

*The skills and*

*researched. The social urban landscape is constantly changing and is, therefore, never dull.*

Professor Garry Crawford, University of Salford

BRITISH  
SOCIOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1951, the British Sociological Association is the national subject association for sociologists in the UK. This booklet has been developed by the BSA for use in schools, colleges and universities, as well as for anyone interested in discovering sociology and the benefits of study.

The British Sociological Association is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales.  
Company Number: 3890729. Registered Charity Number: 1080235. VAT Registration Number: 734 1722 50.

The material contained in this booklet has been sourced from a variety of sociological influences and we would therefore like to acknowledge the following organisations: American Sociological Association, The Economic and Social Research Council, The Higher Education Academy, Academy of Social Sciences.

**www.britsoc.co.uk**

Copyright © BSA Publications Ltd



**www.britsoc.co.uk**



BRITISH  
SOCIOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

Have you ever wondered about the full story behind the important issues in our society? **How will the unemployment that so many are now experiencing affect their lives, even after they have found work?** Perhaps you feel like there is more to what you read in the papers or see on TV? **For instance, why is the western world so obsessed with celebrity now?** Have you wondered about changes in technology and the affect they are having on society? **How are people using Facebook and other social sites?** Do mobile phones make our lives more or less stressful?

If you are fascinated by the behaviour of others and why we act the way we do, then sociology is for you. Sociology seeks to understand all aspects of human social behaviour, including the social dynamics of small groups of people, large organisations, communities, institutions and even entire societies. Sociologists are typically motivated by their desire to better understand the fundamental principles of social life, believing that an understanding of these principles will help improve people's lives through more enlightened and effective policies.

If you choose to study sociology you will discover how to investigate these kinds of questions for yourself and begin to understand more about your own motivations and behaviours, gaining a wide range of very valuable skills that can be applied to almost any career.

*Fascinating and empowering, studying sociology is just like taking the 'Red Pill' in the Matrix and seeing how deep the rabbit hole goes.*

Stuart Winchester, Owner, Work Tank

# What is SOCIOLOGY?

# Take a closer look at society



By taking a closer look at society and revealing the underlying meanings of emerging patterns of social behaviour, sociologists are able to see the bigger picture. Here are just some of the research areas that sociologists have chosen to study and how their findings affect our everyday lives:

## *Ethnic Britain:* Do we treat ethnic minorities differently?

*Many people may be surprised to learn that in the UK it is Black Caribbeans, not Muslims, who feel most alienated and disaffected.*

Almost half of the UK's Black Caribbean citizens do not feel that the British political system has treated them fairly, despite surveys revealing that other ethnic minority groups are generally more satisfied with British democracy than White British citizens.

According to sociology researcher Professor Anthony Heath, young black men feel British society does not treat them equally or provide them with equal opportunities.

*“Unemployment was a big concern, as was overcoming prejudice and discrimination,” says Anthony. “That these distinct ethnic concerns are not currently reflected in the mainstream political agenda is significant, as it may be fuelling feelings of exclusion, alienation and dissatisfaction amongst some of our young. Finding ways to reintegrate these alienated young people who feel they have no stake in society, no job and no future is the real challenge that policy makers need to address.”*

## *Social Class:* How important is social class in early learning?

*Studies have shown that children who watch hours of television are more likely to be ahead of their classmates when it comes to reading and writing.*

As part of a long-term project looking into the first seven years of a child's life, researchers at the University of London found that children who watch three or more hours of television a day are likely to be up to three months ahead of those who watch TV for less than an hour, contradicting the perception that TV diminishes a young child's brain power.

The study, published in the journal *Sociology*, tracked 11,000 British seven-year-olds from birth to examine claims that parenting skills were more important than social background in determining how well children do at school and in later life.

When comparing youngsters of the same social class, the study also found that rules imposed by parents hoping to boost their children's academic ability, such as insisting on regular meals and set bedtimes, only made a small difference, with the report's lead author Dr Alice Sullivan adding that the educational value of television “may help expose some children to a broader vocabulary than they get at home.”

