

GCSE Social Studies Qualification Outline



Made for Wales.
Ready for the world.

Introduction

This document provides a high-level overview of the WJEC GCSE Social Studies Qualification.

It is based on Qualifications Wales's Approval Criteria ([gcse-social-studies-approval-criteria.pdf](https://www.wjec.co.uk/media/1000/gcse-social-studies-approval-criteria.pdf)). Our qualification **must** meet these requirements.

The qualification outline will provide a guide for the development of the Specification and Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs).

Qualification Overview

The GCSE Social Studies qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales by:

- supporting the statements of what matters¹ by giving learners the opportunity to:
 - gain a deeper understanding of the concepts underpinning humanities, and their application in local, national and global contexts
 - explore concepts, including questioning, evidence, evaluation, ethics and judgements
 - form their own informed viewpoints and recognise those of others
 - gather, justify, present, analyse, and evaluate a range of evidence
 - explore how and why interpretations may differ and by critical understanding of a range of interpretations and representations derived from a variety of evidence
 - understand and appreciate how and why places in their locality and elsewhere in Wales, as well as in the wider world, are changing
 - develop their own identity and an awareness of how they, as individuals, can shape the communities in which they live
 - develop an appreciation of identity, heritage and cynefin, helping build their sense of self and of belonging
 - appreciate how the evolution of places, communities and societies is driven by the interplay between a range of factors, including environmental, economic, social, political and cultural processes and human actions
 - develop a critical understanding of how societies are and have been organised, structured and led, in the learners' own locality and in Wales, as well as in the wider world
 - be active, informed, and responsible citizens and consumers, who can identify with and contribute to their communities, and who can engage with the past, contemporary and anticipated challenges and opportunities facing them, their communities and Wales, as well as the wider world
 - develop as self-aware, informed, ethical global citizens, who critically reflect on their own and others' beliefs, values and attitudes.

¹ <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/humanities/statements-of-what-matters/>

- supporting the principles of progression² by encouraging learners to:
 - ask increasingly sophisticated enquiry questions
 - demonstrate greater independence in finding suitable information, making informed predictions and hypotheses, and making judgements
 - become more able to effectively work with others, especially, but not limited to, taking part in social action
 - increase their breadth and depth of knowledge and underlying concepts
 - develop an understanding of themselves in the world
 - demonstrate an ability to work with an increasing number and sophistication of sources of information, and a growing understanding of how to resolve contradictory or conflicting accounts
 - continually refine and develop a growing sophistication of key disciplinary skills, including those relating to enquiry such as framing questions and using evidence to construct and support an answer, and relating that to representation and interpretation of enquiry results
 - demonstrate a growing ability to transfer existing skills and knowledge into new, and increasingly unfamiliar contexts
 - demonstrate a greater ability to influence events by exercising informed and responsible citizenship.
- supporting the subject specific considerations for Social Studies³ by:
 - developing an understanding of the discipline and its value
 - encouraging conceptual understanding of the world by learning about people and their values, in different times, places and circumstances
 - providing rich contexts to explore social issues, identity, rights and responsibilities, and social organisation
 - encouraging active participation and engagement with social issues through social enquiry, discussions and social action
 - developing an understanding of how systems of government in Wales operate and affect people's lives, and how they compare with other systems
 - exploring the concepts of governance, rights, equality, inequality, ethnicity, gender and poverty.

The GCSE Social Studies qualification will also be based on the following concepts:

- authority and governance
- cause and effect
- change and continuity
- citizenship
- community
- diversity
- identity and belonging
- interconnectedness
- justice and equality
- responsibility
- rights
- social action.

² <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/humanities/principles-of-progression/>

³ <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/humanities/designing-your-curriculum/#specific-considerations-for-this-area>

Defining Social Studies

There are many different definitions of Social Studies in existence. Social Studies can be understood as a subject which encompasses and combines many disciplines but there is a need for this new GCSE to be a unique and clearly defined subject in its own right. Social studies will complement other subjects within the Humanities AoLE, but will not overlap with significant aspects of those subjects, by providing a unique learning experience focusing on social issues, actions and beliefs.

In order to define Social Studies, we have consulted:

- the Curriculum for Wales guidance stated above
- the Qualified for the Future Decisions report that stated that this qualification would give learners 'the opportunity to not only engage with current events and with the important questions of our time, but to explore social issues, identity, rights and social organisation'
- the published Approval Criteria
- our Qualification Development Advisory Group (made up of current practitioners from both Welsh and English Medium centres, a Consortia Area Lead for Humanities, an assessment expert and PGCE leads).

