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A-level sociology

New specifications

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The new A-levels: the headlines

- Four 'units' reduced to three 'components'.
- Total of 6 hours of written examinations at the end of the course.
- Students encouraged to design and carry out their own research.

In their study of the different topics and elements of their sociology course, all students must acquire knowledge and understanding of:

- Contemporary social processes and social changes
- Sociological theories and perspectives
- Sociological methods, including their strengths and limitations, and the research design of any data under consideration

Core themes

Students must also study the following two core themes:

- Socialisation, culture and identity
- Social differentiation, power and stratification.

These core themes should be interpreted as threads running through many areas of social life, and should not necessarily be regarded as discrete topics. Rather they should be understood and applied to a range of particular substantive areas of sociology, in a global context where appropriate.

Co-teaching

The new specifications have been designed to be fully co-teachable with the new AS within the first year of study.

The assessment objectives

These are set by Ofqual and are the same across all AS and A-level sociology specifications and all exam boards.

There are three assessment objectives:

AO1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of sociological theories, concepts and evidence.

AO2 Apply sociological theories, concepts, evidence and research methods to a range of issues.

AO3 Analyse and evaluate sociological theories, concepts, evidence and research methods in order to present arguments, make judgements and draw conclusions.

The new specifications: content and skills

What stays the same and what changes?

- For all boards, 'units' have been replaced by 'components'.
- There are now three components to an A-level, rather than four units.
- There are now three Assessment Objectives, rather than two.
- All boards have made an effort to reduce the number of changes made to their specification content, while updating where necessary.

Board	New content	Revised content	Deleted content
AQA	Education with Theory and Methods now compulsory Crime and Deviance with Theory and Methods now compulsory Globalisation now included in all topics 'Work' as part of Work, Poverty and Welfare	Wealth, Poverty and Welfare renamed as Work, Poverty and Welfare	Power and Politics 'Suicide' as an element of Crime and Deviance Different definitions and ways of measuring poverty, wealth and income no longer included in the study of Work, Poverty and Welfare
OCR	Compulsory new section on 'Globalisation and the digital world'	Creation of identities and socialisation also considered in relation to disabilities and sexualities Topics of Crime and Deviance, Education and Religion have stronger global focus	Power and Politics Health No pre-release material.
WJEC			Community and Culture
General observations	AQA Education and Crime and Deviance compulsory topics. Topic content for options largely remains the same.	OCR Greater emphasis on globalisation.	WJEC Few changes to content. Research design still part of exam.

As far as content is concerned, there are relatively few changes, but teachers and students will need to pay attention to the revised assessment objectives, especially the skill of 'application'.

The new specifications: assessment

All examinations are written exams, taken over a total of 6 hours.

Component	AQA	OCR	WJEC
One	<p>Education with Theory and Methods</p> <p>Compulsory questions on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Methods in Context • Theory and Methods <p>2 hrs 33.3% of A level</p>	<p>Socialisation, Culture and Identity</p> <p>Compulsory question on the above,</p> <p>Plus</p> <p>Compulsory questions on one of the following options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families and Relationships • Youth subcultures • Media <p>1hr 30 min 30% of A level</p>	<p>Socialisation and Culture</p> <p>Compulsory question on socialisation and identity.</p> <p>Choice of two options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families and Households • Youth Cultures <p>2hr 30 min 40% of A-level</p>
Two	<p>Topics in Sociology</p> <p>Two structured questions:</p> <p>One from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture and Identity • Families and Households • Health • Work, Poverty and Welfare <p>Plus</p> <p>One from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beliefs in Society • Global Development • The Media • Stratification and Differentiation <p>2 hrs 33.3% of A-level</p>	<p>Researching and understanding social inequalities</p> <p>One compulsory question on research methods and researching social inequalities</p> <p>Plus</p> <p>One compulsory question on understanding social inequalities</p> <p>2hr 15 min 35% of A-level</p>	<p>Methods of Sociological Enquiry</p> <p>Two compulsory questions, one based on stimulus material, the other requiring design and evaluation of piece of research.</p> <p>1hr 45 min 20% of A-level</p>

Three	<p>Crime and Deviance with Theory and Methods</p> <p>Two compulsory questions:</p> <p>Structured question on Crime and Deviance</p> <p>Plus</p> <p>Extended essay on Theory and Methods</p> <p>2 hrs 33.3% of A-level</p>	<p>Debates in Contemporary society</p> <p>One compulsory question on globalisation and the digital social world</p> <p>Plus</p> <p>One compulsory question from one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime and Deviance • Education • Religion, belief and faith <p>2hrs 15 min 35% of A-level</p>	<p>Power and Stratification</p> <p>One compulsory question on social differentiation and stratification.</p> <p>Choice of four options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime and deviance • Health and disability • Politics • World sociology <p>2hr 30 min 40% of A level</p>

Assessment Objective weightings

Board	AO	Paper 1 (approx %)	Paper 2 (approx %)	Paper 3 (approx %)	Overall weighting (approx %)
AQA	AO1	15	13	16	44
	AO2	11	11	9	31
	AO3	8	9	8	25
	Overall weighting	33.3	33.3	33.3	100
OCR	AO1	40–45	30–35	40–45	
	AO2	40–45	30–35	20–25	
	AO3	15–20	35–40	30–35	
	Overall weighting	30	35	35	100
WJEC	AO1	18	9	18	45
	AO2	14	7	14	35
	AO3	8	4	8	20
	Overall weighting	40	20	40	100

What the REVIEW provides for the new specifications

Content

- Articles strongly focussed on specification topics, especially new content.
- ‘Signposts’ drawing out how articles relate to specific subject content and core themes.
- Short pieces on specific concepts.

Data skills

- Article authors describing their data collection and analysis methods.
- Student exercise on some form of data in each issue.
- Suggested ‘mini’ research tasks for students, some to be undertaken and others as research design.

Independent learning with the Online Archive

- Hundreds of past articles on key A-level topics for students to develop their research skills.
- Recent back issues include extra resources such as revision PowerPoints, teaching activities and weblinks.

Assessment

- Exercises designed to understand and develop all examinable skills.
- Sample questions to try, with examiner guidance.
- Specimen student answers with examiner comments.

Stretch and challenge

- Some articles are deliberately more challenging, though guidance will be provided.
- Some student tasks present a greater level of difficulty.

Research skills

- Links to archived SOCIOLOGY REVIEW articles with suggestions on how these could be used.
- Links to useful websites with suggested tasks.
- Suggestions for further reading at the end of articles.

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Philip Allan CPD events and online seminars to prepare for the new specifications

- **Preparing for the New 2015 AQA A-level Sociology Specification**
Led by Laura Pountney

Central London: Friday, 12 June 2015 Manchester: Friday, 26 June 2015

- **Teaching A-level Sociology for the First Time**
Led by Lesley Clark

Central London: Monday, 15 June 2015

- **The 2015 Sociology Teachers' Conference**
Chaired by Fionnuala Swann

Central London: Tuesday, 23 June 2015

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