

## PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

<b>Course Record Information</b>	
Name and level of final and intermediate Awards	Final awards: BA (Hons) Sociology BA Sociology  Intermediate awards: Diploma of Higher Education Certificate of Higher Education
Awarding Body	University of Westminster
Location of Delivery	Regent
Mode of Study	FT and PT (day) or mixed modes
UW Course Code	BSOCSCI
JACS Code	L300
UCAS Code	L300
QAA Subject Benchmarking Group	Sociology
Professional Body Accreditation	
Date of initial course approval/last review	November 2008
Date of Programme Specification	May 2012

### Admissions Requirements

BB C grades at A-Level + English GCSE at grade C or above.

BTec DMM and an academic A-Level grade C or above.

Access 60 credits at level 3 and the rest at level 2.

International Bac 28 points and English 5/6 IELTS points.

Non-traditional mature students are considered on the basis of their qualifications and experience.

## **Aims of the course**

### **Context**

This programme specification is written mainly for current and future students so that they can find out about the ‘what, how and why’ of our sociology degree at the University of Westminster. Sociology is the study of social relations and society which helps us to understand the social issues facing us today. As May (2001) puts it, ‘thinking sociologically’ helps to make sense of our experiences in our local surroundings and in relation to other people. It studies how societies work in both national and global contexts, engaging with the social, cultural, political and economic processes which shape them and drawing on different theoretical perspectives to explain them.

The discipline can be divided into core areas of theory and methodology and specialist areas such as gender, ‘race’, sexualities, the body, globalisation, media, cultural representations, social policy and education, which reflect some of the specialist research interests of the teaching team. The ‘how’ of sociology is its methodology and the ways in which sociological research is conducted and how it stems from and informs sociological theory and understandings of society. The ‘why’ of sociology is the reasons why students want to study sociology and its benefits in preparing them for their future lives. Sociology is an exciting and challenging discipline, which one of our first-year students described as opening up a whole new way of thinking about her life and society. The lives and interests of students are reflected both in modules about diversity/difference and our approach to learning and teaching.

### **Aims**

The aims of the BA Sociology degree at Westminster fit within the university’s mission statement to provide for “the intellectual, social and professional development of the individual” and are as follows:

- To encourage interest in and excitement about sociological knowledge and society;
- To promote critical thinking and integrity of intellectual enquiry;
- To develop self/structural awareness through engaging with sociological perspectives;
- To support non-traditional students and prepare all students for the ‘real world’.

### **Employment and Further Study Opportunities**

A degree in Sociology prepares students for most professional careers because it develops critical self- and social awareness (QAA (2007) Sociology Benchmarks). Our students are encouraged from the first year Researching Society module onwards, to develop personal strategies of independent learning and career management skills, identifying any skills gaps and remedying them through further training provided by the university, for example in IT, modern languages and academic literacy or through work. In the third year, the Work Experience module

requires students to find and negotiate a suitable placement where they can apply their sociological knowledge and gain valuable experience in the workplace.

Many of our full-time home students are doing some form of paid work to support themselves financially, and they are encouraged to look for work which can extend their experience beyond previous jobs in the retail or service sectors. The University careers service provides lists of job vacancies and voluntary work opportunities, within the university (such as student ambassadors or working in the library) and individual careers' counselling which students find invaluable. The University of London Institute of Education runs a Student Associate scheme to give our second and third year students a taste of teaching prior to applying for the PGCE. The Economic and Social Research Council also offers a summer placement scheme for students to gain relevant work experience. These opportunities are especially valuable for students with little experience of paid work. Students can continue to use the Careers' service for up to three years after they graduate to assist them in finding graduate employment.

Many Sociology students enter professions such as teaching and social work or join the civil service, local government or voluntary organisations. Their interest may have been sparked by specific modules in areas such as social policy, health and education. A number of students are inspired to further study for Masters' degrees and PhDs and subsequently make the transition to academic jobs in teaching and/or research at this or other universities.

### **Course Learning Outcomes**

The most important intellectual skills developed in the Sociology degree, are skills of evaluation, analysis, critique and independence of thought. Collectively these skills enable students to build sociological conceptual frameworks upon which practical, evidence-based skills can be developed. By the end of the degree, we want students to develop and apply their sociological imagination, have acquired a substantial body of sociological knowledge, undertaken personal development and to be equipped for graduate employment.

The degree is broadly structured at three levels:

**Level 4** is equivalent to first year and students are not expected to have studied sociology before (although some will have studied it at A-Level and they are expected to understand the difference between what they learnt at this level and degree level);

**Level 5** consists of core and option modules and is equivalent to second year; Second-year students can take up two Level 6 options in Semester 2.