## Gambling and Debt: Are problem gamblers given enough solutions?

*Surveys suggest there are around 300,000 problem gamblers in the UK, which can lead to difficulties involving debt, family breakdown, mental ill health and even suicide.*

Gambling is a traditional part of British life, but the Gambling Commission wanted to know how many people developed problems as a result of gambling. Charities GamCare and the Money Advice Trust asked sociologist Dr Carolyn Downs to investigate issues specific to gambling, so she compared the impacts of gambling debt with debt resulting from ill health or redundancy. Having worked with a number of agencies, including the Insolvency Service and the Salvation Army, her research team established key issues surrounding problem gambling that could help to identify and treat problem gamblers and support their families.

For example, although many gamblers seek help with their debts, they usually don't admit the true cause (debt advice agencies are now advised to ask about gambling activity where debt is unexplained). Equally, while willing to talk to GPs, younger gamblers in particular are often unable to use telephone helplines because of either a lack of credit on their mobile phones or fear of being caught by their parents if they use a landline. Fear of temptation on the web also deters them from using online advice.

As a result of the Gambling and Debt Pathfinder Study, a new free telephone helpline has been established with special training for GPs on how to help problem gamblers.

## Sport and Family: What does football teach us about family life?

*Two thirds of fans have cried at football matches – occasionally through despair, but mostly because of joy.*

In England more than 650,000 people watch games in the country's Premier League, Championship and Football League stadiums each week, with millions watching live games and highlights on television. Countless others express equally passionate support for lower league teams, while families and friends all over the country stand on the touchlines of local park pitches to support youngsters who themselves may become future stars.

Often social scientists are expected to research the downside of human life – problems such as aggression, alienation, poverty and family dysfunction. As a result, we know a lot about violence and anti-social behaviour and rather less about the basis of civility and good humoured social interaction – things that people experience in their everyday lives most of the time.

## Star Wars: Will future social conflict revolve around the ownership of outer space?

*India's Space Program is busy planning its first unmanned landing on Mars; China is expected to conduct a manned mission in 2020; while in 'Space Tourism' Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic now offers sub-orbital spaceflights to space tourists.*

Sociologists Peter Dickens and James Ormrod argue that society has always been cosmic. In ancient China and Egypt daily life was organised around the movements of the sun and the heavens, while many believed that gods needed to be worshiped for social order to be maintained. Today, society is increasingly involved in the use of outer space, with satellites an essential part of today's communications systems. Outer space is also being progressively used for military and surveillance purposes. Satellite guided drones, for example, are being used to observe and attack Taliban and Al-Qaida operatives in Afghanistan, while tracking stations for the United States' Strategic Defence Initiative, or 'Star Wars' programme, are still being proposed for Poland and the Czech Republic.

Outer space is fast becoming globalised, so much so that 'outer space law' is now being developed in ways that could make the ownership of outer space a reality. Peter Dickens and James Ormrod argue that the ways outer space is now being used benefits mainly those countries with economic, cultural and military muscle and it is therefore not impossible to imagine future social conflict revolving around the ownership of outer space.

Like the dreaded Death Star in the fictional *Star Wars* saga, there is a real danger of advances in space being led by what is technologically possible, rather than what is socially and environmentally desirable.




In the world of football, family life rarely features in sociological commentary and sociologist Janis Griffiths wanted to alter that balance. Her research showed that football plays a key role in family life in much of Europe, linking the shared experiences of family members across generations and creating a lasting sense of tradition and belonging. References to great emotional experiences at football games characterised all aspects of discussions, with over half of those interviewed likening being a fan to having a long-term girlfriend/boyfriend.





