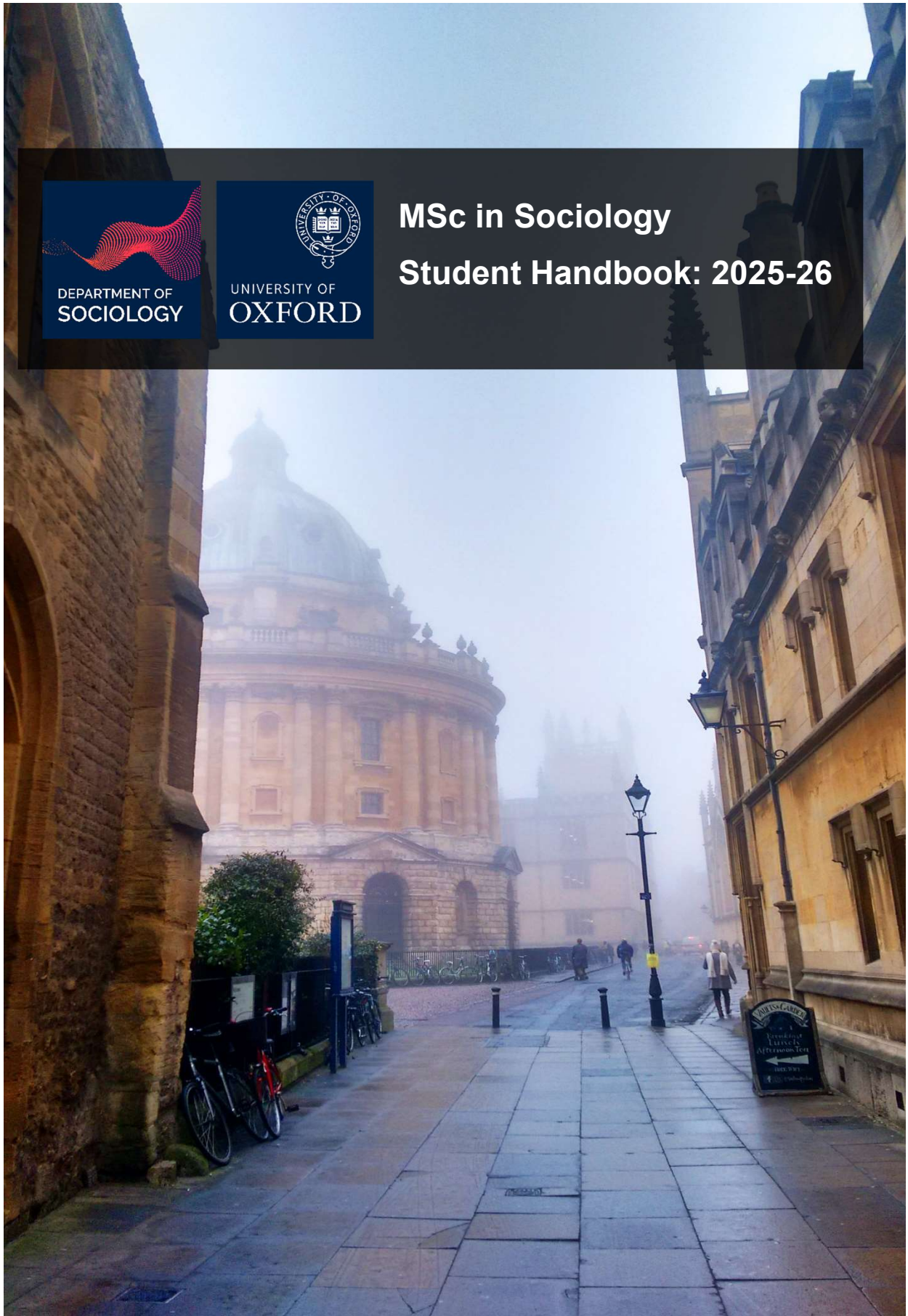




MSc in Sociology Student Handbook: 2025-26



About this student handbook

This handbook applies to students starting the MSc in Sociology in Michaelmas Term 2025 and the information within may be different for students starting the course in other years.

Your degree is formally governed by the Examination Decrees and Regulations. These are published in September each year, and are available [here](#). This handbook contains informal descriptions and interpretations of some of the most relevant rules, but any formal question must be settled primarily by reference to the Examination Decrees and Regulations. If there is a conflict between information in this handbook and the Examination Regulations, then you should follow the Examination Regulations. If you have any concerns, please contact the Graduate Studies Officer at graduate-studies@sociology.ox.ac.uk.

