

Unit 9: Sociological Perspectives

Delivery guidance

In this unit learners will gain an understanding of the different sociological perspectives and concepts put forward by the principal theories and schools of thought. They will cover functionalism, interactionist and post-modern theories, and consider how these are reflected in our behaviours, relationships, values and social structures. They will investigate how sociologists conduct their research, looking at different schools of thought, and at how the findings of this research are interpreted politically before being applied to the development of social policy in relation to the uniformed protective services.

Approaching the unit

This unit will be of particular interest and use to learners hoping to pursue a career in policy making or management in any of the uniformed protective services. As such it will provide an opportunity for you to discuss the purpose, nature, roles and responsibilities of the professions throughout delivery. The unit content is closely related to Unit 6: Government and the Protective Services, Unit 2: Behaviour and Discipline in the Uniformed Protective Services and Unit 13: Introduction to Criminology. If your centre protocols allow, taking a combined and integrated approach to delivery where there is overlap might benefit your learners by giving them a holistic view of the rationale behind the operation of the uniformed protective services.

Much of the unit is theory and classroom based, and so it is recommended to break up the teaching as much as possible with videos and case studies – YouTube provides a wealth of short introductory videos.

The purpose of **Learning aim A** is to introduce your learners to the key concepts that form the basis of any study of sociology before contextualising these concepts by assessing and evaluating their impact on uniformed protective services. There are many interesting introductory videos on YouTube (search YouTube for 'What is Sociology').

Learning aim B requires learners to examine the research methods used by sociologists in order to arrive at their findings. Learners must explore positivist research methods, interpretivist research methods and sampling methods.

Learning aim C requires learners to explore the impact of sociological theory and research on the policies that determine the work of the uniformed protective services. In order to engage your learners, it might be appropriate for them to identify their primary area of interest and direct their work for this learning aim to a policy / service that particularly interests them – there is a list of possible topic areas in the Assessment Guidance below.

Assessment model

Learning aim	Key content areas	Recommended assessment approach
A Investigate the theories that form the basis of sociology as a science	A1 The major themes emerging from the study of sociology A2 Social structures A3 Sociological theories and theorists	A report that evaluated the key concepts of sociology.
B Examine the research methods used by sociologists to arrive at their findings	B1 Positivist research methods B2 Interpretivist research methods B3 Sampling	A research project that includes investigating and identifying the application of the results of sociological research methods in the development of policies impacting on the uniformed protective services.
C Explore the impact of sociological theory and research on the social policies that determine the work of the uniformed protective services	C1 Sociological perspectives on social policy C2 The influence of sociology on policy C3 How social policy shapes the uniformed protective services	A case study on how social policy has influenced the response of a particular uniformed protective service.

Assessment guidance

This unit is internally assessed through a number of tasks. Learners must produce individual evidence that can be authenticated. The main sources of evidence are likely to be written reports for application, analysis and evaluation of the key content areas. Learning aim A should involve the production of an individual report. As learning aim A investigates the theories that form the basis of sociology, a display that shows the interconnectivity between the major themes, social structures, theories and theorists may well be very appropriate, but it needs to give learners the opportunity to both assess the impact of these on the uniformed protective services and evaluate them.

For learning aim B learners will need to explain then compare, analyse and evaluate different research methods used by sociologists in general terms before selecting and focussing on the ones used specifically in their policy case study for learning aim C.

Learners must distinguish between positivist, interpretivist and sampling research methods. The following gives a brief summary of what might be expected, examples of the use of each type of research method should be included:

Positivist methods:

- Primary research involves interviewing or administering questionnaires or written surveys to large numbers of people. The investigator analyses the data obtained from surveys to learn about similarities, differences, and trends. He or she then makes predictions about the population being studied.

Advantages of this method of research are that it enables information to be obtained from a large number of respondents, it is inexpensive and convenient.

Disadvantages are that results can include volunteer bias, interviewer bias, and distortion.

- Secondary data or official statistics are used when collecting new data is impractical or unnecessary. Sociologists may obtain statistical data for analysis from businesses, academic institutions, and governmental agencies.

The main advantage of this method of research is that it saves time as the primary data has already been collected. Disadvantages include possible political bias.

Interpretivist methods:

- Observational research involves directly observing subjects' reactions, either in a laboratory or in a natural setting.

Advantages of this kind of research are that it reduces the possibility that subjects will not give totally honest accounts of their experiences. Subjects are more likely to take the study seriously and less likely to feel embarrassed. This kind of research tends to give more accurate results as subjects' behaviour is observed directly rather than subjects having to think back and remember the way they behaved when completing a survey.

