Undergraduate Certificate in Sociology

2024-2025

Course code: 2425CCR262

COURSE GUIDE
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Welcome

Welcome to the **Undergraduate Certificate in Sociology**, a University of Cambridge award offered by the Institute of Continuing Education (ICE). The Certificate is taught and awarded at Level 4 (i.e., first-year undergraduate level) and attracts 60 credits. The award is completed in one academic year. For further information about academic credit please refer to the ‘Academic credit and university-level study’ section of the [Student Handbook](#).

The course offers three termly units and a syllabus and reading and resource list for each of these units are included in this Course Guide.

The programme will be taught remotely, through pre-recorded lectures which students can access at times convenient to them in addition to scheduled live sessions where tutor and students will gather for discussion. While attendance at the live sessions is encouraged, all sessions will be recorded and will be accessible via the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Discussion forums and suggestions for additional reading and resources will also be found on the VLE.

The programme aims to:

- introduce students to the concepts, theories and methods of sociology that provide an evidence-based, analytical and critical approach to understanding modern societies;
- outline and assess central debates concerning the formation and transformation of modern societies by examining ‘classical’ sociological theory and theories as they have been developed in the twentieth century and beyond;
- promote students’ knowledge and critical understanding of sociological methods, including quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research, as strategies for investigating and representing social life;
- outline and evaluate sociological approaches to social inequalities, including gender, ethnicity and social class, and consider social policy responses to inequality (for example related to educational and health inequalities);
- explore and evaluate the sociology of the life course, the social policy making process and social policy research to consider the contemporary utility of sociology.

**Transferable skills for further study and employability**

- The capacity for independent thought and judgement
- The development of independent learning, study and time management skills
- The deployment of skills in critical reasoning
- The development of competence in using IT to support one’s work
- The ability to work with others, productively and equitably
- The qualities necessary for employment requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility and the demonstration of high levels of motivation and personal commitment through part-time study
- Competence in understanding and evaluating descriptive statistics
- Competence in the planning and production of assignments, essays and presentations
- Reflexivity about assumptions and the social processes and structures shaping knowledge

**Study hours**

The award of academic credit is a means of quantifying and recognising learning and within the UK, one credit notionally represents 10 hours of learning¹. Each of the units in this course attracts 20 credits, so students should expect to need to study for approximately 200 hours in total to complete each unit successfully. However, it is recognised that students study at different paces of learning.
and use a variety of approaches, so this is a recommendation, rather than a hard-and-fast calculation.

1 SEEC Credit Level Descriptors for Higher Education (2021) here

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### Teaching staff

**Academic Director:**

**Dr Nigel Kettley** is Academic Director, University Associate Professor in Education and Social Science, University of Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education; and Director of Studies in Education, Tutor and Fellow, Wolfson College.

Nigel has had a wide-ranging teaching and research career in the fields of sociology, education studies, research methods and 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 in Sociology and Politics 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, theory formation and curriculum design.

Nigel teaches on a variety of courses for the Institute, supervises postgraduate students, and is a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of the British Journal of Sociology of Education. His published works include *Education Attainment and Society* (2007) and *Theory Building in Educational Research* (2012). He is also a Fellow at Wolfson College, Cambridge, a member of the Faculty of Education, Cambridge, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts.

**Tutors:**

**Dr Kenny Monrose** is a researcher at the University of Cambridge in the Department of Sociology and a Fellow of Wolfson College Cambridge. He is the lead researcher on the Black British Voices Project at Cambridge Sociology. Kenny has many years of experience in teaching, supervising and examining undergraduate and postgraduate students in the areas of Sociology, Behavioural Sciences and Criminology and Criminal Justice.

Kenny is the author of *Black Men in Britain: An Ethnographic Portrait of the Post-Windrush Generation* (2020). The book engages with an invisible population of Black men who grew up during 1970s and 80s post-industrial Britain, and as part of an environment that rendered them irrelevant and indistinguishable. He is an affiliate at The Centre for Screen and Film within the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages and Linguistics, and a member of Centre for the study of Global Human Movement at the University of Cambridge.

**Dr Gregory L Allen** is a Sociologist and Senior Lecturer in Organisational Behaviour at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, specialising in workplace diversity, disability studies, cross-cultural management, and critical management studies. Gregory’s PhD explored a postcolonial perspective to the representation of Polish host-country nationals by western expatriate managers - a topic on which he has had academic and industry articles and book chapters published.

Gregory’s approach to teaching Sociology is interactive and engaging, encouraging discussion and debate. He encourages students to adopt a critical perspective and question the predominant paradigms in the field in an attempt to find innovative approaches to contemporary issues.

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### Administrative staff

**Undergraduate Enquiries**

e. undergraduate@ice.cam.ac.uk
The Institute of Continuing Education's administrative headquarters are at Madingley Hall, an elegant country house built in the 16th century and set in gardens of about seven acres, designed in the 18th century by Capability Brown. Please visit www.ice.cam.ac.uk and www.madingleyhall.co.uk for further information.