The information in this handbook is accurate as of 3 October 2025. However, it may be necessary for changes to be made in certain circumstances, as explained [here](#) on the University's Graduate website. If such changes are made, the department will publish a new version of this handbook together with a list of the changes and students will be informed.

This is **version 1.1**.

Other key sources of information for students on the 2025-26 MSc in Sociology include:

- The '[Department of Sociology Student Information 2025-26](#)' Canvas page (SSO required). Canvas is Oxford's Virtual Learning Environment, where the Department and many courses have pages with further information, course assignments, etc.;
- the Examination Conventions, which will be made available on the above Canvas site;
- the course timetable, distributed by email and available on Canvas in advance of the start of each term;
- the [Inspera submissions website](#) for the submission of all summative work, along with the university Inspera [guidance pages for coursework submissions and examinations](#);
- the [University's website for students](#);
- the [University Student Handbook 2025/26](#)
- the handbooks provided by Oxford colleges, normally available on their websites.

Finally...

We welcome any feedback, concerns or suggestions received in connection to the handbook content. These should be sent to the Graduate Studies Officer, at graduate-studies@sociology.ox.ac.uk

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Overview of the MSc

The Master of Science in Sociology is a 12-month course (24 months for part-time) at FHEQ Level 7. It prepares students for doctoral work in Sociology and for research careers in government and in the private sector. To achieve this, it provides rigorous training in sociology. This includes:

- Knowledge of the key theoretical approaches that are relevant to empirical investigations.
- An understanding of their application to substantive problems.
- Skills in the use of major research techniques.

By the end of the course students should be able to understand, and to evaluate critically, research monographs and papers at the forefront of academic development within sociology, enabling them to apply these ideas and techniques to their own research work. The emphasis is not only on the findings of sociological research but more importantly on the ways in which these findings were reached, the formulation of the research questions, the research methods used, and the interpretation of the research results.

Students who successfully complete the course will have acquired a solid basis for further, independent research and should have the relevant research training necessary for a doctoral degree. Students who wish to work towards a doctoral degree will, through the MSc, have acquired a thorough knowledge of the discipline and an understanding of, and competence in the application of, the principal research techniques likely to be employed in their doctoral research. In addition, the course enables students, through their optional

papers, to acquire a more detailed knowledge of the substantive literature in the field of the proposed doctoral research, and, through their thesis, to undertake preparatory work, theoretical and methodological, towards the doctoral thesis.

Students who complete the course will have developed a solid basis for research work of other kinds, e.g. in government or private administration, in data science, and in international agencies.

Assessment Components

Teaching for the MSc Sociology will be delivered in-person. The course consists of the following components, each of which are described in further detail in the '*Core Papers*' and '*Option Papers*' sections of this handbook:

- A compulsory core paper, Sociological Analysis, for which students sit an examination at the end of Trinity Term.
- A compulsory Methods of Social Research paper, with three components: Statistical Methods, assessed by an assignment and an unseen examination; Qualitative Methods, assessed by assignments, and Research Design, assessed by a take-home essay.
- Two optional papers, for which students either sit an examination at the end of Trinity Term, or complete appropriate coursework. **Students should note that the options available may vary each year and there may be timetable constraints on the choice of options that may be combined.**
- A 10,000-word MSc thesis comprising original sociological research. The thesis

must be the student's own work; and analyse a sociological problem agreed jointly by Supervisor and student.

The components of the course are weighted as follows:

Methods of Social Research (Statistical Methods, Qualitative Methods, and Research Design equally weighted) 75%

Sociological Analysis 25%

MSc Thesis 25%

Optional Paper (1) 12.5%

Optional Paper (2) 12.5%

Schedule of Teaching

Michaelmas Term	Hilary Term	Trinity Term
Sociological Analysis	Research Design	MSc Thesis Workshop
Statistical Methods	Two Optional Papers	Examinations
Qualitative Methods	Departmental Seminar	Departmental Seminar
Departmental Seminar		

Term Dates 2025/26

Oxford term dates for the 2025-26 academic year:

Michaelmas Term 2025: Sunday 12th October to Saturday 6th December

Hilary Term 2026: Sunday 18th January to Saturday 14th March

Trinity Term 2026: Sunday 26th April to Saturday 20st June

The dates of term for future academic years can be found [here](#).

Required Course Work and Attendance

Class essays, seminar presentations, and other assignments form the basis for much of the student's learning and progress throughout the course, as well as being the main way in which we can offer flexibility in meeting individual students' special interests. This work is compulsory; and termly Supervisor reports on individual progress are required by the student's college. Student progress and attendance will also be discussed at the meetings of the departmental Graduate Studies Committee.

Negative reports or non-attendance at tutorials or classes are taken seriously by colleges and the Graduate Studies Committee, but do not form part of the formal assessment for the degree.

