivation and Murray on the underclass
- different forms of power and authority: traditional, charismatic, rational-legal, formal and informal sources of power including the work of Weber on power and authority
- different views on factors affecting power relationships including social class, gender, sexuality, race, age, disability, religion and beliefs including the work of Walby on patriarchy

Sociological research methods

7. GCSE specifications in sociology must require that students know and understand the following research methods, and understand how research methodology can be applied within the contexts listed in paragraph 6:

- 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 the mixed methods approach
- 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 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

Skills

8. 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 the current sociological issues outlined in each of the topic areas above
- use sociological theories and evidence to compare and contrast social issues, construct reasoned arguments and debates, make substantiated judgement and to draw conclusions
- draw connections between the different topic areas studied

9. In addition, GCSE specifications will require students to:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of key sociological theories by reading and responding to extracts which illustrate the different views of sociologists regarding the topics which have been studied. Students should be able to critically analyse and evaluate how the issues have been interpreted by these sociologists



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