# GIVING YOU THE SKILLS TO SUCCEED!



The skills you learn in sociology are marketable and having it on your CV shows that you understand the world around you. Sociological theory helps you to become a critical thinker because it exposes you to many different ways of seeing the social world and with so much political and ethnic strife at the moment, having an informed sense as to why this is happening will help you engage with many different kinds of people. Take these skills, together with your insights into the workings of society and it is not surprising that more and more employers see a sociology degree as highly desirable.

**Communication skills:** Typically, employers are looking for people who are comfortable expressing themselves and their ideas in a clear, concise and meaningful way. A sociology degree will give you the skills and confidence to express yourself in both verbal and written forms to a variety of people.

**Interpersonal skills:** Many of today's employers adopt a customer-oriented approach and are therefore seeking graduates who are good at networking and affiliating. Most sociology courses now include exercises in team working, so as well as learning how to initiate ideas and work independently, you will also learn how to work in collaboration with others.

**Analytical skills:** Sociology is the study of society and therefore develops great problem-solving abilities and sharp, critical thinking. These skills are essential for all kinds of duties and projects.

**Statistics:** Organisations value an employee who can work with others to define a problem or research question, design a study to find answers, analyse the data, report on the findings and then make recommendations based on those findings.

**Cross-cultural understanding:** Employers need staff who can understand and operate across many diverse cultures. A degree in sociology will give you a global outlook and help make you aware of traditional stereotypes.

**Leadership skills:** Employers value employees who can lead by example and develop new ideas. Sociology teaches you how to find information, extract what is important and then turn it into a compelling argument, helping you to influence and motivate others.

*"Sociology is fascinating! Everything we do has sociological implications and studying social science feeds into and informs a number of additional disciplines (such as health, crime, law, economics)."*

Stephanie O'Neil, SIPS JR-High Research Assistant, Newcastle University

## SCALING NEW HEIGHTS

With a passion for sport and competing, Rebecca Darlington viewed herself as 'one of the lads'. However, it was her fascination with analysing others that ultimately led her to study sociology.

When I was 12 I wanted to be a vet. At 15 I dreamed of being a firefighter. By 17 I thought about joining the army. Through it all what I really sought was a way to keep being an athlete; a competitor; a player; an opponent; physically strong; mentally tough. I was a tomboy, 'one of the lads'. Going against the grain is never easy, yet sport was my safe haven.

But I also had an intellectual wondering and I secretly consumed knowledge like my life depended on it. In an odd way it did. Some days I could hold a book and feel as if I was breathing in the letters from the pages and I would imagine who might have held it before me. My curiosity ran through me like a thread. I sensed people in a way I couldn't explain. I watched inquisitively and quietly. I was like a chameleon blending into the background. I was already a sociologist at heart.

I went about my sports science degree largely doing modules in physiology and biomechanics, trying to resist the enticement of sociology. I knew it was where my passion lay but I worried about employability and the direct paths to a vocation. Yet, slowly, it was opening up this whole new world for me, a whole new way of seeing, a level of understanding that I already seemed to have been looking for. I was living it. I just lacked the academic training.

Lucky enough to have the support and guidance of a fantastic tutor, I knew I wanted to continue to shape my sociological imagination. My endless curiosity about other people's doings and my fascination with listening to and analysing their interactions was no longer just about learning my own place, but about whole groups of people. So with a few detours along the way, I started a PhD. Combining my passions for rock climbing and sociology, I decided to explore the realms of gender and risk in climbing and mountaineering. And here we are. I am a sociologist. I am sociology.

*"I knew it was where my passion lay but I worried about employability and the direct paths to a vocation."*

Rebecca Darlington  
(Postgraduate Student)



## THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

Having studied sociology at university, Leyla Mehmet is now a recognised publisher and the proud owner of her own marketing company. Here she explains how it was her fascination with social behaviour that first attracted her to sociology and how her newly acquired skills and knowledge in the subject have driven her to succeed in media.

Sociology was part of a group of subjects I studied when I did my BA and although I always found it more interesting than the other subjects, I never imagined that it would play such a pivotal role in every decision and indeed every job role, that I have had since graduation.