**Level 6** is equivalent to third year and includes core and option modules. The specific learning outcomes are drawn from the QAA (2007) Sociology benchmarks and applied to our modules. These are categorised in terms of 'knowledge and understanding, specific skills and key transferable skills', providing threshold criteria at each level. Essentially, in terms of knowledge and understanding, level 4 introduces ways of thinking sociologically about self and

society in historical and social context and core concepts and methods. Level 5 develops knowledge about the discipline and its perspectives and methods, drawing more on primary sources to develop competence and application of theoretical concepts in relation to specialist options. By level 6, students are expected to think sociologically, formulate sociological questions, design and conduct primary research and be competent in interpreting theory and evidence. Similarly, there is progression in specific skills from orientation to higher education and academic literacy at level 4 to being able accurately to describe, conduct, analyse and report empirical sociological information at level 5 and to be competent sociological practitioners, able to think critically, undertake research, and marshal arguments at level 6.

Key transferable skills progress from strategies to support independent learning, ICT skills, referencing and group work at level 4 to reflecting on and improving personal learning strategies, more sophisticated information retrieval and skills and career management skills at level 5 and dissertation skills, work experience and awareness of the relevance of sociological knowledge to policy and career pathways. Together, the threshold knowledge required of a sociology graduate, demonstrates a disciplinary commitment to equipping students for graduate employment.

## **Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods**

### **Learning**

The most important ways in which students will learn is through engaging their interest and motivation and providing them with the resources (staff, books and journals, computing resources etc) to stimulate them. The first year requires most students to make a significant shift in their approach to education to become more aware of their learning strategies and the value placed on independent learning.

This can be achieved if students manage their time to spend approximately 150 hours per module in reading and preparation of course work in order to acquire sociological knowledge and skills at degree level. They also need support from the teaching team to foster independent learning through provision of clear documentation in module handbooks about content, expectations (learning outcomes), assessment and appropriate reading.

Additionally, detailed guidance is provided through lectures and seminar activities in outlining key sociological knowledge and providing opportunities for students to practise ways of thinking sociologically. Students learn much from each other but they also need to know what standards are expected at degree level and early opportunities for formative assessment are important especially in the first semester of the first year.

As students progress through their second and third years, they are expected to use their initiative more in the coursework they undertake such as small scale research in core research methods modules, selecting their own topics, texts, images etc for analysis. Independent learning is most developed in the final-year honours dissertation, where students have the opportunity and freedom to research in depth

(and write about) a sociological topic that most interests them (as long as it is linked their academic programme) with limited supervision.

## **Teaching**

The QAA Sociology benchmarks document identifies distinctive features of the discipline which are critical to teaching and learning. Firstly, that 'sociology seeks to generalise on the basis of evidence' (QAA 2007:4) so that theory and interpretation of evidence need to be judged in relation to one another. Students need to be given the chance to learn how to think in both abstract and concrete terms. Secondly, students need to be able to evaluate competing perspectives and conflicting explanations and to develop the skills to judge whether theories offer valid, logical explanations and to justify their arguments. Thirdly, sociological knowledge is intimately bound up with most areas of social and public life and different perspectives are connected to value positions, so students need to be self-aware in relation to how their own values and other people with different values will influence rival interpretations of evidence.

Teaching advances student learning through a range of methods within and outside the teaching slot for each module. Typically, modules are divided between lectures and seminars, with the lectures being used to provide a framework for further study by defining the topic, identifying and evaluating significant theories and research evidence and issues in relation to it. Seminars provide an opportunity for students to practise sociological skills and explore or test their understanding through specific exercises, such as detailed textual analysis, data interpretation, discussion and debate. Students can ask questions about things they do not understand, shape the direction of discussion and seek guidance on assignments in seminars, but the success of seminars depends on the extent to which students have read and prepared for them.

During lectures and seminars, students have the opportunity to practise specific skills of academic literacy through analysing primary data and sources sociologically. They also develop key transferable skills such as time management in working through activities, information retrieval, group work, use of ICT, communication and presentation skills etc which may be taught and practised but not necessarily assessed.

Outside formal classes, students can communicate with the academic staff via email or drop-in during office hours and use the Blackboard virtual learning environment to find out information about the module, links to related web-based resources and use discussion boards to communicate with one another and academics. Guided study enables students to make use of a range of resources, both paper and electronic to support their learning. First-year students will be given more guidance in terms of suggested reading, appropriate websites etc whereas second and final-year students will be expected to find their own resources and use wider, more complex search facilities from within and outside the university. In summary, teaching is more lecturer-led in the first year and becomes more student-led in the second and especially the third year.