All assessed coursework is retained in an anonymised form by the department for one year. Retained work is kept for inspection by course providers and external teaching quality inspectors. Samples of non-assessed coursework will also be retained.

Recording of Lectures and Seminars

All departmental lectures and seminars are held in-person; no online or hybrid facilities are offered, and lectures/seminars are not recorded. Students with a registered disability who need recordings must obtain a Student Support Plan from the Disability Advisory Service that explicitly authorizes this accommodation. Without this, the

Department may refuse requests to use laptops or other recording devices if other reasonable adjustments to take account of your disability are possible and, if such recording is authorised, the Department may impose reasonable additional controls or requirements as a result.

Usage of Generative Artificial Intelligence

Please see Annexe A.

Dissemination of Teaching or Learning Materials Outside of the Department

Students are strictly prohibited from sharing teaching or learning materials—including the content of seminar discussions and materials produced by other students or staff—to any third party, including to any social media or other

online forum. Compliance with this is a mandatory requirement for participation in this course, and all students will be asked at Induction to sign a form confirming their acceptance.

Assessment Submission and Examinations

Summative submissions are assessment components that contribute to the final grade and classification of the MSc Sociology. All summative work must be submitted online via [Inspira](#) and will be run through 'Turnitin' plagiarism detection software. All students should ensure that they are familiar with the online submission process in advance of any deadline. Full information is provided on the relevant page of the [Oxford students website](#).

There are a number of university processes in place to help you if you find that illness or other personal circumstances are affecting your assessments, or if you experience technical difficulties with an online exam or submission. Full information is available on the [Oxford students website](#).

In-person Examinations

Practical information and support for sitting in-person exams is provided on the [Oxford students website](#).

Online Examinations

Online exams are taken in Inspira and students should familiarise themselves with the system and guidance prior to taking an online examination. There are a wide range of resources to help you on the [Oxford Students website](#).

Online exams require you to adhere to the [University's Honour Code](#) and students must read this in advance of any online examinations.

Departmental Seminars

Departmental Seminars are held during term throughout the year at 12.45 on Mondays. See the '[Events' page on the departmental website](#) for further details.

Attendance is compulsory for all students enrolled on taught courses,

including the MSc Sociology and the MPhil Sociology and Demography.

Students are also highly encouraged to attend the Nuffield College Sociology Seminars. Details are available on the [Nuffield College website](#).

Core Papers

Sociological Analysis

Course provider: Dr Lindsay Richards

Aims:

This course develops intellectual skills in explaining social phenomena: identifying puzzles, developing theoretical explanations, and evaluating empirical evidence.

Topic and structure:

Each week a lecture introduces one type of explanation, while the seminar discusses empirical research on a related topic. The seminar topic illustrates the explanation in practice, revealing its strengths and weaknesses. The lectures and seminars are complementary but distinct.

Lecture Topics:

- Week 1 - Instrumental rationality
- Week 2 - Signalling
- Week 3 - Values and norms
- Week 4 - Social networks
- Week 5 - Contextual effects and social integration
- Week 6 - Diffusion
- Week 7 - Social change
- Week 8 - Review

Seminar Topics:

- Week 1 - Educational inequalities
- Week 2 - Interpersonal violence
- Week 3 - Political preferences
- Week 4 - Getting ahead in the labour market
- Week 5 - Recidivism and neighbourhoods
- Week 6 - Protest movements
- Week 7 - Attitudes to same-sex relationships
- Week 8 - Explanations in practice

Learning Outcomes:

On completing the course, students will understand some of the main theoretical tools used to explain social phenomena. They will also be familiar with current debates in various substantive areas of sociology.

Teaching arrangement:

One lecture (90 minutes) and one seminar (one hour) per week in Michaelmas Term.

Requirements:

- Two short essays (1000–1200 words each) on the seminar readings.
- One longer essay (2500 words) at the end of term.

Course Assessment:

One 3-hour examination in Trinity Term.

Key references:

The key readings for each week will be provided at the start of term. A general text that provides a complementary perspective is:

- Elster, J. (2015) *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*, 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press.

Useful introductory texts:

- Van Tubergen, F. (2020) *Introduction to Sociology*, Routledge
- Collins, R. (1994) *Four Sociological Traditions*, Oxford University Press.

Methods of Social Research

'Methods of Social Research' consists of three equally weighted components, listed below.

Qualitative Methods

Course Provider:
Dr Lynn Schneider

Aims:

To introduce students to the basic issues in the collection of qualitative data.