Contact details of ICE

Institute of Continuing Education
University of Cambridge
Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge
CB23 8AQ
T: 01223 746222
www.ice.cam.ac.uk

Please also refer to the ‘information for students’ section on ICE’s website www.ice.cam.ac.uk/studying-with-us/information-for-students and the 2024-25 Student Handbook for award-bearing courses for further information and guidance relating to all aspects of the course including study skills, assignments, assessment and moderation. Course Information and Help and Guidance section of the ICE VLE will also contain valuable information specific to your course.

Information correct as of 14.11.23
Syllabus for first unit
Michaelmas term 2024

Sociology: historical origins, insights and value

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start date</th>
<th>11 October 2024</th>
<th>End date</th>
<th>8 January 2025</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tutor(s)</td>
<td>Dr Nigel Kettley</td>
<td>No of meetings</td>
<td>Introduction, 16 pre-recorded lectures and 6 live teaching/open sessions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aims

1. to introduce students to the concepts, methods and theories of sociology which provide a systematic and critical framework for understanding modern social life and societies;
2. to outline and assess central debates concerning the formation and transformation of modern societies by examining the key theoretical and methodological ideas of Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber;
3. to outline and assess the development of sociological theory in the twentieth and twenty-first century;
4. to promote students’ knowledge and critical understanding of sociological methods as they have been developed and deployed in sociological research.

Content

Unit 1 introduces the key concepts, theories and methods of sociology which have been used to explore the relationship between the individual, institutions and society. The unit begins with a consideration of the characteristics and core concepts of sociology (for example the self, consensus, conflict, social class and social change) and the historical origins of the discipline. It proceeds to analyse the theoretical and methodological foundations of sociology by comparing the ‘classical’ ideas of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. Developments in sociological theory in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are then explored by evaluating ‘modern’ approaches to society including structural functionalism, neo-Marxism, varieties of interpretive sociology (for example symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology) and feminisms. In addition, developments in quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research are examined to critically evaluate how sociologists have investigated social life. Throughout Unit 1 students will also be introduced to academic literacies and study skills for sociology including: reading skills; notetaking skills; critical thinking; evaluating empirical evidence; argumentation; and essay writing and referencing. The unit will highlight the historical origins, insights and contemporary value of sociology.

Presentation of the unit

The unit will be taught in a series of pre-recorded lectures and ‘live’ teaching sessions via Zoom. Live teaching will involve directed discussion and reading, with short talks from tutors and small-group work in breakout rooms. There will be comfort breaks during each session and opportunities for general Q&As with the tutor.

Please also look at the VLE for each block’s dedicated discussions and forum activities which are designed to guide your reading and to introduce you to relevant contextual and critical resources. You are expected to actively participate in the activities provided on the VLE.
### Teaching Sessions/ Lectures list

For each block the four pre-recorded lectures will be available a week before the live teaching session. Live teaching sessions will be on **Saturdays between 13.00-14.30 and 15.00-16.30 pm GMT**. Please watch each pre-recorded lecture before the live sessions, complete the appropriate readings and other learning activities on the VLE, and participate in the discussion forums.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course structure</th>
<th>Date and time</th>
<th>Indicative content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome and introduction</td>
<td>Friday 11 October 2024</td>
<td>A chance to meet your classmates and tutor and to become familiar with the online classroom environment. Review of course guide and assessments for Unit 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 1</td>
<td>Saturday 12 October 2024</td>
<td><strong>Introduction to sociology: core concepts, historical origins and study skills</strong>&lt;br&gt;This block explores competing definitions of sociology, fundamental concepts in the discipline and its historical origins. You will also be introduced to those study skills and academic conventions required for success as a student including critical thinking skills, essay writing skills and referencing conventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 2</td>
<td>Saturday 26 October 2024</td>
<td><strong>Classical sociological theories and methods: Marx, Weber and Durkheim</strong>&lt;br&gt;In Block 2 we will examine and evaluate the ‘classical’ canon of sociological theory (and method) as expressed by Marx, Weber and Durkheim. The historical context of classical theory will be assessed, and we will cast a critical eye on both the content and retrospective construction of the sociological canon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-point open session</td>
<td>Wednesday 30 October 2024</td>
<td>An open session for informal discussion, advice about study skills, questions about coursework, and review of the marking scale and assessment criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 3</td>
<td>Saturday 9 November 2024</td>
<td><strong>Theoretical developments: functionalism, interpretivism, neo-Marxism and feminisms</strong>&lt;br&gt;The limitations of ‘classical’ sociology and changes in society resulted in the fragmentation and proliferation of sociological theory (and method) in the twentieth century and beyond. In Block 3, we will explore ‘modern’ and contemporary developments in sociological theory including the rise of structural functionalism, interpretivism, neo-Marxism and feminist theories (and associated methods).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 4</td>
<td>Saturday 23 November 2024</td>
<td><strong>Investigating social life: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research</strong>&lt;br&gt;In the final block of Unit 1, we will examine the research methods, designs and data analysis strategies sociologists have used to explore everyday life and develop social explanations and theories. The theoretical links and relative merits of specific research ‘paradigms’ will be considered and the potential value of sociological research for social policy will be examined drawing on specific examples of research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End-point open session</td>
<td>Wednesday 27 November 2024</td>
<td>An open session for advice about course content, coursework, assessment and an opportunity to reflect on Unit 1.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learning outcomes

