UNIT TITLE:	**Independent Academic Study (Social Science)**
LEVEL:	**Three**
CREDIT VALUE:	**6**
UNIT CODE:	**WJC844**
UNIT TYPE:	**Graded (Academic subject content)**
GRADE DESCRIPTORS:	**1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7**

(Access/A2)

This unit has 8 learning outcomes.

LEARNING OUTCOMES	**ASSESSMENT CRITERIA**
The learner will:	**The learner can:**
1. Be able to identify and define an academic study or project related to a social science topic	1.1. Identify and justify the choice of a study topic. 1.2. Produce a clearly defined project aim related to the chosen topic.
2. Be able to plan and design a social science study or project.	2.1. Plan each stage of the study to include all relevant tasks contextually appropriate to the research task chosen. These should include the identification and evaluation of: (a) a detailed research proposal, (b) a literature review or annotated bibliography, (c) a statement of methodology, (d) a realistic timetable for completion, 2.2. Explain and justify the planned research with reference to, accuracy and reliability and appropriate ethical guidelines. 2.3. Link research undertaken to relevant prior theoretical and / or practical work undertaken. 2.4. Identify and evaluate any potential barriers or risks to successful execution of the plan within the planning process.
3. Be able to undertake and refine research into a social science subject.	3.1. Research and select relevant information from academic sources appropriate to the study. 3.2. Make modifications to the plan as appropriate 3.3. Record findings appropriately for future use.

LEARNING OUTCOMES	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
The learner will:	**The learner can:**
4. Be able to interpret and organise information in response to a piece of research within a social science subject	4.1. Deploy accurate, detailed and relevant knowledge of the subject in support of a coherent analysis of the study.
5. Be able to consider findings and reach conclusions.	5.1. Draw relevant conclusions which are supported by academic evidence. 5.2. Use academic knowledge to explain and clarify the conclusions
6. Be able to evaluate the study process and findings	6.1. Evaluate the study, discussing strengths and weaknesses within the study and explain how improvements could be made as appropriate. 6.2. Suggest and justify improvements and modifications to the study.
7. Be able to use academic conventions related to studying a social science subject	7.1. Consistently apply relevant academic conventions including: a) accurate and consistent referencing, b) appropriate academic written style and 'voice'.
8. Be able to apply academic knowledge to the study of a social science subject.	8.1 Select and explain the relevance of secondary sources appropriate to the academic discipline. 8.2 Critically analyse and integrate material from secondary sources within the response to a question or study.

Additional Information / Guidance
This is an Access academic subject unit which is graded and therefore contributes to the 45 graded credits within an Access to HE Diploma. The assessment of this unit is primarily focussed on the academic subject material and not on any generic study skills required in order to carry out the piece of work. The final piece of work is required to be structured in a format that is relevant and appropriate to the task with accurate use of referencing and acknowledgement of sources. Individual centres may require the use of a specific referencing system or they may use their own simpler versions to prepare students for study at degree level. LASER does not wish to impose any requirements on the types of referencing to be used other than to state that students should be properly prepared to understand and apply referencing skills at degree level.

The 'length' or size of the study is difficult to prescribe as the notional learning hours for different types of academic study tasks may vary considerably. Many Access programmes of study will typically set limits of 1500-2000 words for a standard course essay generating 3 credits, with 3000-4000 plus for extended essays and even more for 'mini-dissertations' style assessments. LASER does not therefore place a specified word limit on the study. However, in planning assessment tasks it should be remembered that assessment of a three credit unit should represent 30 hours of study; six credits should equate to 60 hours of study and nine credits should equate to 90 hours of study (including both classroom based teaching and independent study. Any planned assessment should be based therefore on the learning achievable in terms of both knowledge and skills within this time framework.

When identifying the piece of work that will be used as the actual 'academic study', consideration should be given to other outputs by the student (e.g. preparatory notes, research activity, plans and check lists etc.) that could be used as part of the overall assessment. For example a research based study project is likely to include a considerable volume of activity beyond the production of the final written output though it is to be expected that learners produce a clearly and logically structured research Report / Mini-Dissertation / Extended Essay using correct academic and technical convention throughout. The Assessment Criteria for the unit therefore suggest that these informal preparative activities be formalised to include a clear **Research Proposal; Literature Review / Annotated Bibliography;** statement of **Methodology** and identification of a research **timetable.** These may well be adapted to the specifics of the research undertaken and the context of the academic discipline related to the task, however, they present a formal indication of the intellectual steps which should be evidenced in terms of the development of skills and knowledge to meet the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria. It is also necessary for the student to evidence appropriate reflection and evaluation of the efficacy of their planning and execution of research (which could be assessed through the development of a series of tasks which when combined create a reflective log or journal in relation to the research.

In undertaking research it is necessary for the student to refer to appropriate theoretical or interpretative secondary sources to evidence and develop their understanding and analysis. These will be governed by the nature of the research problem undertaken but may be theoretical relating to a particular critical interpretation (e.g. a Neo-Marxist interpretation of the global media / a psychological investigation exploring the 'bystander apathy' in relation to homelessness) or they might be secondary sources of information which are then used as a source of information or interpretation within the Report / Mini-Dissertation / Extended Essay to highlight particular issues (e.g. a journal article detailing information relating to discrimination in the workplace which is then explored within the Report / Mini-Dissertation / Extended Essay's analysis or a newspaper article on electoral results in the 2015 election). LASER does not present any definitive rule of the number of secondary sources referred to, but they must be sufficient to appropriately evidence the student's ability to independently undertake research and analysis at Level 3 (in line with the Learning Outcomes). In making this judgement consideration should be given to both the quantity of secondary sources and also the depth of analysis of those sources presented. Therefore, an in depth analysis referring to fewer sources maybe of more value than the tenuous use and poor analysis of numerous texts which remain poorly linked to the research goals of the task.

The work required by the student to complete all of the tasks should be capable of being completed within 60 notional hours of learning for the extended study unit (see above).

Recommended Assessment Method (s)[1]:

Methodology	Insert √	Methodology	Insert √
Essay		Tutor Observation	√

[1] One or more of these methods may be employed in evidencing the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria for the unit. However, please note that these methods do not preclude other means of evidencing Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria and are only **RECOMMENDED** means of assessment

Presentation	√	Experiment	
Report / Mini-Dissertation / Extended Essay	√	Practical Demonstration	
Exam		Other (provide details in additional details box)	√

Additional Details:

The completion of a research log or journal which includes a detailed research proposal; review of literature / annotated bibliography; statement of methodology and timetable could be used to evidence the meeting of key assessment criteria (this might also include the planning and preparation necessary for the final presentation of the work). This could be supplemented with individual analysis and evaluation of the key skills utilized in undertaking the research associated with consideration to how these might have been improved (*even better if*…). This further evaluation might be confirmed by tutor observation / discussion at supervision meetings and recorded in this manner (contributing to the overall research log). This would leave the recommended Report / Mini-Dissertation / Extended Essay aspect of the task to focus on the knowledge based facets of the research in more detail (although not necessarily to the exclusion of other skills based aspects) and would allow clear evidence to meet all the Learning Outcomes and Grading Descriptors allocated to the unit. However, the actual Report / Mini-Dissertation / Extended Essay must also conform to the technical demands in terms of language and presentation required for the presentation of academic research within the appropriate discipline. The Report / Mini-Dissertation / Extended Essay must also show evidence of the appropriate use of secondary sources to develop a critical / theoretical and interpretative argument in response to the task. A Presentation may be used to assess the development of the students planning of the project but as this is not an extended IAS unit it is not integral to the assessment of the unit.