Disadvantages of this method include the possibility of subject bias. Individuals who agree to observation and monitoring may function differently from those who do not. Subjects may also function differently in a laboratory setting from the way they do in ordinary life.

- Experimental research attempts to determine how and why something happens. It tests the way in which an independent variable affects a dependent variable.

Advantages of experimental research are that it uses samples that are random, and representative of the population being studied.

Disadvantages include the possibility of experimenter bias and the impact of extraneous variables.

For Learning aim C the following should be covered when exploring sociological perspectives on social policy:

- **Positivists** – use scientific, quantitative methods to carry out research. They believe that sociology should use a similar approach to study societies as the natural sciences (e.g. biology and physics) use to study the natural world. They aim to gain a scientific understanding of how societies work and behave. Positivists would use the evidence from objective, scientifically collected facts (cause and effect) to help shape social policy and bring about positive changes in a society. They tend to favour the piecemeal approach of tackling one social problem at a time.

Marxists criticise this piecemeal approach arguing that it ignores wider social issues. For instance, concentrating solely on improving education to reduce poverty might ignore wider issues that also cause poverty.

- **Realists:** Left realism emerged from critical criminology and argues that crime is more prevalent among the working classes. It believes that the controlling of crime must

reflect the nature of the crime and argues that solutions that increase repression can in turn lead to an increase in crime. Policing is considered an important preventative measure as long as society has democratic control of the police. It is also thought to be crucial that democracy has an influence on the development of preventative measures and on policy development in general. Left realists believe that it is only through multi agency intervention that the reality of crime can be tackled.

- Right Realists: right realists believe that criminal laws should be unambiguous and rigidly enforced. Sentencing of offenders should not attempt treatment or reform as these approaches are ineffective. Rather, harsh punishments should be enforced to protect the public, deter others, and to act as social retribution. The emphasis is on order and discipline as crime feeds off poor social discipline.
- Marxists – Marxists consider that using sociological research to influence policy is supporting the capitalist state rather than criticising it. They believe that policies are created in the interests of the ruling class. They would argue that policies such as welfare are created in an attempt to show that the capitalist state cares about the non-ruling classes, but that this is just another attempt to maintain exploitation.
- Feminism - because of the patriarchy, polices make assumptions about people in society, e.g. family policies benefit heterosexual married families. Feminism has had its greatest influence on education and teacher training. Liberal feminists believe that anti-discrimination policies liberate women, enabling them to choose careers that may more traditionally be seen as male dominated, such as infantry or submariner roles. Radical feminist ideas of separatism also effect policy, for example by changing policy to support domestic violence victims by giving them additional legal rights.
- The New Right- object to state intervention into people's lives as it removes people's freedom to choose, undermines social responsibility and weakens self-reliance. For example, Breakdown Britain, a conservative report by Social Justice Policy Group (2007), proposed a list of new policies to promote marriage, parenting classes and mothers staying at home.

Critics of the New Right question the validity of some research about the link between absent fathers and crime. Critics also argue that New Right policies tend not to use real sociological research, instead favouring think tanks.

- Post-modernists believe that knowledge itself needs to be understood in a different way because our society has changed so much over recent years. They argue that society is now more globalised, yet fragmented, more consumer and media driven and that the core traditional theories of sociology are no longer relevant.

Learners could be given a case study of a social policy to explore. This could be a choice dependant on their career interest or defined by you. It is vital for assessors to ensure learner work is independent even if some of the preparation and research is done collaboratively. Topic areas must have sufficient depth to allow for justification of the policy and could include any of the following or other suitable areas:

- Health (the NHS)
- Social work
- Education (free school meals / raising the participation age)
- Crime and Policing
- Sentencing policy
- Welfare State

- Military conscription (search online for 'The Telegraph: Conscription 100 years on: how would enlistment work in 2016?' for an interesting starting point)
- Gender roles in the Armed Forces

Learners will research the chosen policy and document the methods used by sociologists in the preparation and development of it. They must make links between the policy, social structures and relevant sociological perspectives.

The justification of the value of sociological theory and research should be explored not only with evidence of where it has / has not been effective, but also with reference to the argument: should sociologists be involved in social policy research, given the widely contrasting sociological beliefs documented above?

Getting started

This provides you with a starting place for one way of delivering the unit, based around the recommended assessment approach in the specification.

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Introduction

Learners will gain an understanding of the different sociological perspectives and concepts put forward by the principal theories and schools of thought. They will investigate how sociologists conduct their research by looking at the different methods used by different schools of thought, and then at how the findings of this research are interpreted politically before being applied to the development of social policy in relation to the uniformed protective services.

Learning aim, A – Investigate the theories that form the basis of sociology as a science

As sociology is likely to be an entirely new subject for learners, there will need to be an effective introduction as the themes and theories may be conceptually very different from anything they have done before.