As a result of the unit, students should be able to:

1. demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and theories of sociology (including classical, modern and contemporary theories);
2. assess and evaluate sociological explanations and classical, modern and contemporary theories of social life;
3. demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of methodological approaches in sociology, including their links to theory, and be able to critically evaluate the application of methods in empirical research;
4. synthesise empirical and theoretical evidence drawn from disparate sources to construct a scholarly argument in response to pre-established tasks and essay questions.

Student assessment

Students will be assessed through two assignments reflecting the overall learning outcomes of the unit. The maximum word count for Assignment 1, the key concepts task, is 2,000 words. The maximum word count for Assignment 2, the essay, is 2,000 words. Students will have the opportunity to submit a plan on the VLE for each assignment, of no more than 500 words, as part of their formative assessment for feedback from the tutor. The assignments will be submitted through the ICE VLE and must include a bibliography or reference list.

The word length specified for the assignments is inclusive of references in the main body of the text and any footnotes and endnotes, although the use of footnotes and endnotes is strongly discouraged, but exclusive of the bibliography or reference list and any list of abbreviations that may be included at the beginning or end of the assignment.

The use of appendices is strongly discouraged except where additional data, not available in published form, must be presented, and must be agreed with the tutor before the submission of an assignment.

The keywords assignment is worth 50% of the overall unit mark. The essay will be worth 50% of the total mark for Unit 1.

Closing date for the submission of plans for feedback:
Assignment 1: Saturday 16 November 2024 by 12.00 noon GMT*
Assignment 2: Saturday 14 December 2024 by 12.00 noon GMT*

Closing date for the submission of assignments:
Assignment 1: Wednesday 4 December 2024 by 12.00 noon GMT*
Assignment 2: Wednesday 8 January 2025 by 12.00 noon GMT*
*Greenwich Mean Time

Assignment 1: Key concepts task

This assignment requires you to undertake an in-depth examination and an evaluation of a key concept in sociology. You should select one of the following concepts and critically discuss its development, connection to sociological theory and explanatory value in promoting an understanding of social life:

Action and agency
Alienation
Anomie
Capitalism
Change and development
Culture
Division of labour
Rational action
Self and identity
Social class
Social structure
Socialisation

Your answer must engage with academic texts when discussing your chosen key concept. You may wish to consider its historical and contemporary significance. Please include a bibliography or reference list (excluded from the word count) at the end of your submission.

Assignment 2: Essay titles

You should select one of the following essay questions for Assignment 2. You must avoid selecting a question that allows you to reproduce material submitted in Assignment 1. If in doubt, ask the tutor.

1. What major historical events shaped sociology as a discipline? How and why?
2. What are the evils of capitalism for Marx and how are they to be resolved in the future?
3. Is the use of biological metaphors by Durkheim to explain society inherently conservative?
4. What, according to Weber, is the role of the Predestination doctrine in the development of modern capitalism? Critically assess this argument.
5. Durkheim maintains that the task of the sociologist is to study ‘social facts’. What are social facts and what problems arise from conceptualising of sociology as a science?
6. Critically assess the contribution of structural functionalism to our understanding of either social stratification or education.
7. What central concepts and questions guide the symbolic interactionist perspective in sociology? What are the major shortcomings of this approach to social life?
8. Does mixed methods research resolve the quantitative/qualitative divide in sociology?

Please include a bibliography or reference list (excluded from the word count) at the end of your submission.

Reading and resource list

The following list suggests introductory readings for Unit 1. You should consult these suggestions selectively in relation to the assignments you select for Unit 1. Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are highly recommended. In addition, further readings and resources will be suggested on the ICE VLE e.g., books, journal articles, reports and videos.

Core texts


Block 1: Introduction to sociology: core concepts, historical origins and study skills

You may find these texts useful across more than one teaching block and unit.

British Sociological Association (BSA) (2023) What is Sociology? Durham: BSA.
Block 2: Classical sociological theories and methods: Marx, Weber and Durkheim


Block 3: Theoretical developments: functionalism, interpretivism, neo-Marxism and feminisms


Block 4: Investigating social life: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research


**Pre-reading**

Introductory textbooks: There are many introductory textbooks on sociology. Pre-reading could include the first few chapters of one of these e.g., Giddens, A. and Sutton, P. W. (2021) *Sociology*. Nineth Edition. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Internet resources: Review the resources available on a professional sociology website e.g., British Sociological Association (BSA) (2023) *What is Sociology?* Durham: BSA.