## Assessment

Assessment offers a way of measuring whether the learning outcomes of a module have been achieved and to what standard and is crucial to student motivation. At each level and within each module, assessments have been designed which are fit for purpose and our external examiners applaud the original and diverse range of assessments that we offer. Initially, with first-year modules such as “Self and Society”, there are formative assessments at a relatively early stage which do not carry many marks but help to give students an idea of what is required for degree-level learning. Very detailed guidance is provided in the module handbooks and support is given in seminars to assist the students. Where appropriate, in-class tests are used to test understanding of concepts, for example in the first year “Thinking Sociologically” module or analysis of primary theoretical texts in the second-year “Theorising Modernity” module. Some modules use a log as the formative assessment in order to encourage students to prepare for and attend seminars and test their application of sociological knowledge and their ability to be concise, for example “Introduction to Women’ Studies”. Exams use different types of questions to test sociological knowledge and application of skills at different levels.

Coursework consists of a range of assessments and essays remain very important. They test students’ ability to research and answer the question, marshal arguments and practise academic literacy (including conventions of referencing and bibliography). Other assessments involve students choosing a textual representation for more detailed deconstruction and analysis.

Data processing and analysis is developed from level 4 onwards, for example in the “Researching Society” module where SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) is introduced and the Level 5 “Sociological Research Methods”. Social Policy and education modules use a report to encourage students to develop different forms of writing which are appropriate to future careers. Presentations test group work and communication skills and are more often associated with level 6 modules, which have smaller numbers. Students feel less confident producing assignments which are not standard essays but with detailed guidance and appropriate support, including use of previous examples, they also enjoy the opportunities to do more creative assignments, for example, a manifesto for “Sexualities” or a textual analysis or an autobiographical essay.

Some of the modules rehearse skills required at a more advanced level in subsequent modules, such as reviewing an article in “Thinking Sociologically” at level 4 and conducting a literature review in “Body and Society” at level 6. Similarly, students do some primary research in “Research Methods” at level 5 and use this knowledge of the research process if they do primary research for their final year dissertation.

## Course Structure

This section shows the core and option modules available as part of the course and their credit value. Full-time Undergraduate students study 120 credits in combinations of 15 and 30 credits.

### Credit Level 4

Code	Title	Status	Value
1SOC431	Self and Society	Core	15
SSOC403	Researching Society I	Core	15
SSOC404	Researching Society II	Core	15
1SOC437	Thinking Sociologically	Core	30
1SOC434	Introduction to Women's Studies	Option	15
SSOC400	Understanding Race: Key Debates	Option	15
SSOC401	Globalisation and the Media	Option	15
SSOC402	Culture and Everyday Life	Option	15

BA Sociology students can choose a module from Criminology or History as well as one 'free' module from outside the department such as a modern language.

Award of Certificate of Higher Education is available on successful completion of 120 credits as an exit qualification.

### Credit Level 5

Code	Title	Status	Value
1SOC501	Sociological Research Methods	Core	15
1SOC504	Analyzing the Social	Core	30
1SOC505	Theorising Modernity	Core	30
SSOC500	Culture and Identity	Option	15
1SOC503	Women, Gender and Power	Option	15
1SOC507	Sociology of Health and Illness	Option	15
1SOC508	Contemporary Issues in Education	Option	15

BA Sociology students choose 45 option credits in addition to the core modules at this stage. They can choose from the Level 5 options above and a maximum of two level 6 options and a 'free' module from another subject area as well if they wish.

Award of Diploma of Higher Education is available on successful completion of 240 credits at Levels 5/6 as an exit qualification.

Note: Students at level five (or part-time equivalent) are permitted to take up to 30 credits at Level 6 in Semester 2 of that second year, with the approval of their Personal Tutor.

## Credit Level 6

Code	Title	Status	Value
1SOC607	Theorising Postmodernity	Core	15
1SOC699	Dissertation	Core	30
1SOC600	Sexualities	Option	15
1SOC602	Globalisation and Britain	Option	15
1SOC603	Gender, Ethnicity & Cultural Representations	Option	15
1SOC604	Masculinities	Option	15
1SOC606	Gender and Education	Option	15
1SOC608	Race and Ethnicity	Option	15
1SOC612	Women, Family and Social Policy	Option	15
1SOC613	Feminist Issues: Theory & Sexual Politics	Option	15
1SOC614	Applied Social Research	Option	15
1SOC616	Body and Society	Option	15
1SOC617	Power and the Media	Option	15
1SOC695	Work Experience: Practice and Reflection	Option	15
SSOC609	Consuming Race	Option	15
SSOC610	Perils and Pleasures: A London Sociology of Leisure	Option	15
SSOC611	Families, Intimacies and Personal Life	Option	15

At this level, there are fewer core (45 credits) and more options (75 credits) to give more scope to explore the substantive areas of the discipline.

