

# GCSE Social Studies Qualification Outline – Consultation Version



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## Introduction

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

It is based on Qualifications Wales's Approval Criteria (key sections are included in Appendix 1). 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 matters<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

- Supporting the principles of progression<sup>2</sup> 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 Studies<sup>3</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> <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.

## Proposed 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 proposed 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 4, which is a synoptic unit, there is no hierarchy implied by the order in which the three other units are presented. Therefore, the order does not imply a prescribed teaching order.

## 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 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.

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## 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, 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.

## Consideration of manageability, engagement, validity and reliability

In developing this proposed qualification outline, we have considered manageability, engagement, validity and reliability, and how to balance these considerations in the context of the requirements of the Approval Criteria.

The Approval Criteria require 40% of the qualification to be assessed by non-examination assessment; one non-examination assessment must be set by WJEC, internally marked by the school, and moderated by WJEC, and the other will must be set and marked by WJEC. This poses some potential manageability challenges which we propose to minimise by allowing centres to spread the workload and assessment. As the Approval Criteria states that the qualification is unitised, we propose making both non-examination assessment in the summer terms of both first and second year of teaching to give centres some choice in deciding when to undertake the non-examination assessments.

We have also considered the assessment time that we have allocated to both non-examination assessments to try to reduce the impact on teaching and learning. Both non-examination assessments will feature tasks that require practical enquiry (investigating a social issue in Unit 2 and planning for action for social change in Unit 4). To aid manageability we would foresee these featuring a low level of control to enable learners to undertake an authentic enquiry experience. However, in order to ensure reliability, we will provide guidance on what notes are able to be used from the practical enquiry when responding to the assessment tasks. When undertaking the assessed tasks, we have concluded that a high level of control is considered crucial to assure reliability and equity for learners. This will secure the requirement of the Approval Criteria that learners can demonstrate a range of appropriate enquiry and investigation skills including the ability to think critically and the ability to reflect.

We believe that our proposed qualification should provide opportunities for centres to develop an engaging programme of study for its learners, in line with the expectations of the Curriculum for Wales. Unit 1 will cover a broad understanding of society, allowing for a range of topics to be covered, and will allow learners to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts underpinning how society works and functions in Welsh, national and global contexts. Unit 2 will enable learners to engage with source material and data related to a social issue. This will provide learners with a real-world context to their learning and allow them to explore an issue through a variety of viewpoints. Unit 3 will enable learners to explore the factors and processes involved in social change. This will enable learners to appreciate the political, economic, social, legal drivers for change as well as social pressure and actions of groups/individuals and the cause and effect of social change. Unit 4 will allow learners to engage with a social issue that is important to them. They will be able to explore a variety of viewpoints relating to their chosen social issue and devise a relevant plan that incorporates a social change strategy that could be used as part of a proposed social action.

We believe that the non-examination assessments we proposed for Units 2 and 4 are a valid approach to assessing the purpose and content because they allow learners to demonstrate their skills in appropriate contexts. To ensure the reliability of the non-examination assessments, we will ensure each unit will target the same assessment objective weightings each series. For both units, marking criteria will be developed and for Unit 4, teachers will be provided with a package of support to ensure consistent application of the marking criteria across centres and over time. We will moderate a sample of candidate work from each centre to provide further assurance of reliability.



We believe that the purpose and content of Units 1 and 3 can be validly assessed by examination, and a mix of question types can help us maximise validity. When we develop assessments, we will ensure that all tasks target the relevant construct, that there is an appropriate balance of content covered over time and that there is alignment between assessment items and learning outcomes. Where appropriate, we will use data available to us on how an assessment has functioned. To ensure reliability, we will make sure that the examined units target the same assessment objective weightings and have a consistent level of demand each series, marking criteria will be developed and assessors will be trained on how to apply them consistently.

In considering the weightings of the Assessment Objectives we propose following the same weightings for GCSE Business and GCSE Geography, due to the similar focus on the application of knowledge and understanding across all four units. We will continue to consider the balance of manageability, engagement, reliability and validity, at each stage of qualification development.

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## APPENDIX

### Key information from Approval Criteria

The following information has come directly from Qualifications Wales's [GCSE Social Studies - Approval Criteria](#) - our qualification must meet these requirements.

#### Purpose

##### 1. GCSE Social Studies must:

- 1.1. be designed primarily for *Learners* between the ages of 14 and 16
- 1.2. build on the conceptual understanding *Learners* have developed through their learning from ages 3–14
- 1.3. support teaching and learning by providing appropriately broad, demanding, relevant and engaging content and assessment that relates to and supports the Curriculum for Wales, including its four purposes
- 1.4. allow *Learners* to develop a strong foundation of knowledge, skills and understanding which supports progression to post-16 study and prepares them for life, learning and work
- 1.5. provide meaningful, fair, and accurate information on *Learner* achievement within a subject that highlights what *Learners* know, understand, and can do

#### Aims

##### 2. GCSE Social Studies must:

- 2.1. allow *Learners* to explore a range of knowledge, skills and understanding in relation to social studies
- 2.2. provide opportunities for *Learners* to be assessed in a variety of relevant and meaningful contexts

##### 3. GCSE Social Studies must:

- 3.1. develop an understanding of how to become ethical, informed and responsible citizens of Wales and the world
- 3.2. develop a greater understanding of the world and of other people and their values
- 3.3. engage with contemporary social issues, and explore identity, rights and democracy
- 3.4. explore social issues and consider how to actively participate and engage in social action
- 3.5. appreciate the complex, pluralistic and diverse nature of society by understanding identity, rights and responsibilities, equality and inequality, and how these issues shape people, places and community
- 3.6. reflect on the influence of governance on people, places and community
- 3.7. explore the cross-cutting theme of human rights and diversity, including Black, Asian, and minority ethnic perspectives, identity, culture and contributions

## Assessment objectives

10. The assessment of the knowledge, understanding and skills required in the qualification must target the following assessment objectives in line with the indicated weightings, within a tolerance of +/- 5 percentage points.

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.	25%
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.	25%

## Scheme of assessment

11. **GCSE Social Studies** must be unitised.

12. **GCSE Social Studies** must show the range in the proportion of marks allocated to each assessment objective and to each unit.

13. **GCSE Social Studies** must include the following assessment arrangements:

13.1. There must be two examination assessments that:

13.1.1. are set and marked by the awarding body

13.1.2. account for 60% of the qualification

13.1.3. the timing of the examinations must be prescribed by the awarding body

13.2. There must be two non-examination assessments that:

13.2.1. account for 40% of the qualification

13.2.2. one non-examination assessment, set by the awarding body, internally marked by the *Centre*, and externally *Moderated* by the awarding body

13.2.3. one non-examination assessment set and externally marked by the awarding body

14. Both non-examination assessments must be able to be submitted digitally.

15. One examination unit must be available in the summer of 2026 for the first cohort of *Learners* taking the qualification.

16. The awarding body must specify its rules regarding resits and resubmissions for **GCSE Social Studies** in accordance with the *National GCSE Conditions and Requirements*.