**Preparing for the course**

Read Unit 1 of this Course Guide carefully - this will give you a good overview of the unit topics, readings and assignments.

Do some background reading on the history of sociology as a discipline - there are many good books and articles available on the topic. This will help you to familiarise yourself with the key concepts and theories.


**Progression routes**

Students who have completed the Certificate in Sociology may be able to progress to other provision within ICE including the:

- Undergraduate Certificate in Cognitive Psychology
- Undergraduate Certificate in History
- Undergraduate Certificate in Politics
- Undergraduate Certificate in International Relations
- Undergraduate Advanced Diploma in Research Theory and Practice
- Undergraduate Advanced Diploma in Research in the Arts/Sciences

Credit awarded by ICE can be transferred into the degree programmes of some other higher education providers. The amount of credit which can be transferred into degree programmes varies from institution to institution and is always at the discretion of the receiving institution.
Syllabus for second unit
Lent term 2025

Social inequality, reproduction and transformation

Start date: 6 January 2025
End date: 26 March 2025

Tutor(s): Dr Kenny Monrose
No of meetings: Introduction, 16 pre-recorded lectures and 6 live teaching/open sessions

Aims

1. to outline and assess sociological approaches, both empirical and theoretical, to social inequalities including gender, ethnicity and social class;
2. to understand the intersection of forms of inequality and their impact on individual life chances and lived experience;
3. to critically evaluate the explanations sociologists have developed to account for stability (and change) in patterns of social inequality;
4. to briefly consider and assess social policy responses to social inequality for example related to attempts to promote social mobility.

Content

The degree of social change – that is the extent of social reproduction and/or transformation – constitutes a central concern of sociologists both past and present. Unit 2, therefore, defines some of the major forms of social inequality (gender, ethnicity and social class) in modern societies, examines how inequalities are measured, and analyses and assesses empirical evidence related to changing patterns of inequality (for example changes in the gender and ethnic gap in pay levels and the extent of social mobility in society over time). It will also highlight the intersection of forms of social inequality, as experienced in everyday life, and introduce students to the value of research evidence in relation to social policy making. For example, the relationship between studies of social mobility and education policy will be assessed. The unit provides an evaluation of the contemporary explanations and theories sociologists have developed to account for stability (and change) in patterns of social inequality. In so doing, it seeks to foreground the debate on research agendas, empirical evidence and the quality of explanations to assess the utility of sociology. Additionally, the unit highlights the interplay of biographical, institutional and social experiences in the reproduction and transformation of social life in modern societies.

Presentation of the unit

The unit will be taught in a series of pre-recorded lectures and ‘live’ teaching sessions via Zoom. Live teaching will involve directed discussion and reading, with short talks from tutors and small-group work in breakout rooms. There will be comfort breaks during each session and opportunities for general Q&As with the tutor.

Please also look at the VLE for each block’s dedicated discussions and forum activities which are designed to guide your reading and to introduce you to relevant contextual and critical resources. You are expected to actively participate in the activities provided on the VLE.
Teaching Sessions/ Lectures list

For each block the four pre-recorded lectures will be available a week before the live teaching session. Live teaching sessions will be on Saturdays between 13.00-14.30 and 15.00-16.30 pm GMT. Please watch each pre-recorded lecture before the live sessions, complete the appropriate readings and other learning activities on the VLE, and participate in the discussion forums.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course structure</th>
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<th>Indicative content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome and introduction</td>
<td>Friday 10 January 2025</td>
<td>A chance to meet your tutor for Unit 2 and reconnect with classmates. Review of the course guide and assessments for Unit 2.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Block 1                | Saturday 11 January 2025    | **Social stratification: Forms, empirical evidence and theories of continuity/change**  
Block 1 defines key concepts and the forms of inequality in modern societies (including gender, ethnicity and social class) and explores empirical data related to changing patterns of inequality (for example related to employment). It also examines theoretical models of stratification such as functionalist, Marxist and Weberian accounts of inequality. |
| Block 2                | Saturday 25 January 2025    | **Social class: theoretical meaning, measurement and social mobility**  
In Block 2, key terminology related to conventional class analysis is explained and various employment aggregate class scales are reviewed. In addition, the theoretical basis of class scales is examined, their limitations explored, and neo-Marxist and feminist alternatives considered. The utility of class scales is assessed for measuring life chances related to health and educational inequalities. The meaning, measurement and extent of social mobility is explored. |
| Mid-point open session | Wednesday 29 January 2025   | An open session for informal discussion, advice about study skills, questions about coursework, and review of the assessment process.            |
| Block 3                | Saturday 8 February 2025    | **Ethnicity and racism: prejudice, inequalities and ethnic stratification**  
Block 3 begins by clarifying the terms ethnicity, ‘race’, ethnic identity and ethnic stratification. It also explores the meaning of (and explanations for) prejudice, racism and discrimination. Sociological evidence related to the unequal life chances of specific ethnic groups in Britain will be examined (as will the lived experience and intersection of inequalities). In addition, the block will evaluate neo-Weberian, Marxist and contemporary theories of ethnic stratification and consider the possibility of change. |
| Block 4                | Saturday 22 February 2025   | **The sociology of gender: inequalities, feminist research and theories of gender**  
Block 4 starts by defining sex and gender, by exploring competing models of gender identity formation and by reflecting on feminist critiques of ‘malestream’ sociology. It progresses to define gender stratification, examine evidence pertaining to the scale of gender stratification and to evaluate competing feminist explanations of inequality. The block concludes by considering the issues of gender and power, the ‘new’ sociology of masculinility and possibilities for change. |
| End-point open session | Wednesday 26 February 2025  | An open session for advice about course content, coursework, assessment and an opportunity to reflect on Unit 2.                                 |
Learning outcomes

