



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



*Rewarding Learning*

# **GCE AS and A level subject criteria for sociology**

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September 2006

QCA/06/2865

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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Advanced subsidiary (AS) and advanced (A) level subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding and skills common to all AS and A level specifications in a given subject. They provide the framework within which the awarding body creates the detail of the specification.

Subject criteria are intended to:

- help ensure consistent and comparable standards in the same subject across the awarding bodies
- define the relationship between the AS and A level specifications, with the AS as a subset of the A level
- ensure that the rigour of A level is maintained
- help higher education institutions and employers know what has been studied and assessed.

Any specification that contains significant elements of the subject sociology must be consistent with the relevant parts of these subject criteria.

## 2. Aims

- 2.1 The study of A level sociology should focus on contemporary society. Studying sociology should foster the development of critical and reflective thinking with a respect for social diversity. It should provide an awareness of the importance of social structure and social action in explaining social issues. Students should be encouraged to develop their own sociological awareness through active engagement with the contemporary social world. GCE specifications in sociology should encourage students 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
- develop a lifelong interest in social issues.

## 3. Subject content

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

### 3.2 Knowledge and understanding

#### a) *The nature of sociological thought*

GCE AS and A level specifications will require candidates 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
- the relationship between sociology and contemporary social policy.

#### b) *Methods of sociological enquiry*

GCE AS and A level specifications will require candidates 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
- practical, ethical and theoretical issues arising in sociological research.

#### c) *Themes*

GCE AS and A level specifications will require candidates to study two themes:

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

The themes should 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 'the family' but equally through aspects of the 'the mass 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'.

### 3.3 Skills

In order to demonstrate the skills outlined in this section, candidates should relate them to their sociological knowledge and understanding, as specified in sections 3.2 a) to c).

#### a) *Collection and recording of evidence\**

GCE AS and A level specifications will require candidates to demonstrate their ability to:

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

This could be achieved by candidates designing and conducting a sociological investigation.

#### b) *Interpretation and evaluation of evidence\**

GCE AS and A level specifications will require candidates 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
- evaluate theories, arguments and evidence.

#### c) *Presentation of evidence\* and argument*

GCE AS and A level specifications will require candidates to demonstrate their ability to:

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

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

### 3.4 In addition, GCE A level specifications will require candidates to demonstrate:

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

## 4. Key skills

4.1 AS and A level specifications in sociology should provide opportunities for developing and generating evidence for assessing relevant key skills from the list below. Where appropriate these opportunities should be directly cross-referenced, at specified level(s), to the key skills standards, which may be found on the QCA website ([www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk)).

- Application of number
- Communication
- Improving own learning and performance
- Information and communication technology
- Problem solving
- Working with others

## 5. Assessment objectives

5.1 The assessment objectives and the associated weightings for AS and A level are the same and should be weighted in all specifications as indicated.

Specifications should require that all candidates demonstrate the following assessment objectives in the context of the content and skills prescribed.

Assessment objectives		Weighting
<b>AO1</b>	Knowledge and understanding of the theories, methods, concepts and various forms of evidence outlined in paragraphs 3.2 a), b) and c), and of the links between them. Communication of knowledge and understanding in a clear and effective manner.	45–55%
<b>AO2</b>	Demonstration of skills of application, analysis, interpretation and evaluation as indicated in paragraphs 3.3 a), b) and c).	45–55%

Assessment objective 2 should have a higher weighting at A level than at AS level.

The assessment objectives apply to the whole specification.

## 6. Scheme of assessment

### 6.1 Assessment

Assessment must be entirely through external assessment.

### 6.2 Synoptic assessment

Synoptic assessment will be included at A2 and draw on both assessment objectives.

The definition of synoptic assessment in the context of sociology is as follows:

- synoptic assessment in sociology should engage students in theoretical debate while encouraging an active involvement with the research process. It should foster a critical awareness of contemporary social processes and change. Synoptic assessment should draw together the knowledge, understanding and skills learnt in different aspects of the course and should include the explicit assessment of understanding of the connections between the nature of sociological thought, methods of sociological enquiry and the themes identified in section 3.2 c), using the higher-order skills identified in section 3.4.

Examples of synoptic assessment tasks might include:

- an examination question that assesses a candidate's understanding of the links between sociological theories, methods and substantive topics, and which draws on the candidate's own small-scale research experiences
- an examination question that presents candidates with a research topic that is related to the core themes and requires them to use their theoretical and methodological understanding to create and justify a research proposal
- a stimulus question based on at least one prose passage and/or numerical data making connections between different parts of the course. The question would assess candidates' understanding of these connections in the context of sociological thought and research methods.

### 6.3 Quality of written communication

AS and A level specifications will be required to assess the candidates' quality of written communication in accordance with the guidance document produced by QCA.