Award of BA Sociology available on completion of 300 credits

Award of BA (Hons) Sociology available on completion of 360 credits

## Progression Requirements

The University has regulations that govern the progression through the course.

The BA (Hons) Sociology and its intermediate awards operate in accordance with the University's Academic Regulations and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

A *pass* in a module is achieved when the overall mark is at least 40% and the marks for each individual element (eg coursework and exam) are at least 30%.

In order to progress from year one to year two, a full-time student must obtain a 40% overall average at level 4;

In order to progress from year two to year three, a full-time student must obtain a minimum of 165 credits at level 4 or above, including a minimum of 75 credits at level 5 or above.



## Awards

### Award of a Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE)

- (i) To be eligible for the award of a Certificate of Higher Education, a student must have:
  - a) obtained a minimum of 120 credits at Level 4 or higher, including 75 credits passed and at least a condoned credit in each of the remaining modules worth 45 credits; and
  - b) satisfied the requirements contained within any course specific regulations for the relevant Course Scheme.
- (ii) The University may award:
  - a) a **Certificate of Higher Education with Merit** to a student whose marks average at least 60% across the best 105 credits;
  - b) a **Certificate of Higher Education with Distinction** to a student whose marks average at least 70% across the best 105 credits.

### Award of a Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)

- (i) To be eligible for the award of a Diploma of Higher Education, a student must have:
  - a) obtained at least 240 credits including:
    - a minimum of 120 credits at Level 4 or higher, including 75 credits passed and at least a condoned credit in each of the remaining modules worth 45 credits; and
    - a minimum of 120 credits at Level 5 or higher; and
  - b) satisfied the requirements contained within any course specific regulations for the relevant Course Scheme.
- (ii) The University may award:
  - a) a **Diploma of Higher Education with Merit** to a student whose marks average at least 60% across the best 105 credits at Level 5 or higher;
  - b) a **Diploma of Higher Education with Distinction** to a student whose marks average at least 70% across the best 105 credits at Level 5 or higher.

### Award of a Non-Honours Degree

- (i) To be eligible for the award of a Non-Honours Degree, a student must have:
  - a) obtained at least 300 credits including:
    - a minimum of 120 credits at Level 4 or higher, including 75 credits passed and at least a condoned credit in each of the remaining modules worth 45 credits; and
    - a minimum of 120 credits at Level 5 or higher; and
    - a minimum of 60 credits at Level 6 or higher.

b) satisfied the requirements contained within any course specific regulations for the relevant Course Scheme.

(ii) The University may award:

a) a **Non-Honours Degree with Merit** to a student whose marks average at least 60% across the best 150 credits at Levels 5 and 6;

b) a **Non-Honours Degree with Distinction** to a student whose marks average at least 70% across the best 150 credits at Levels 5 and 6.

### **Award of an Honours Degree**

17.1 (i) To be eligible for the award of an Honours Degree, a student must have obtained at least 360 credits including:

a) - a minimum of 120 credits at Level 4 or higher, including 75 credits passed and at least a condoned credit in each of the remaining modules worth 45 credits; and

- a minimum of 120 credits at Level 5 or higher; and

- a minimum of 120 credits at Level 6 or higher; and

b) attempted modules with a maximum value of 330 credits at Level 5 and 6; and

c) satisfied the requirements contained within any course specific regulations for the relevant Course Scheme.

## **Time Limits**

The time limit for a student to complete his/her programme of study shall be as follows:

	<b>Full-time study</b>	<b>Part-time or mixed mode study</b>
CertHE	3 years	5 years
DipHE	5 years	6 years
Degree	6 years	8 years
Honours degree	6 years	8 years

These are the overall time limits for programmes of study with the substantive mode of attendance indicated above and **include** any periods for the suspension of studies or the retrieval of failed modules. The time limit for any programme of study not listed above shall be determined by the relevant University Validation Panel.