As a result of the unit, students should be able to:

1. demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of key concepts related to the study of social stratification (including those related to gender, ethnicity and social class);
2. demonstrate an ability to interpret and assess research evidence, making informed comparisons between competing sources of data, as a means of constructing an informed and sound academic argument;
3. assess and evaluate sociological explanations and theories of social stratification, including explanations for persistence and change in patterns of inequality, and appreciate the intersectionality and individual impact of inequalities;
4. critically reflect on social policy responses designed to tackle persistent inequalities drawing on appropriate evidence.

Student assessment

Students will be assessed through two assignments reflecting the overall learning outcomes of the unit. The maximum word count for Assignment 1, the journal article review, is 2,000 words. The maximum word count for Assignment 2, the essay, is 2,000 words. Students will have the opportunity to submit a plan on the VLE for each assignment, of no more than 500 words, as part of their formative assessment for feedback from the tutor. The assignments will be submitted through the ICE VLE and must include a bibliography or reference list.

The word length specified for the assignments is inclusive of references in the main body of the text and any footnotes and endnotes, although the use of footnotes and endnotes is strongly discouraged, but exclusive of the bibliography or reference list and any list of abbreviations that may be included at the beginning or end of the assignment.

The use of appendices is strongly discouraged except where additional data, not available in published form, must be presented, and must be agreed with the tutor before the submission of an assignment.

The journal article review assignment is worth 50% of the overall unit mark. The essay will be worth 50% of the total mark for Unit 2.

Closing date for the submission of plans for feedback:
Assignment 1: Saturday 8 February 2025 by 12.00 noon GMT*
Assignment 2: Saturday 8 March 2025 by 12.00 noon GMT*

Closing date for the submission of assignments:
Assignment 1: Wednesday 26 February 2025 by 12.00 noon GMT*
Assignment 2: Wednesday 26 March 2025 by 12.00 noon GMT*
*Greenwich Mean Time

Assignment 1: Journal article review

The first assignment for Unit 2 is a 2000-word journal article review from a peer reviewed sociology journal. Your review should consider such issues as the content of the article, aims and research methods, evidence, argument(s) and (briefly) how it relates to other literature in the field. You must choose ONE of the four articles provided on the Unit 2 page on the VLE.

The purpose of this assignment is to assess your ability to: read and understand a piece of academic research; summarise arguments in a clear and concise manner; recognise the contribution of the article to the field of research; and provide some evaluation of the article’s academic effectiveness.
Please include a bibliography or reference list (excluded from the word count) at the end of your submission.

Assignment 2: Essay titles

You should select one of the following essay questions for Assignment 2. You must avoid selecting a question that allows you to reproduce material submitted in Assignment 1. If in doubt, ask the tutor.

1. Why have sociologists found it so difficult to agree upon an approach to the measurement of social class?
2. Why have studies of social mobility generated so much debate and disagreement among sociologists?
3. Examine the claim that Britain’s class structure, as a whole, is becoming increasingly fragmented.
4. How and why have feminist sociologists criticised conventional class scales and analyses?
5. What are the similarities and differences (if any) between the concepts of race and ethnicity?
6. Discuss two key social or cultural mechanisms by which racism persists in one contemporary society.
7. What is the difference between sex and gender? Outline the key elements of a sociological account of gender.
8. How have sociologists tried to explain either persistent gender or persistent ethnic inequalities in paid employment?

Please include a bibliography or reference list (excluded from the word count) at the end of your submission.

Reading and resource list

The following list suggests introductory readings for Unit 2. You should consult these suggestions selectively in relation to the assignments you select for Unit 2. Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are highly recommended. In addition, further readings and resources will be suggested on the ICE VLE e.g., books, journal articles, reports and videos.

Core texts


Block 1: Social stratification: Forms, empirical evidence and theories of continuity/change


**Block 2: Social class: theoretical meaning, measurement and social mobility**


**Block 3: Ethnicity and racism: prejudice, inequalities and ethnic stratification**


**Block 4: The sociology of gender: inequalities, feminist research and theories of gender**


**Pre-reading**


Journal articles: If you have an idea of the focus of your Unit 2 essay search appropriate peer reviewed journals for research on the topic. For example, *American Journal of Sociology; British Journal of Sociology; Sociology;* and *The Sociological Review*. There are many others (run a search in Google for ‘Sociology Journals’).

