

## Divided kingdom: Social class and inequality in modern Britain

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**Start date** 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2016**End date** 24<sup>th</sup> April 2016**Venue** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge**Tutor** Dr Nigel Kettley**Course code** 1516NRX134

### Director of Programmes

For further information on this  
course, please contact

**To book** See: [www.ice.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk)

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### Tutor biography

Nigel has had a wide ranging teaching and research career in the fields of sociology, education studies, research methods and initial teacher education. Before joining the Institute of Continuing Education in 2007, he was a Research Associate in the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, and earlier still an MPhil and PhD student at Wolfson College. He is an active researcher in the areas of widening participation, educational attainment and lifelong learning more generally with a particular focus on issues of gender, social stratification and theory formation. Nigel teaches on a variety of courses for the Institute, supervises MSt. and PhD students, and is Senior Lecturer and Academic Director for Education and Social Science courses at the Institute of Continuing Education. His major publications include *Educational Attainment and Society* (2007, Continuum) and *Theory Building in Educational Research* (2010/2012, Continuum). He is also a Governing Body Fellow at Wolfson College, Cambridge and a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts.

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## Course programme

### Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00 Dinner

20:30 – 22:00

Session 1 Chavs, Rahs and Toffs? Defining and measuring social class and social mobility in modern Britain (Tutor: Dr Nigel Kettley)

In this session, we will explore alternative definitions of social class and divergent approaches to measuring social class inequality in modern Britain. The session commences by differentiating common sense or lay approaches to social class, typified for example in the distinction between Chavs, Rahs and Toffs, and proceeds to outline and assess competing social scientific measures of social class (including the Registrar-General's class scale, the Goldthorpe scale and the Rose and O'Reilly Scale). Additionally, the relationship between measures of social class and wider life chances, specifically health inequalities, will be introduced and patterns of social mobility since 1945 will be explored.

22:00

Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Saturday

07.30

Breakfast

09:00 – 10:30

Session 2 Class Maps: The 'upper', 'middle', 'working' and 'under-' classes (Tutor: Dr Nigel Kettley)

In this session, we will define class maps – the products of different class scales - and consider the competing conceptual and theoretical bases of class maps. We will then examine the class formation of modern societies in terms of the structuration of the upper class, middle class, working class and underclass. The strengths and weaknesses of class maps as descriptions of class formation in modern societies will also be considered.

10:30

Coffee

11:00 – 12:30

Session 3 Session 3 Life chances: Inequalities by social class in modern Britain (Tutor: Dr Nigel Kettley)

What impact, if any, does social class have on the life chances of people in modern Britain? In this session, we will expand on the definition of life chances provided in Session 1 and relate the concept to Weber's broader model of social class in liberal democratic societies. In particular, we will examine empirical evidence related to life chance inequalities by social class (for example drawing on data related to the distribution of income and spending patterns in Britain). Reviewing this and other empirical evidence, it will be shown that social class background has an ongoing and significant impact on the everyday life of people and that debates on the 'death' of class are largely spurious. The session concludes by assessing the relative impact of social class, gender, age and ethnicity on life chances in modern Britain.

12.30	Free
13:00	Lunch
14:00	Free
16:00	Tea
16:30	<p>Session 4 Educational attainment and social class: Evidence and explanations (Tutor: Dr Nigel Kettley)</p> <p>In this session, we will: examine how education has changed in Britain, paying particular attention to the 1944 Education Act and the 1988 Education Reform Act; examine the motivations for educational reform; and consider the impact of change on the reproduction and/or transformation of inequality in educational attainment by social class. The session will proceed to consider how social scientists have tried to explain class inequalities in educational outcomes by contrasting the 'old', the 'new' and the 'contemporary' sociology of education (Kettley 2007). These empirical and theoretical approaches to explaining differential attainment will be critically assessed.</p>
18.30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	<p>Session 5 Consensus or class war? Theories of social class and historical change (Tutor: Dr Nigel Kettley)</p> <p>Having substantiated the ongoing impact of social class on life chances, this session explores and evaluates divergent social scientific theories which have tried to explain the purpose or functions of social class in industrial societies. In particular, we will compare and critically examine functionalist, Marxist and Weberian approaches to the role of social class in modern societies. Is social class: a pre-requisite for allocating talented individuals to functionally important jobs; an expression of the supply of and demand for skills in the labour market; or a system of economic exploitation? The relative merits of these explanations of social class will be explored (as will revisions to theories which try to overcome their respective deficits).</p>
21:30	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