Learning about cultures, languages, the interpretation of data and social theories are just some of the skills that have pushed me forward at a high speed through my media career. In sociology, everything that the rest of the world regards as new, or novel or difficult to understand is simply another form of culture, another form of communication and another interesting case study. Sociology provides a framework of thinking and understanding that makes you not only understand and digest emerging information quickly and easily, but also makes it fun and interesting.

My experience of sociology is that it makes the whole world one long, interesting study into social behaviour and social behaviour is at the root of pretty much every business, every PR campaign and every political movement and news story. The world right now, with constantly evolving and emerging social media, global political movements, revolutions and economics, new technologies, the online world – this is sociology actually in action and, as a graduate, I find the experience of it is just fascinating!

Employers love this sort of thing and I can honestly say, hand on heart, that it is sociology that has got me to where I am today and what is still driving me to learn and achieve even more.

*"Sociology is at the root of pretty much every business, every PR campaign and every political movement and news story."*

Leyla Mehmet  
Little Local Marketing Company



# OPEN DOORS WITH A SOCIOLOGY DEGREE

Today, research shows people entering the job market will change careers several times over the course of their working life, which begs the question, 'why limit yourself to one type of job'? Sociology trains you to answer the 'what', 'how' and 'why' questions about human societies, giving you a competitive edge in the job market and providing a strong intellectual background for students considering careers in the professions or business.

**Administration:** Sociologists can reshape their communities, particularly in government and public agencies, by leading teams of researchers and social work professionals to define public policies.

**Business:** Sociologists research consumer trends to reveal evolving customer needs and opportunities. Sociologists also help product designers understand the overall trends shaping consumer culture in order to inspire tomorrow's new products.

**Health and Welfare Service:** Most health and welfare professionals study sociology in order to better understand some of the larger trends they see among patients and clients. By using the kinds of pattern analysis techniques that sociologists are known for, they can focus their practices on critical needs in their communities.

**Education:** Teachers with a sociological perspective are aware of the factors that make up a child's background and understand why they act the way they do. This gives them the tools and confidence to help overcome many challenges in schools.

**Journalism:** Newspapers and media outlets employ sociologists to help understand the kinds of stories that engage readers, viewers and listeners in a particular region. Sociologists work with editors to identify the right balance between news that audiences expect and the stories that need to be reported.

**Public Relations:** By reviewing market research data and understanding historic trends, sociologists who truly understand the motivations of customers can effectively defuse problems in the media by responding to the public's concerns with carefully composed solutions.

**Police:** Many local authorities hire sociologists to understand the impact of tougher laws. Sociologists also help prison and probation officers determine the effects of new programmes and regulations on the prison population.

**Research:** A variety of government agencies, nonprofit institutions and outreach organisations seek out sociologists for specialist research. Many sociologists go on to carve out careers as independent research consultants, examining trends in human behaviour for a variety of clients.



## From PhD to PUBLIC HEALTH DOCTOR

Dr Catherine Heffernan explains a typical morning for a public health doctor in the NHS. The difference is she's a sociologist.

My day kicks off at 9:30am with coffee and 100 emails. My PA hands me my diary for the day. There has been an E. coli outbreak at a school so there is an emergency teleconference at 11am. I check the agenda and minutes for the Breastfeeding & Immunisation Steering Committee that I chair and notice Alcohol Awareness Week is approaching. I look at my diary again. The local radio station wants to interview me at 5pm on the rise in child poverty in London and I also have to meet with the performance team to update them on teenage pregnancy in the borough. This is a typical morning for a public health doctor in the NHS. The difference is I'm a sociologist.

Although public health is a medical speciality, non-medics who are suitably qualified can apply to the postgraduate programme and train to become consultants. The programme is four to five years and the salary is good – between £40,000 and £50,000 a year.

I find that my sociological background is invaluable to my day-to-day work. Firstly, all my statistical and social research methodology training means that I can interpret any health trend, read any epidemiological report and measure outcomes and users' perspectives.