**Preparing for the course**

Read Unit 2 of this Course Guide carefully - this will give you a good overview of the unit topics, readings and assignments.

Familiarise yourself with official approaches to the measurement of social inequality. For example, for social class see: *Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2010) ‘The National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC)’ London: ONS.*

**Progression routes**

Students who have completed the Certificate in Sociology may be able to progress to other provision within ICE including the:

Undergraduate Certificate in Cognitive Psychology
Undergraduate Certificate in History
Undergraduate Certificate in Politics
Undergraduate Certificate in International Relations
Undergraduate Advanced Diploma in Research Theory and Practice
Undergraduate Advanced Diploma in Research in the Arts/Sciences

Credit awarded by ICE can be transferred into the degree programmes of some other higher education providers. The amount of credit which can be transferred into degree programmes varies from institution to institution and is always at the discretion of the receiving institution.
Contemporary issues in sociology and social policy

Start date | 31 March 2025 | End date | 13 June 2025
Tutor(s) | Dr Gregory L Allen | No of meetings | Introduction, 16 pre-recorded lectures and 6 live teaching/open sessions

Aims

1. to outline and assess sociological approaches to the life course, including research related to childhood, adulthood and old age, recognising the socially constructed qualities of these ‘stages’ and academic representations of them;
2. to assess the changing nature of educational provision, inequalities in patterns of educational attainment and theoretical explanations of educational inequality;
3. to examine research evidence related to persistent inequalities in health and illness, and to evaluate explanations of inequalities in health and illness;
4. to explore the social policy making process, the adequacy of policy responses to social inequalities and the utility of sociology for informing social policy.

Content

The purpose of sociology is to explain individual behaviour, patterns of social formation and – potentially – to provide an evidence base for social policy. Consequently, Unit 3 provides a critical introduction to the sociology of the life course, exploring the connection between biography and history, and to the sociology of education and the sociology of health and illness. Specifically, the unit will explore scholarly debates and research related to the social construction of the life course, the experience of childhood, adulthood and old age both past and present, and the experience of death and bereavement. Subsequently, the changing nature of educational provision, inequalities in educational attainment and the policy responses of specific governments to educational inequality will be examined. Unit 3 also introduces the sociology of health and illness focusing on the social construction of health, the measurement of health inequalities and policy responses adopted to tackle persistent health inequalities. In addition, these sessions will critically evaluate the potential link between research evidence, policy making and government commitments to ‘social justice’ or, more recently, ‘levelling up’. Finally, the unit concludes by exploring the social policy making process, policy research and by reflecting on the contemporary utility of sociology.

Presentation of the unit

The unit will be taught in a series of pre-recorded lectures and ‘live’ teaching sessions via Zoom. Live teaching will involve directed discussion and reading, with short talks from tutors and small-group work in breakout rooms. There will be comfort breaks during each session and opportunities for general Q&As with the tutor.

Please also look at the VLE for each block’s dedicated discussions and forum activities which are designed to guide your reading and to introduce you to relevant contextual and critical
### Teaching Sessions/ Lectures list

For each block the four pre-recorded lectures will be available a week before the live teaching session. Live teaching sessions will be on **Saturdays between 13.00-14.30 and 15.00-16.30 pm BST**. Please watch each pre-recorded lecture before the live sessions, complete the appropriate readings and other learning activities on the VLE, and participate in the discussion forums.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course structure</th>
<th>Date and time</th>
<th>Indicative content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome and introduction</td>
<td>Friday 4 April 2025</td>
<td>A chance to meet your tutor for Unit 3 and reconnect with classmates. Review of the course guide and assessments for Unit 3.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Block 1                | Saturday 5 April 2025 | **The life course: childhood, adulthood, old age, death and bereavement**  
Block 1 explores sociological definitions of the life course, transitions in the life course and how individual experience is embedded in society. It also analyses the methods sociologists have used to study the life course. Research and theoretical evidence related to the social construction and experience of childhood, adulthood (for example various styles of parenting) and old age is evaluated. The block will consider the way sociologists have studied dying, death and bereavement. |
| Block 2                | Saturday 26 April 2025 | **The sociology of education: theories, inequalities and education policy**  
Block 2 begins by exploring the provision of education in England and Wales to assess whether schooling can promote ‘social justice’. It proceeds to explore research evidence related to persistent inequalities in educational outcomes by gender, ethnicity and social class. Explanations of educational inequality are examined in terms of the ‘old’, the ‘new’ and the ‘contemporary’ sociology of education. The block concludes by exploring whether the expansion of higher education since the 1990s can promote social justice. |
| Mid-point open session | Wednesday 30 April 2025 | An open session for informal discussion, advice about study skills, questions about coursework, and review of the assessment process.                                                                                           |
| Block 3                | Saturday 10 May 2025  | **The sociology of health and illness: health inequalities and health policy**  
Key terms related to the study of health and illness are analysed in Block 3 including morbidity, mortality and the health/wealth gap. Empirical evidence related to the extent and potential causes of persistent health inequalities (for example by social class) is then explored. The block then evaluates official and sociological explanations of persistent health inequalities before assessing social policy responses that have been designed to tackle health inequalities. |
| Block 4                | Saturday 24 May 2025  | **Social policy making, policy research and the utility of sociology**  
Block 4 commences by defining social policy and exploring the intersection of economic theory and political ideology for the formation of governments’ policy agendas. Subsequently, competing models of the social policy making process are evaluated and methods used to assess the potential effectiveness of social policy are reviewed. Examples of social policy initiatives will be discussed, for example by drawing on |
Learning outcomes