Content and Structure:

Students will gain practical experience in study design, the application of the major research methods and the analysis of qualitative data. By the end of this course, participants should be able to: appreciate the importance of qualitative methods in sociological research; decide when a research topic requires qualitative research methods and select the most appropriate qualitative format to address the research question; begin to develop skills required to conduct interviews, facilitate focus groups and undertake ethnographic research; begin to understand how to analyse qualitative data; start to understand how to employ qualitative methods alongside other methods in sociological research; appreciate the ethical dilemmas of qualitative research.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students should:

- understand the basic principles of qualitative data collection;
- have practical experience in conducting qualitative research and analysing qualitative data;

Teaching Arrangements:

Eight lectures/classes in Michaelmas Term.

Course Assessment:

Students will be required to complete a series of practical assignments in data collection, and in coding and reporting the results. The summative assessment is an assignment due no later than noon on Friday of Week 0 of Hilary Term.

Key Texts:

- Arskey, H & P. Knight (1996) *Interviewing for Social Scientists*, Sage.
- Burgess, R. (1984) *In the Field*, Routledge.
- King, G., R.O. Keohane and S. Verba (1994) *Designing Social Inquiry: scientific inference in qualitative research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Krippendorff, K. (2004) *Content Analysis*, second ed. Sage.
- Whyte, W. F. ([1943]1993) *Street corner society: the social structure of an Italian slum*. 4th Edition Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.

Statistical Methods

Course Provider: Professor Colin Mills

Aims:

The course aims to develop the foundations of statistical thinking and to introduce the most important basic statistical models used in social science research. The problem classes will give feedback on the weekly problem sets.

Content and Structure:

This course is taught through a series of lectures and classes. The course is vertically structured: later lectures assume knowledge of the foundational material covered earlier in the course. Topics covered include ideas of sampling and probability models, basic methods for inference about a population from a sample, and the use and interpretation of some

common types of statistical models, including linear regression.

Learning Outcomes:

On successfully completing this course, students should:

- understand the basic principles of statistical thinking;
- be familiar with the most commonly used elementary statistical models;
- be able to implement simple statistical procedures using R.

Teaching Arrangement:

Eight two-hour lectures plus eight problem classes in Michaelmas Term.

Course Assessment:

Students will be given weekly problem sets. These will involve a mixture of pen and paper problems and small pieces of data analysis to be carried out using R. The weekly problem sets are formative and ungraded but to benefit from the course you will need to complete them. The answers will be discussed in the problem classes so that you get a weekly picture of your progress.

Summative assessment: A take home practical data analysis problem at the end of Michaelmas Term and a formal two-hour exam in Week 0 of Hilary Term that will each be worth 50%. The data analysis problem assignment will be made available on Monday of Week 9 of Michaelmas Term and due no later than noon on Monday of Week 10 of Michaelmas Term.

Candidates are permitted to take the specified textbook for the course into the formal examination. Any candidate that is unable to purchase the course textbook for reasons relating to hardship should contact the Graduate Studies Officer.

Key Text:

Agresti, A. (2017) *Statistical Methods for the Social Sciences*, Pearson (5th edition).

Research Design

Course Providers: Dr Jonathan Lusthaus

Aims:

The course is concerned with the nature of empirical investigation in the social sciences. It deals with the question of how we establish systematic knowledge about the social world. The course will consider in turn the various stages of the research process, the different types of research strategies that are in use, and some general methodological problems about the conduct of inquiry.

Topics covered by this course include:

The research process; aims of enquiry; research ethics; principles of open science and reproducibility; measurement; sampling; causality and experiments; survey design; field research.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students should:

- appreciate the strength and limits of different research strategies,
- understand how research design considerations should be linked to substantive sociological concerns

Teaching Arrangement:

Eight classes in Hilary Term.

Course Assessment:

One "critical essay" of up to 2,500 words evaluating a piece of published research.

Key Texts:

- King, G., R. Keohane, and S. Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton University Press.
- Straits, B.C. and R. A. Singleton, Jr. 2017. *Social Research: Approaches and Fundamentals*. Oxford University Press.

Option Papers

Option papers will be presented during Induction Week at the start of Michaelmas Term. Course Providers will describe the papers they teach in detail and be available to answer any questions. Students will then have until the end of Week 4 of Michaelmas Term to select their options. Instructions on how to submit option paper choices will be provided by the Graduate Studies Officer via email. At least three students must choose to take a course for credit for the course to run and individual course providers may place a cap on the number of students.

Advanced Quantitative Methods

Course Provider: Dr Ozan Aksoy

Aims:

The application of advanced statistical models to social science data and their interpretation.