## **Support for Students**

On arrival, a departmental induction programme will register students, introduce them to the staff responsible for the course and most importantly, help them to choose their subjects and modules to embark on their degree programme. Students will be given the Course Handbook, which provides detailed information about the course. All students are required to take the core 30 credit module, "Researching Society", which is a year-long subject-based module which is designed to help students make the transition to the culture of HE and independent study. This

module combines specific sociological skills and knowledge, academic literacy skills, career management and personal development skills including managing finances. It also provides an important social function as the same group of students meet every week and this gives them a social base in what are otherwise very large and interdisciplinary first-year classes. Often students maintain the friends they make in this module for the duration of their degree. All students are allocated to a Personal Tutor. In the final year, students are also allocated a dissertation supervisor, and sometimes, this person is the one students turn to when they are experiencing academic or personal difficulties, thus providing another level of support. The Course Leader is also available to students experiencing difficulties with their programme.

Learning support includes the Library which, across its four sites, holds print collections of 356,000 printed books, 29,000 print and e-journals, over 45,000 electronic resources (databases, e-journals, e-books). Access to all resources is facilitated through Library Search.

At University level, Services for Students provide general and individual advice and guidance on accommodation, financial and legal matters, personal counselling, health and disability issues, careers and the chaplaincy provides multi-faith guidance. The International Education Office provides particular support for international students and home students who want to study abroad. The Students' Union also provides a range of facilities to support all students during their time at the University.

## **Reference Points for the course**

### **Internally**

The university's mission statement, widening participation, skills and teaching, learning and assessment policies have informed the design of the course along with more specific school and departmental policies. The Skills Policy (Whitlock, 2001), explicitly designed to promote graduate employability, includes two elements: 1) Higher Education and career management skills and, 2) personal development planning, both of which have been incorporated into the Sociology programme.

Within the Department for Social and Historical Studies, the BA Sociology links with other Single Honours degrees in Criminal Justice and History.

The sociology programme closely reflects the specialist interests and research activity of the staff team, particularly in the areas of masculinities, 'race', education, the body, etc. Newer modules such as Sexualities, Cultural Representations, Media and Power have been produced in response to student interest and/or perceived gaps in the curriculum.

### **Externally**

QAA subject benchmark statements (Sociology)

## **Quality Management and Enhancement**

### **Course Management**

The BA (Hons) Sociology degree and all the sociology modules are the responsibility of the sociology team and co-ordinated by the Course Leader. Subject meetings are attended by full-time, fractional and PTVL staff, who are early involved in the academic decision-making process around course review, monitoring and development. However, all financial decisions are the responsibility of the Head of the Department of Social and Historical Studies and policy decisions are guided by policies at school level or are university-wide.

Course committees are held once a term with representatives from the School Registry, computing, library and the subject team to update information about any changes or new initiatives, and to provide students with an opportunity to raise issues or provide feedback on specific academic services, policies or areas of concern.

### **Course approval, monitoring and review**

The course was initially approved by a University Validation Panel in 2001t. The Panel included internal peers from the University and external subject specialists from academia and industry to ensure the comparability of the course to those offered in other Universities and the relevance to employers. Periodic Course Review helps to ensure that the curriculum is up-to-date and that the skills gained on the course continue to be relevant to employers.

The course is monitored each year by the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Languages to ensure that it is running effectively and that issues that might affect the student experience have been appropriately addressed. Staff will consider the outcomes from each Course Committee, evidence of student progression and achievement and the reports from External Examiners to evaluate the effectiveness of the course. The School Learning and Teaching Quality Committee audits this process and the outcomes are reported to the Academic Council of the University, which has overall responsibility for the maintenance of quality and standards in the University.

### **Student involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement**

Student feedback is important to the University and student views are taken seriously. Student feedback is gathered in a variety of ways. The most formal mechanism for feedback on the course is the Course Committee. Student representatives will be elected to sit on the Committee to represent the views of their peer group in various discussions. The University and the Students' Union work together to provide a full induction to the role of the Course Committee.

All students are invited to complete a Module Feedback Questionnaire before the end of each module. The feedback from this will inform the Module Leader on the effectiveness of the module and highlight areas that could be enhanced. The

University also has an annual Student Experience Survey which elicits feedback from students about their course and University experience.

Students meet with Review Panels when the periodic review of the course is conducted to provide oral feedback on their experience on the course. Student feedback from Course Committees are part of the Schools' quality assurance evidence base.

For more information about this course:

The Course Leader, Dr Celia Jenkins on [jenkinc@westminster.ac.uk](mailto:jenkinc@westminster.ac.uk)

Please note – This programme specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the course and the learning outcomes that a student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if s/he takes full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. This specification should be read in conjunction with the Course Handbook provided to students and Module Handbooks which provide more detailed information on the specific learning outcomes, content, teaching, learning and assessment methods for each module.