As a result of the unit, students should be able to:

1. evidence a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of key concepts and methods related to the sociological study of the life course, educational and health inequalities, and the social policy making process;
2. evaluate sociological explanations and evidence related to life course experiences, persistent educational and health inequalities, and social policies designed to affect change in these substantive areas;
3. apply this knowledge and critical understanding to the preliminary design of a research proposal for investigating one aspect of a contemporary issue in sociology;
4. critically reflect on the utility of sociology for informing social policy making.

Student assessment

Students will be assessed through two assignments reflecting the overall learning outcomes of the unit. The maximum word count for Assignment 1, the preliminary research proposal, is 2,000 words. The maximum word count for Assignment 2, the essay, is 2,000 words. Students will have the opportunity to submit a plan on the VLE for each assignment, of no more than 500 words, as part of their formative assessment for feedback from the tutor. The assignments will be submitted through the ICE VLE and must include a bibliography or reference list.

The word length specified for the assignments is inclusive of references in the main body of the text and any footnotes and endnotes, although the use of footnotes and endnotes is strongly discouraged, but exclusive of the bibliography or reference list and any list of abbreviations that may be included at the beginning or end of the assignment.

The use of appendices is strongly discouraged except where additional data, not available in published form, must be presented, and must be agreed with the tutor before the submission of an assignment.

The preliminary research proposal assignment is worth 50% of the overall unit mark. The essay will be worth 50% of the total mark for Unit 3.

Closing date for the submission of plans for feedback:
Assignment 1: Saturday 26 April 2025 by 12.00 noon BST*
Assignment 2: Saturday 24 May 2025 by 12.00 noon BST*

Closing date for the submission of assignments:
Assignment 1: Wednesday 14 May 2025 by 12.00 noon BST*
Assignment 2: Friday 13 June 2025 by 12 noon BST*
*British Summer Time

Assignment 1: Preliminary research proposal

The first assignment for Unit 3 is a 2,000-word research proposal. The assignment requires you to write a preliminary plan and research design to investigate an aspect of a substantive topic in sociology, which has been covered in this unit of the Undergraduate Certificate. You will be able
to confirm the theme and substantive topic of your research proposal with the tutor before submitting your 500-plan for formative feedback.

A proposal is written before a project begins and provides a blueprint for conducting research. Your proposal should: describe the substantive topic and research problem under investigation; explain the importance of this topic and problem; and give a detailed account of the methods that will be used (including a justification for their selection). Conventional elements of a research proposal include:

1. the research topic, problem and question(s);
2. a review of related academic literature;
3. the research design, methods section and ethical issues;
4. potential approaches to data coding and analysis;
5. potential outputs and benefits of the proposed research.

The purpose of this assignment is to assess your ability to: select an aspect of a contemporary issue appropriate for sociological investigation; develop a research question or questions; evaluate existing literature related to your topic; and design a research strategy that has the potential to answer your question. You are not expected to conduct primary research for the assignment.

Please include a bibliography or reference list (excluded from the word count) at the end of your submission.

**Assignment 2: Essay titles**

You should select one of the following essay questions for Assignment 2. You must avoid selecting a question that allows you to reproduce material submitted in Assignment 1. If in doubt, ask the tutor.

1. Critically assess the claims that: 1) childhood is socially constructed; and 2) contemporary childhood is in a state of crisis.
2. What is the life course? Critically evaluate empirical and theoretical approaches to the life course in sociology.
3. Does parenting style vary by social class? What impact, if any, do variations in parenting style have on child outcomes?
4. How have sociologists attempted to explain either gender, ethnic or social class differences in educational attainment?
5. With reference to relevant theories and research, critically discuss the view that education serves to reproduce social inequality.
6. What, if anything, have the concepts of social class and stratification contributed to a sociological understanding of health inequalities?
7. Critically assess sociological explanations for the persistence of health inequalities in one contemporary society.
8. What is social policy? Compare and contrast at least three models of the social policy making process.
9. To what extent did either New Labour or the Coalition government (2010-2015) achieve their main social policy objectives?

Please include a bibliography or reference list (excluded from the word count) at the end of your submission.