Topics covered by this course include:

The precise topics covered vary from year to year depending on the expertise and interests of the staff giving the lectures. In 2025/2026, topics will include but are not limited to: regression for categorical dependent variables, fixed and random effects for panel data, hierarchical/multilevel models, and instrumental variable estimation.

Content and structure:

This course follows on from Statistical Methods in Michaelmas Term and introduces a number of more advanced techniques that are particularly relevant for sociologists. It is primarily an “applied” course and emphasises the application of

advanced statistical models to typical social science data and the interpretation of parameter estimates.

Learning Outcomes:

On successfully completing this course, students should have an appreciation of the advantages and pitfalls of different methods and experience of the practical use of the methods taught. To gain any benefit from this course, it is necessary to have demonstrated mastery of the material taught in the Statistical Methods course in Michaelmas Term. A poor or even average performance in that course should suggest to you that you are unprepared for this course.

Teaching Arrangement:

Eight two-hour lectures (weeks 1–8) and three practical classes (weeks 3–8) in which students are introduced to and gain hands-on experience with software for estimating and testing the statistical models introduced in the lectures.

Course Assessment:

The course is assessed by a two hour in-person examination in week 0 of Trinity Term, and one quantitative assignment for submission in week 9 of Trinity Term. The candidates will analyse data using some of the methods covered and write a short report on their analyses. The assignment will be made available at 9am Monday of week 9 of Hilary Term and the deadline for submission will be noon Friday of Week 9 of Hilary Term.

Software: AQM is exclusively taught in R. All examples in the lectures and all lab exercises use R. Code for the assessment has to be written in R as well. This is a substantive course and not a coding course. Students are strongly encouraged to complete the *Learn R* sequence on Codecademy (<https://www.codecademy.com/learn/learn-r>; free course), which should take about

15-20 hours, before the start of Hillary Term.

Key Texts:

The following texts are indicative. Students will receive a reading list and suggestions for readings in the lectures.

- Firebaugh, G. (2008) *Seven Rules for Social Research*. Princeton University Press.
- Allison, P. (2009) *Fixed Effect Regression Models*. Sage [e-book, available from Bodleian through SOLO].
- Snijders, T. & R. Bosker (2011) *Multilevel analysis: an introduction to basic and advanced multilevel modeling*. 2nd edition. Sage.
- Huntington-Klein, N (2022) *The Effect*. <https://theeffectbook.net/>
- Cunningham, S (2022). *Causal Inference: The Mixtape*. <https://mixtape.scunning.com/>
- Breen R, A. Holm & K. Karlson (2014). Correlations and Nonlinear Probability Models. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 43: 571-605.
- Bryan, M. & S. Jenkins (2016). Multilevel Modelling of Country Effects: A Cautionary Tale. *European Sociological Review*, 32(1): 3–22
- Felton, C & B. Stewart (2022) *Handle with Care: A Sociologist's Guide to Causal Inference with Instrumental Variables*. Pre-print September 2002. <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/3ua7q/>

Political and Civil Conflict

Course Provider: Dr Lynn Schneider

Aims:

To introduce students to current social science debates on the causes and consequences of political and civil conflict.

Topics covered by this course include:

This course is designed for students interested in aspects of political and civil conflict. The course introduces students to changes in the type and nature of conflict; the motivations of actors; the strategic use of violence and the end of violence and its consequences.

Content and Structure:

This course will begin by examining changes in violent political and civil conflict over time. It will then focus on civil wars and the role of ethnicity in violent conflict; recruitment into violent political organisations; how rebel groups are organised and the impact this has on their behaviour; the strategic use of violence against civilians including the use of suicide attacks; and the end of violence and its legacy.

Learning Outcomes:

On successfully completing this course, students should:

- Have acquired knowledge of the key theoretical debates on the causes and consequences of political and civil conflict and the motivations of actors
- Become familiar with a range of different case studies and issues arising from the comparative method of investigating this topic
- To be prepared for advanced doctoral research on violent political conflict

Teaching Arrangement:

Eight seminars in Hilary Term. Each student is expected to write three essays (1500-2000 words) and participate actively in seminars.

Course Assessment:

The course will be assessed by an examination in Trinity term.

Key Texts:

- Kalyvas, Stathis (2006) *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press
- Kapuściński, Ryszard *Another Day of Life* London: Penguin Classics; New edition (2001)
- Petersen, Roger D. (2002) *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth Century Eastern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Tilly, Charles (2003) *The Politics of Collective Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weinstein Jeremy (2006). *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Social Movements

Course Provider: Professor Michael Biggs

Aims:

This option introduces the sociological literature on social movements and collective protest, including theoretical approaches and empirical methods.