## Sunday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	<p>Session 6 The death of social class: Towards a classless society in a global age (Tutor: Dr Nigel Kettley)</p> <p>Media commentators, politicians and some academics have proclaimed the end or 'death' of social class in modern societies. In this session, we will review the empirical evidence related to the ongoing importance of social class divisions in Britain and consider the motivations of individuals who have advocated the 'death' of social class as a political and social scientific position. We will also examine alternative forms of the 'death' of class thesis including empirical work related to embourgeoisement and class convergence. Additionally, alternative approaches to change in the class structure will be assessed including the class fragmentation and proletarianisation theses.</p> <p>Is Britain becoming a more united or divided society in an age of austerity and globalisation?</p>
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	<p>Session 7 'Intellectual sexism': The feminist critique of conventional class analysis (Dr Nigel Kettley)</p> <p>In this final session, we will outline and explore the feminist critique of conventional class analysis which arose in Britain and the USA in the 1970s. We will begin by examining different forms of feminism – liberal, materialist, socialist and Marxist – and proceed to analyse the limitations feminists have identified with conventional class analysis. In particular, feminists maintained that the social class position of a household should not be based on the male breadwinner's occupation alone, that studies of social mobility ignored women and that an analysis of women's occupations was vital for understanding class structuration. Examples of feminist research related to social class will be considered as will the importance of patriarchal theorising, advocated in the 1980s and 1990s by some feminists, for understanding inequality in modern societies. We will conclude by reflecting upon how conventional class analysis changed as a result of the feminist critique.</p>
12.30	Free
12:45	Lunch

**The course will disperse after lunch**

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## Course syllabus

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### Aims:

1. To introduce students to competing definitions and measures of social class, which underpin a range of competing empirical research and theories of social inequality in modern Britain;
2. To enable students to identify, interpret and assess research evidence related to the changing nature of inequality by social class in Britain since World War II;
3. To critically assess and evaluate competing explanations and theories of change in the class structure, including the role of class actors as agents of change, drawing on sociological theories and research related to patterns of social mobility.

### Content:

All complex societies are characterised by the unequal distribution of socio-economic resources like income and wealth. In 2012, many people in the United Kingdom celebrated the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the staging of the Olympic Games, which may have promoted a sense of national unity despite prevailing economic austerity. This course takes a fresh look at the extent to which Britain is united or divided in the early 21st century by exploring forms of social inequality and social class. In particular, the meaning and measurement of social class will be examined including both common sense typologies of class (Chavs, Rags and Toffs) and social scientific models. We will also consider evidence related to unequal life chances in the family, education and health system by social class. Having defined and mapped the nature of social class inequalities in modern Britain, we will explore prevailing social scientific explanations for the existence of social class inequalities, including the ideas that inequality is necessary to reward differential talent and that class is simply a result of economic exploitation in capitalism. In addition, we will consider how the class structure in Britain has changed since 1945. The course will also consider the future of class inequalities, whether diminishing or expanding, in a global age where Britain faces intensified economic competition from abroad. We will conclude the course by exploring how conventional class analysis changed as a result of feminist critiques of research which arose in the 1970s and 1980s.

### Presentation of the course:

A variety of teaching and learning strategies will be used throughout the course including: formal lectures using visual presentations; interactive lectures and presentations incorporating extensive discussion sessions; activity based sessions where students work in small groups to solve problems; the provision of detailed handouts and reading lists enabling students to conduct independent reading; and independent learning activities which students can complete after the residential course to extend their knowledge and understanding of contemporary explanations of social class and inequality.

### Outcomes:

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

1. identify and explain competing definitions of social class and consider their respective relationships to the ideas of equality and social justice;
2. explain the strengths and weaknesses present in a range of empirical evidence related to social inequality and social class in modern Britain;
3. critically assess competing social scientific explanations (theories) of the origins, purpose and effects of social class inequalities in modern Britain.

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## Reading and resources list

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Listed below are a number of texts that might be of interest for future reference, but do not need to be bought (or consulted) for the course.

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Author	Title	Publisher and date
BOTTERO, W	<i>Stratification: Social Division and Inequality</i>	Abingdon: Routledge 2005
***CROMPTON, R	<i>Class and Stratification</i>	Cambridge: Polity Press (3rd edition) 2008
LEVINE, R F (ed)	<i>Social Class and Stratification: Class Statements and Theoretical Debates</i>	Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield 1998
MILNER, A	<i>Class</i>	London: Sage 1999
PIERSON, J	<i>Tackling Social Exclusion</i>	Abingdon: Routledge (2nd edition) 2010
REID, I	<i>Social Class in Britain</i>	Cambridge: Polity Press 1998

\*\*\*Recommended

## Website addresses None

**Note** Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

*Information correct as of:* 16 February 2016