Secondly, service redesign is a huge component of public health work and being able to develop service models based on evidence requires the skills of a social researcher. People need to know what works and the years spent doing literature reviews means that I can quickly put together an argument on the effectiveness of interventions.

Thirdly, partnership working is crucial to improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities. Without knowing it, I readily apply sociological theories to my work and feel that I can bring anyone, even dissenting voices, to the table. Sociology also equips you with an understanding of the barriers to good health, including the impact of social structure. This is crucial when working with local authorities who have responsibility for improving housing, transport, education and overall quality of life.

*I find that my sociological background is invaluable to my day-to-day work. It really is a fantastic grounding for public health.*

Dr Catherine Heffernan



## From the classroom to THE INTERVIEW ROOM

George Nelson works with a wide range of individuals involved in the criminal justice system, specifically the homeless and those on parole or probation. He is also a part-time lecturer in sociology.

Having studied sociology and the relationship between individuals and social structures, I know the importance of objectivity when assessing and supporting an individual. The individuals I work with are often classified as 'offenders' or those involved in the social construct of 'crime'. They are typically defined by a certain set of characteristics, namely distrust, vulnerability and a poor self-concept.

Offenders have often experienced a number of breakdowns in their lives, so having an understanding of the structural factors that can influence them is vital in helping me determine the best way to work with them.

As a sociologist, I don't see these individuals as one-dimensional, but rather possessing individual differences that have been shaped by their own personal histories. Through a sociological interpretation of these histories and an understanding of the way society is divided and organised into social groups, I can attempt to uncover what may be exerting a disciplinary power or influence over them and help them re-evaluate their existing beliefs and norms.

Crime and homelessness are social problems that continue to capture the interest of the media, academia, politicians and the general public alike. It is only with the aforementioned knowledge, gained through sociology, that I am able to interpret the social world around me and apply this successfully within the voluntary sector.

*The ability to analyse social research and understand the impact this has on social policy has been instrumental in my transition from academic student to successful practitioner.*

George Nelson





# My Life in SOCIOLOGY

By BBC Radio 4's Laurie Taylor

Everything about society seemed little more than a matter of common sense. But as soon as I began to learn about the origins and the nature of the state and religion and social class and power, I found that the previously taken for granted world had suddenly become so much more interesting. Matters that I'd previously taken for granted about the differences between cultures and peoples now became objects of curiosity and amazement. Instead of merely regretting the existence of such enduring social problems as crime and racism and social inequality, I now eagerly learned about their causes and the manner in which their impact might be modified.

At times it made me dizzy. Sociology can have that effect. It disturbs conventional ways of thinking, breaks up solid categories and throws doubt on accepted truths. When I was a Professor of Sociology at the University of York I used to give a lecture on Erving Goffman's account of the social function of embarrassment. After one such lecture a second-year student came up to me and asked if she could be excused from the seminar on the topic. She explained that she had become so fascinated by Goffman's brilliant analysis of face-to-face interaction that she could no longer enjoy her social life (I'm delighted to say that she soon got over this problem and went on to obtain a first-class degree).

It is sociology's power to disturb and disorient which makes its students so suited to the media. Nobody wants to listen to a radio feature or watch a television documentary that simply repeats the obvious. Viewers and listeners expect programmes to have an original angle, provide a different perspective, introduce some new facts. And, of course, sociology students not only tend to possess the imagination which can produce such results but also have the research methodology which can ensure that any such new findings have a proper basis in reality.

Sociology is continually surprising. Although I've been presenting R4's weekly social science programme *Thinking Allowed* for many years now, I find that I'm still as excited by the new research it introduces as I was when the programme began. I'm also constantly delighted to discover that the many sociologists I meet in the course of this job fully share my own abiding fascination with the subject. As an elderly professor once told me when I genially asked if he intended to retire in the near future, "You don't retire from sociology any more than you retire from life."