Topics covered by this course include:

The 1960s student movement in the USA as case study. The historical origins of social movements. Conceptualization and measurement. Movements since the 1960s draw disproportionately on university graduates. Participants are typically mobilized through social networks. Movements are intimately connected to institutionalized politics. Protest fluctuates dramatically over time. How to measure the impact of movements and protests.

Content and Structure:

There will be eight seminars:

- 1960s student movement

- historical origins
- conceptualization and measurement
- class bases
- social networks
- political linkages
- protest volatility
- measuring impact

Learning Outcomes:

On completing the course, students will be familiar with a range of social movements and episodes of protest and will understand the major theoretical approaches and the various empirical methods used by sociologists. Most importantly, they will be able to formulate a research project that can contribute to sociological literature.

Teaching Arrangement:

There is a weekly seminar in Hilary Term. Each student will contribute two essays (each of about 2000 words) and one 10-minute presentation.

Course Assessment:

One three-hour unseen examination in Trinity Term.

Key Texts:

- Tilly, C and S Tarrow. (2015) *Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Opp, K-D. (2022) *Advanced Introduction to Social Movements and Political Protests*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Social Stratification

Course Provider: Professor Colin Mills and Dr Lindsay Richards

Aims:

The paper introduces students to contemporary research on social

stratification, so that they can apply advanced concepts and techniques to their own research problems.

Topics covered by this course include:

The major forms of social stratification; their relation to economic and political institutions. The course will concentrate mainly on industrial societies; the structure of social inequality; prestige hierarchies and status structures; class formation; social mobility; processes of 'social selection' and status attainment; social stratification and sub-cultural variations. Social stratification in relation to social integration, conflict and change, with special reference to industry and politics.

Content and Structure:

This course examines the central debates about stratification and social mobility in contemporary societies. For example, what explains the sharp rise in income inequality in recent decades? Why has the gender gap in educational attainment disappeared? How much inequality is there between countries, and is global income inequality growing or shrinking? Are social classes becoming less relevant in modern societies? How do class advantages and disadvantages get passed from parents to children? In what sense can Britain be said to be a meritocracy? How does cultural inequality map onto social inequality? Students are introduced to the central concepts and theories, the key methodological issues in stratification research, and the main empirical results.

Learning Outcomes:

On completing this course satisfactorily, students should:

- have a thorough understanding of the empirical results in contemporary stratification research;
- understand how methodological issues in stratification research are related to theoretical concepts and substantive questions;

Teaching Arrangement:

Eight classes in Hilary Term. Students are expected to write three formative essays.

Course Assessment:

A formal examination in Trinity Term.

Key Texts:

- Arrow, K., S. Bowles, and S. Darlauf, eds. (2000) *Meritocracy and Economic Inequality*, Princeton University Press.
- Bowles, S., H. Gintis and M. Osborne Groves, eds. (2005) *Unequal Chances: Family Background and Economic Success*, Princeton University Press.
- Wright, E.O. ed. (2005) *Approaches to Class Analysis*, Cambridge University Press.
- Devlin, B. et al. eds. (1997) *Intelligence, Genes and Success*, Copernicus.
- Grusky, D.B. ed. (2008) *Social Stratification*, 3rd ed, Westview Press.
- Goldthorpe, J.H. (1987) *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain*, 2nd ed, Clarendon Press.
- Marshall, G., A. Swift and S. Roberts (1997) *Against the Odds?* Oxford University Press.
- Firebaugh, G. (2003) *The New Geography of Global Income Inequality*, Harvard University Press.

Sociology of Cybersecurity

Course Provider: Dr Jonathan Lusthaus

Aims:

This option paper introduces students to key concepts in cybersecurity, from a sociological rather than technical perspective. This course is global and comparative in its approach, drawing on examples from a range of countries/areas.

Topics covered by this course include:

Cybersecurity is often seen as a technical discipline, but it also contains a vital human component. People carry out cyber-attacks; people are victims of these attacks; people seek to defend against these attacks. The

focus of this course is the social analysis of cybersecurity. While some broad technical terms will be covered, the emphasis will be on the nature, behaviour and organisation of attackers, defenders, and victims.

Content and Structure:

This course will cover cybercrime, hacking and hacktivism, insiders, proxies, and nation state threats, along with cyber policing and the cybersecurity industry, and the users and organisations who fall victim to cyber-attacks.

Learning Outcomes:

On completing the course, students will be able to:

- Understand the core concepts of cybersecurity.
- Understand the range of common attackers (cybercriminals, hackers, insiders, nation states), along with their behaviour and organisation.
- Understand the behaviour and organisation of victims, along with the cybersecurity industry and police.
- Be able to apply sociological approaches and theory to key aspects of cybersecurity.
- Determine the importance of local context in relation to cybersecurity issues.

