

Sociology

Why does bullying happen in schools? Is the internet changing the way we think?

Sociology explores how people relate to one another, the influences that shape societies and how these affect our world.

Why study sociology?

We live in a diverse and ever changing world. Sociology gives us the tools to understand the challenges and opportunities we face, from fan culture at football matches to glossy magazines and their influence on how we see our bodies. Sociology focuses on applying theory to real life situations, from crime and violence to sexuality, ethnicity, environmentalism, welfare reform and migration. Sociology is the study of society in all its forms and so it has wide-ranging applications.

What will I study at university?

You don't need to have studied sociology at school to do a sociology degree. There are over 800 courses in the UK that offer sociology. Many of these are multiple subject courses, where you can combine sociology with subjects, such as:

- Media studies
- Psychology
- Criminology
- Philosophy
- Political science
- Education
- Social policy



“I have always felt that sociology is like detective work, a combination of different kinds of reasoning, and different methods, in order to arrive at a satisfactory explanation – at least for the time being.”

Rosemary Compton, sociologist

Some universities offer a placement as part of the course, enabling you to put what you have learned into practice. It also increases employability; many students are offered jobs through their placements.

In the first year you will be introduced to the key concepts, theories and methods that sociologists use to understand the processes of social change.

This includes:

- Macro-sociology, how people's lives today are shaped by large-scale forces, for example the media, religion or social surveillance
- Micro-sociology, small-scale social patterns and experiences of everyday life such as sex and gender, the body, emotions, health and illness, individualism, childhood and ageing
- Social science research methods, including qualitative research (such as interviewing and observation), quantitative research (including questionnaire design) and statistical analyses

These form a foundation for the rest of the course.

SOCIAL SCIENCE FOR SCHOOLS

Careers in social science

Sociology

What skills will I gain?

Many students study sociology because it gives them a wide range of transferable skills. Sociology will help you to think analytically about your life and the world. With your understanding of research methods, you will be able to generate new knowledge using social surveys, in-depth interviews, language analysis, statistics etc. Other skills include:

- Assembling and evaluating evidence
- Thinking critically and writing efficiently
- Constructing and presenting persuasive arguments

These skills will prepare you for employment in a variety of professions that require a sophisticated and questioning understanding of the society.

After my degree... what next?

For some professions, such as teaching, social work or human resource management, you will have to take a vocational postgraduate qualification. You might want to go on to do a postgraduate degree (either a taught course or a research programme) and then continue to a PhD and perhaps a career in research.

On the other hand, there are many opportunities for those who want go straight into the job market. Sociology graduates leave university with marketable skills, particularly the ability to design and conduct accurate research.

Why is sociology important?

“Generations of students have found that sociology makes them look at the world in new ways and this is why so many of us who teach it feel passionately about it - and why it is still pioneering after more than a hundred years.” **British Sociological Society**

What do students say?

“Studying sociology has given me the skills to critically analyse and evaluate evidence, and make well-reasoned arguments, valuable for my career.”

Sociology graduate, Univeristy of Oxford

Graduates in sociology follow diverse and interesting careers. Here are a few examples that would use the skills mentioned above:

- Public relations
- Marketing
- Events management
- Human resources
- Social work
- Systems analysis
- Fundraising
- Local or national government official
- Journalist

Your skills and what you have learned about the workings of society mean that various employers see a sociology degree as highly relevant.



SOCIAL SCIENCE FOR SCHOOLS

Further resources

- **British Sociological Association** is the national association for sociologists in the UK. Its website has a dedicated section for people thinking about studying sociology. The association represents UK sociology on key bodies both nationally and internationally.
www.britsoc.org
- **Intute** is a national internet service, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Higher Education Funding Councils. It helps social scientists find high quality information on the internet that is suitable for education and research. It has a free online tutorial that can help you develop your research skills and find the best websites for your coursework.
www.intute.ac.uk
- **Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology (AACS)** provides a forum for sociologists and others interested in applying sociological knowledge. It tries to enhance understanding of the inter-relationship between sociological knowledge and sociological practice. The website provides resources to increase the effectiveness of applied sociological research and training.
www.aacsnet.net
- **British Library Social Science Research Blog** written by the Social Science team at the British Library, records events, interesting resources and research methods related to the social sciences. It is aimed at anyone with an interest in social sciences from academics and students to policymakers, practitioners and journalists.
<http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/socialscience/index.html>
- **The Academy of Social Sciences** responds to the government on behalf of the social science community. It organises meetings about social science and seminars on topics that span social science disciplines.
www.acss.org.uk
- **Society for the Study of Social Problems** is an interdisciplinary community of scholars, practitioners, advocates and students interested in the application of critical, scientific and humanistic perspectives to the study of vital social problems.
www.sssp1.org
- **Centre for Research on Socio-cultural change (CRESC)** is a University of Manchester and Open University research centre funded by the ESRC. It focuses on the empirical and theoretical complexities of social and cultural change in finance, the media, cities, technologies and social exclusion.
www.cresc.ac.uk
- **Writing Across Boundaries** project is based at Durham University and funded by the ESRC. It supports social science researchers who study the practical and intellectual issues that arise in producing texts that are engaging, accurate and analytically insightful.
www.dur.ac.uk/writingacrossboundaries/
- **Institute for Social and Economic Research** is a department of the University of Essex. Its survey and research experts specialise in the production and analysis of longitudinal data. Longitudinal data is evidence that tracks changes in the lives of the same people over time.
www.iser.essex.ac.uk