**Reading and resource list**

The following list suggests introductory readings for Unit 3. You should consult these suggestions selectively in relation to the assignments you select for Unit 3. Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are highly recommended. In addition, further readings and resources will be suggested on the ICE VLE e.g., books, journal articles, reports and videos.
Core texts


Block 1: The life course: childhood, adulthood, old age, death and bereavement


Block 2: The sociology of education: theories, inequalities and education policy


educational attainment and participation', York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.


**Block 3: The sociology of health and illness: health inequalities and health policy**


**Block 4: Social policy making, policy research and the utility of sociology**


Pre-reading

Journal articles: If you have an idea of the focus of your Unit 3 essay search appropriate peer reviewed journals for research on the topic. For example, American Journal of Sociology; British Journal of Sociology; Sociology; and The Sociological Review. There are many others (run a search in Google for ‘Sociology Journals’).

Preparing for the course
Read Unit 3 of this Course Guide carefully - this will give you a good overview of the unit topics, readings and assignments.

Familiarise yourself with empirical evidence related to the topics you are interested in studying. For example, if you are keen to study health inequalities see: Marmot, M. et al. (2020) Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On. London: The Health Foundation.

Progression routes
Students who have completed the Certificate in Sociology may be able to progress to other provision within ICE including the:

Undergraduate Certificate in Cognitive Psychology
Undergraduate Certificate in History
Undergraduate Certificate in Politics
Undergraduate Certificate in International Relations
Undergraduate Advanced Diploma in Research Theory and Practice
Undergraduate Advanced Diploma in Research in the Arts/Sciences

Credit awarded by ICE can be transferred into the degree programmes of some other higher education providers. The amount of credit which can be transferred into degree programmes varies from institution to institution and is always at the discretion of the receiving institution.


**FULL TIMETABLE**

All Saturday live sessions run from 13.00-14.30 and 15.00-16.30.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Michaelmas 2024</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 1 Sociology: historical origins, insights and value</strong></td>
<td>(Timings are inclusive of breaks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductory session</td>
<td>Friday 11 October 2024 19.00 – 20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 1 Live session</td>
<td>Saturday 12 October 2024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 2 Live session</td>
<td>Saturday 26 October 2024</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-point open session</td>
<td>Wednesday 30 October 2024 19.00 – 20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan deadline Assignment 1</td>
<td>Saturday 16 November 2024 by 12.00 noon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission deadline Assignment 1</td>
<td>Wednesday 4 December 2024 19.00 – 20.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Block 3 Live session</td>
<td>Saturday 9 November 2024</td>
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<tr>
<td>Block 4 Live session</td>
<td>Saturday 23 November 2024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End-point open session</td>
<td>Wednesday 27 November 2024 19.00 – 20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan deadline Assignment 2</td>
<td>Saturday 14 December 2024 by 12.00 noon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission deadline Assignment 2</td>
<td>Wednesday 8 January 2025 19.00 – 20.00</td>
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<tr>
<th>Lent 2025</th>
<th>(Timings are inclusive of breaks)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 2 Social inequality, reproduction and transformation</strong></td>
<td>(Timings are inclusive of breaks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductory session</td>
<td>Friday 10 January 2025 19.00 – 20.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Block 1 Live session</td>
<td>Saturday 11 January 2025</td>
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<tr>
<td>Block 2 Live session</td>
<td>Saturday 25 January 2025</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-point open session</td>
<td>Wednesday 29 January 2025 19.00 – 20.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plan deadline Assignment 1</td>
<td>Saturday 8 February 2025 by 12.00 noon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Submission deadline Assignment 1</td>
<td>Wednesday 26 February 2025 19.00 – 20.00</td>
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<td>Block 3 Live session</td>
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<tr>
<td>Block 4 Live session</td>
<td>Saturday 22 February 2025</td>
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<td>End-point open session</td>
<td>Wednesday 26 February 2025 19.00 – 20.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plan deadline Assignment 2</td>
<td>Saturday 8 March 2025 by 12.00 noon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Submission deadline Assignment 2</td>
<td>Wednesday 26 March 2025 19.00 – 20.00</td>
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<tr>
<th>Easter 2025</th>
<th>(Timings are inclusive of breaks)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 3 Contemporary issues in sociology and social policy</strong></td>
<td>(Timings are inclusive of breaks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductory session</td>
<td>Friday 4 April 2025 19.00 – 20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 1 Live session</td>
<td>Saturday 5 April 2025</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Block 4 Live session</td>
<td>Saturday 24 May 2025</td>
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<tr>
<td>End-point open session</td>
<td>Wednesday 28 May 2025</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plan deadline Assignment 2</td>
<td>Saturday 24 May 2025 by 12.00 noon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission deadline Assignment 2</td>
<td>Friday 13 June 2025 by 12.00 noon</td>
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</tbody>
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Whilst every effort is made to avoid changes to this course, changes to course-content and structure and timings may be made. Students will be consulted on any changes.

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