Teaching Arrangement:

There will be eight classes in Hilary Term. Students will choose one topic within weeks 1-4, and another in weeks 5-8. They will submit one 1500-word essay at the end of week 4, and the other at the end of week 8. Feedback will be provided one week later in each case. Each student will also give one in class presentation.

Course Assessment:

One three-hour examination in Trinity Term. Candidates will answer 3 essay questions from a list.

Key Texts:

There is not one textbook suited to this course. A range of readings will be assigned for each topic, including:

- Levi, M., and Williams, M., (2013) 'Multi-agency partnerships in cybercrime reduction: Mapping the UK information assurance network cooperation space,' *Information Management & Computer Security*, 21 (5) pp. 420-443.
- Levy, S. (2010) *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*, Sebastopol, CA, O'Reilly Media.
- Lusthaus, J. (2018) *Industry of Anonymity: Inside the Business of Cybercrime*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- Shapiro, S. (2023) *Fancy Bear Goes Phishing: The Dark History of the Information Age, in Five Extraordinary Hacks*, Allen Lane.
- Steinmetz, K. (2015) 'Craft(y)ness: An ethnographic study of hacking,' *British Journal of Criminology*, 55 (1) pp. 125-145.

Sociology of Mafias

Course Provider: Professor Federico Varese

Objectives:

There is a consensus that organized crime (OC) is harmful and its profits are immense. Yet the concept of OC itself lumps together people engaging in very different activities, from peasants in Colombia to professional enablers in London and mafias in Italy. This option aims to provide clarity and a solid analytical ground on which to base this field of study. Breaking traditional disciplinary boundaries between the social sciences and adopting a global outlook, the course is multidisciplinary and draws upon concepts from political theory, political economy, and social network analysis, as well as on the

history and sociology of different countries both in the global South and North.

Content:

We first discuss definitions of OC and mafias (Week 1). We then address the methodological challenges of researching OC and hidden populations more generally (Week 2). The rest of the course unpacks the concept of organised crime in three types of activity: Production (Week 3), Trade (Week 4-5) and Governance (Week 6-7). We will discuss a broad range of organised crime in depth: from cybercrime to the international trade of drugs, illegal money flows, piracy, gangs and mafias, including the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, the Japanese *yakuza* and the Russian *vory*. The last class will address the question of how organised crime “ends”. Key contents will be revised, and open questions discussed.

Structure:

- 1 Organised Crime and Mafias Defined
- 2 Researching Organised Crime (Methods and Data)
- 3 Production
- 4 Trade (Goods)
- 5 Trade (Money)
- 6 Governance (Mafias)
- 7 Governance (Beyond Mafias)
- 8 Death of Organised Crime and Revision

Learning Outcomes:

On successfully completing course, students should be familiar with:

- Key issues related to OC and how criminal organisations produce, trade, and govern in a variety of settings;
- Key theories and concepts discussed in the course, including from sociology, political theory and political economy;
- Key insights into comparative and analytical sociology applied to the

study of OC as a hard-to-reach population.

Students should be able to apply key insights to cases not specifically covered in the course.

Teaching Arrangement:

Teaching will be through 8 weekly seminars. Students are expected to study the required readings and engage in class discussion each week.

Formative Course Assessment:

Production of one “Reading Response” (RR) during the Term, to be submitted by noon on Friday of Week 6 by email to the course provider. The RR should not exceed three A4 pages (font 12). The course provider will supply the title of the RR the week before, during class time. The work will be graded on a pass/fail basis. In case of fail, the candidate is allowed to re-submit once. If the candidate fails twice, or fails to submit the RR, they will have failed the course. Late submission will lead to penalisation in the final grade.

Summative Course Assessment:

Production of one assessed essay written unsupervised and unaided. The course provider will publish three Exam Questions on Friday of Week 8 at noon. Candidates will answer ONE of these questions and submit their essay via Inspira by noon on Friday of Week 11. This assignment must be no less than 3,500 words and no more than 5,000 words (inclusive of footnotes but excluding bibliography and appendices). An accurate word count must be declared on the first page of the essay. Students may not approach the course provider for clarification on essay questions or help with or feedback on the essay. Students are expected to draw on course readings; whilst they may be rewarded for drawing upon additional works, examiners may reduce the mark of those who fail to cite relevant course readings. Candidates should take

seriously the word limits imposed (both upper and lower). If the word limit is exceeded, then the Examiners may decide not to mark the work; and if they do proceed then the mark may be reduced. Similarly, those who write less than the minimum word limit may be penalised.