*"I don't think that I ever really thought hard about the world around me until I began to study sociology."*

Laurie Taylor

# Next STEPS

## Get a Head Start in Life

As you can see, sociology embraces the whole range of human activities, making it a very wide field of study. Whether you are studying sociology at A-level, hoping to further your studies at university or you're simply curious about sociology, we hope this booklet has opened your mind to the many opportunities out there for sociologists and shown how a sociological outlook can help you make your mark in a highly competitive market place.

Our website ([www.britsoc.co.uk](http://www.britsoc.co.uk)) has a dedicated section for people thinking of studying sociology. Here you will find a link to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) site, where you can search for sociology courses either as a single subject or in combination with others. Around 40 British universities have sociology departments and many more teach sociology courses, so if you want to study in the UK you have plenty of choice.

In studying sociology, you are welcomed into a community of like-minded people who are fascinated with how we work as human beings. Generations of students have found that sociology makes them look at the world in new ways and this is why so many of us feel so passionately about it – and why the subject is still pioneering after more than 100 years!

## Where can I study sociology?

### A

1. Aberdeen, University of
2. Abertay Dundee, University of
3. Anglia Ruskin University
4. Aston University, Birmingham

### B

5. Bangor University
6. Bath, University of
7. Bath Spa University
8. Bedfordshire, University of
9. Birmingham, University of
10. Birmingham City University
11. Blackburn College
12. Bournemouth University

### C

13. Bradford, University of
14. Brighton, University of
15. Bristol, University of
16. Brunel University
17. Buckinghamshire New University
18. Bury College

### D

19. Cambridge, University of
20. Canterbury Christ Church University
21. Cardiff University
22. Central Lancashire, University of
23. Chester, University of
24. City University London
25. Coventry University

### E

26. De Montfort University
27. Derby, University of
28. Durham University

### F

29. East London, University of
30. Edge Hill University
31. Edinburgh, University of
32. Edinburgh Napier University
33. Essex, University of
34. Exeter, University of

### G

35. Farnborough College of Technology
36. Glasgow, University of
37. Glasgow Caledonian University
38. Gloucestershire, University of
39. Goldsmiths, University of London
40. Greenwich, University of

### H

41. Huddersfield, University of
42. Hull, University of

### K

43. Keele University
44. Kent at Canterbury, University of
45. Kingston University

### L

46. Lancaster University
47. Leeds, University of
48. Leeds Metropolitan University
49. Leicester, University of
50. Liverpool, University of
51. Liverpool Hope University
52. Liverpool John Moores University
53. London Metropolitan University
54. London School of Economics
55. London South Bank University
56. Loughborough University

### M

57. Manchester, University of
58. Manchester Metropolitan University
59. Middlesex University

### N

60. Newcastle University
61. Newham College London
62. Northampton, University of
63. Northumbria University
64. Norwich City College of Further and Higher Education
65. Nottingham, University of
66. Nottingham Trent University

### O

67. Oxford Brookes University

### P

68. University Centre Peterborough
69. Plymouth University
70. Portsmouth, University of

### Q

71. Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh
72. Queen's University, Belfast

### R

73. Roehampton University
74. Royal Holloway, University of London

### S

75. Salford, University of
76. Sheffield, University of
77. Sheffield Hallam University
78. South Devon College
79. South Wales, University of
80. Southampton, University of
81. St Mary's University College, Twickenham, London
82. Staffordshire University
83. Stirling, University of
84. University Campus Suffolk
85. Sunderland, University of
86. Surrey, University of
87. Sussex, University of

### T

88. Teesside University

### U

89. Ulster, University of

### W

90. Warwick, University of
91. West Anglia, College of
92. West of England, Bristol, University of
93. West of Scotland, University of
94. Westminster, University of
95. Winchester, University of
96. Wolverhampton, University of
97. Worcester, University of

### Y

98. York, University of

Information provided by UCAS.  
Course providers and availability  
correct at time of print.