- The themes, for A1, and theories, for A3, would be best delivered via tutor presentations to ensure accuracy. Interest and variability could be added using a variety of resources that are readily available online. YouTube has a number of useful videos introducing sociology (search YouTube for 'what is sociology?')
- It is important to cover the major themes emerging from the study of sociology thoroughly and to ensure your learners have developed comprehensive notes and a good understanding of the subject before they approach learning aim C.
- The social structure of society, for A2, could be researched by learners working in small groups. Each group could be allocated an 'expert' on each of the social structures (e.g. culture, religion or beliefs system, education, family networks, conformity). The 'expert' should research the purpose of their social structure, how the structure has evolved and its impact, particularly on behaviours. The 'expert' then teaches the remainder of the group about the structure they researched and so all group members end up with a comprehensive guide that will enable them to analyse the impact of social structures on the uniformed protective services.

Learning aim B – Examine the research methods used by sociologists to arrive at their findings

Although learners will be familiar with gathering opinion through survey research etc, the science of research methods will be new to them. There are a number of videos on YouTube introducing research methods. Search YouTube for 'introduction to research methods'. It might be useful for learners to be introduced to the organisations that carry out sociological research on behalf of the government and to develop an understanding of how that is published:

- Learners could work on definitions of positivist research methods, interpretivist research methods and types of sampling and then contextualise them by examining them in the context of the major research projects below.
 - Have a look at Ipsos Mori's research methods.
 - The Institute for Public Policy Research – political bias?

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- The British Crime Survey – how is this information gathered?
- The census – why is this important, who uses it and why?
- Learners could use this information to go on to consider, perhaps in the form of a group discussion, the advantages and disadvantages of different research methods particularly in the context of the studies listed above. This would help learners to evaluate the different research methods used by sociologists

Learning aim C – Explore the impact of sociological theory and research on the social policies that determine the work of the uniformed protective services

By way of introduction to learning aim C, slide share has a useful presentation that could be used or adapted to suit (search online for 'slide share sociology and social policy').

Learners could be given a social policy that they can independently examine in light of the material they learned about in the previous two learning aims. See the assessment guidance above for examples. If learners are particularly anxious about how to approach this, you could work together as a class to 'model' a policy as a working example. This would give them a framework within which to devise their own project / case study. It is important that none of the learners use the same policy the class works on as their assessment policy.

- Assuming learning aim A3 has been covered thoroughly, learners will have sufficient information to contextualise their policy in terms of learning aim C1, by explaining which sociological perspective/s have played a part in the development of the social policy they have been researching. Learners should also consider the influence sociology has on the continued evolution of their policy (learning aim C2).
- The following article, although written in 2012, gives a valuable insight into the role of public opinion in policy making. Search online for 'The Guardian: Public opinion can play a positive role in policy making'. It is a useful resource for learning aim C2: the influence of sociology on policy making.
- The Ipsos Mori annual and monthly reports on *Understanding Society* (found by searching online for 'ipsos MORI understanding society') are a valuable tool for introducing very current concerns and affairs to learners. The reports will give learners access to research findings and possibly help to inspire your / their selection of a social policy that has been influenced by sociology and consequently shapes the work of the uniformed protective services.

Details of links to other BTEC units and qualifications, and to other relevant units/qualifications

This unit links to:

- Unit 6: Government and the Protective Services
- Unit 2: Behaviour and Discipline in the Uniformed Protective Services
- Unit 13: Introduction to Criminology
- Unit 16: Research Skills in the Uniformed Protective Services.

Resources

In addition to the resources listed below, publishers are likely to produce Pearson-endorsed textbooks that support this unit of the BTEC Nationals. Check the Pearson website (<http://qualifications.pearson.com/endorsed-resources>) for more information as titles achieve endorsement.

Textbooks

Osbourne Richard: Sociology for Beginners Publisher: Zidane Press; New edition (8 July 2016)

ISBN-13: 978-0956267870

A great starting point for straight forward introductions and explanations. Earlier editions have better visuals.

Videos

YouTube is a great resource for this unit. There are a large number of videos and online presentations produced by universities and students that will help add some variety to your delivery.

Websites

The Social Policy Association is a learned society and charity. Their purpose is to advance the teaching, research, and dissemination of knowledge in the field of social policy. They have a useful website that can be found by searching online for 'social policy.org' which will help with ideas for case studies and research.

IPSOS is a social research institute that specialises in understanding policy areas like policing, health and the economy. Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute shares the messages from their research with both local and national government, in the belief that a better understanding of public attitudes will lead to better policy and practice. Their website can be found by searching online for 'ipsos'.