Consequently, we see Social Studies as being about:

- understanding the various social issues in the society in which we live
- appreciating that social issues are complex and can be explained from many perspectives
- understanding that societies change, what causes those changes and what we as members of society can do to promote change through social action.

Qualification Structure

Unit 1: Society and Social Issues

Written examination
30% of qualification

Unit 2: Investigating Society and Social Issues

Non-examination assessment
20% of qualification
Set and marked by WJEC

Unit 3: Social Change in Contemporary Society

Written examination
30% of qualification

Unit 4: Planning to Effect Social Change

Non-examination assessment
20% of qualification
Set by WJEC, marked by the Centre and moderated by WJEC

These are the percentages for the four assessment objectives:

AO1	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of terms, concepts and evidence relevant to the study of society.	25%
AO2	Apply knowledge and understanding of terms, concepts and evidence relevant to the study of society, in various contexts.	30%
AO3	Analyse, evaluate, or make judgements on source materials, social issues and debates, using evidence relevant to the study of society.	25%
AO4	Select, use, and apply skills and techniques in practice to undertake enquiries relevant to social studies.	20%

This will be a unitised qualification. Aside from Unit 1, which is an introductory unit, and Unit 4, which is a synoptic unit, there is no hierarchy implied by the order in which the two other units are presented. Therefore, the order does not imply a prescribed teaching order.

The qualification will have 120-140 Guided Learning Hours.

Unit Information

Unit 1 – Society and Social Issues

The purpose of this unit is to explore:

- A variety of social issues
- A variety of viewpoints on social issues
- The ideas of identity, rights, responsibilities, and the diverse nature of society
- Social institutions and various levels of governance in Wales, the United Kingdom and the wider world that influence how societies function.

The unit will be assessed via an examination available in the summer series, first available in 2027, with a mix of question types that will target AO1, AO2 and AO3. An examination will be made available for the first cohort in summer 2027. It is likely that AO1 will have the highest weighting, followed by AO2 with AO3 with the lowest weighting. There will be no optionality in this unit.

Unit 2 – Investigating Society and Social Issues

The purpose of this unit is to:

- Explore methods for researching society and social issues and appreciate the bearing that these methods may have on our understanding of social issues
- Expose learners to a variety of evidence sources relating to society and social issues and enable them to assess the credibility of evidence sources and viewpoints
- Empower learners to be able to draw conclusions from qualitative and quantitative data about social issues.

The unit will take the form of a non-examination assessment available in the summer series, first available in 2027, with a mix of tasks that will target AO2, AO3 and AO4. Due to the practical nature of the investigation, AO4 is likely to receive the highest weighting, followed by AO2 and AO3. The non-examination assessment will involve learners investigating a social issue that is set annually by WJEC. The non-examination assessment will be set and marked by WJEC. The assessment must be submitted digitally. The undertaking of the research into the social issue is likely to feature a low level of control to enable learners to undertake an authentic enquiry experience. However, assessed tasks are likely to be taken under a high level of control.

Unit 3 – Social Change in Contemporary Society

The purpose of this unit is to explore:

- Explanations of social change
- Events that lead to social change
- Agents of social change
- Processes of social change
- The consequences of social change.

The unit will be assessed via an examination available in the summer series, first available in 2027, with a mix of question types that will target AO1, AO2 and AO3; all with equal weighting. There will be no optionality in this unit.

Unit 4 – Planning to Effect Social Change

The purpose of this unit is to:

- Identify and engage with social issues
- Explore various viewpoints relating to social issues
- Explore examples and methods of social action
- Understand how to plan for a social action
- Understand methods for conducting analysis into the effectiveness of social action .

This synoptic unit will take the form of non-examination assessment available in the summer series of Year 11, first available in 2028, with a mix of tasks that will target AO2, AO3 and AO4. Due to the practical nature of the investigation, AO4 is likely to receive the highest weighting, followed by AO2 and AO3. There will be no optionality in this unit. The non-examination assessment will feature an assessment based around learners identifying and engaging with a social issue that interests them, allowing for learner choice. Learners will plan for social action but will not be expected to undertake the action. The non-examination assessment will be marked by centres and moderated by WJEC. The undertaking of the research is likely to feature a low level of control to enable learners to undertake an authentic enquiry experience. However, assessed tasks are likely to be taken under a high level of control. The assessment must be submitted digitally.