Key Texts:

- Diego Gambetta. *The Sicilian Mafia*. Harvard University Press. 1993.
- Federico Varese, *Mafia Life*. Oxford University Press. 2018.
- Some key papers are collected in: Varese, F. (ed.) 2010. *Organized Crime. Critical Concepts in Criminology*, Routledge, 2010.

Hard-to-find papers and unpublished papers are stored on the Canvas page for Sociology of Mafias. Contact the course provider if you cannot locate a paper or book chapter.

Suggested Viewings:

Mean Streets; The Godfather: Parts One and Two; Goodfellas; Casino; Donnie Brasco; Narcos TV Series; Cartel Land (documentary); *The Irishman*.

Pre-course Reading (choose at least one):

- Pistone, J.D. and R. Woodley. *Donnie Brasco: My Undercover Life in the Mafia*, 1988.
- Arlacchi, P. *Men of Dishonor*. 1992.
- Maas, P. *Underboss. Sammy the Bull Gravano's Story of Life in the Mafia*, 1997.
- Escobar, R. *Escobar*. 2009.
- Leeson, *The Invisible Hook*. 2009.
- Poulsen, K. *Kingpin*. 2011.
- Glenny, M. *Nemesis*. 2015.

Sociology of Gender

Course Provider: Professor Man-Yee Kan

Aims:

This option aims to introduce candidates to the sociological literature explaining the causes and consequences of gender inequalities. We focus on the state, the educational institution, the labour market, the domestic sphere and women's representations and positions in post-industrialised societies as arenas of gender inequality.

Topics to be covered in this course will include:

The course focuses on contemporary gender inequalities in post-industrialised societies. Candidates will be familiarised with theories and literature about gender inequalities. The mechanisms and institutions through which gender inequalities are produced and reproduced will be discussed.

Content and Structure:

There will be eight classes, covering the following topics:

- Gender inequalities: perspectives and trends
- How gender works in the education system
- Occupational gender segregation
- The gender wage gap
- The domestic division of labour
- Gendered consequences of marriage and parenthood
- Welfare states and public policy regimes
- Incomplete revolution? How do we measure progress in gender equality

Learning Outcomes:

On completing the course, students will be familiar with the contemporary situations and trends concerning gender inequalities in post-industrialised societies. They will understand the theories and mechanisms that explain the processes leading to gender inequality. They will be capable of embarking on a research project on the subject.

Teaching Arrangement:

There is a weekly class in Hilary Term. Students will write one 3000-word essay or two 1500-word essays on the tutorial topics and give one presentation of about 20-30 minutes summarizing and critically discussing the literature.

Course Assessment:

An examination in Trinity Term.

Key Texts:

- Blau, F. D., Brinton, M. C. And Grusky, D. (2008) (eds). *The Declining Significance of Gender?* Russell Sage Foundation
- Crompton, R. Scott, J., and Lyonnette C. (2010) (eds) *Gender Inequalities in the 21st Century*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Esping-Andersen, Gösta. 2009. *The Incomplete Revolution*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Scott, J., Dex. S. and Plagnol, A. (2012) (eds). *Gendered Lives*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Treas, J. and Drobnic, S (eds) (2010) *Dividing the Domestic: Men, Women, and Household Work in Cross-National Perspective*. Stanford University Press.
- Risman, B. (2018) "Gender as a Social Structure" In Risman, B. J., Froyum, C. M., Scarborough, W. J. (eds) (2018). *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender*. 2nd Edition. Chapter 2.

Causality: Methods of Causal Inference in the Social Sciences

Course Provider: Dr Ozan Aksoy

Aims:

The course introduces students to contemporary frameworks of "counterfactual" causal inference, emphasizing the complementarities between potential outcomes (a.k.a., Neyman-Rubin causal model) and the structural causal model (a.k.a., Wright-Pearl

graphical approach). The focus will be on identification and estimation of causal effects using observational data as encountered in social science applications.

Topics to be covered in this course will include:

Topics covered in the class include an introduction to the experimental ideal, the use of potential outcomes to formalize the target quantity of an observational study and the assumptions needed for causal identification, the use of graphical models (Directed Acyclic Graphs) to discuss the plausibility of such identifying assumptions, and several "templates" for identification commonly used in empirical research (matching, weighting, regression, including recent machine learning approaches, instrumental variables, regression discontinuity, difference-in-differences, and sensitivity analysis).

Content and Structure:

The course focuses on the identification and estimation of causal effects, including the use of formal languages to define the target quantity ("estimand"), the conditions that should be met for a causal interpretation to be valid ("identification assumptions"), and the evaluation of different algorithms that can be used to obtain answers from data ("estimators").

Basic knowledge of probability and statistics, up to generalized linear models, is a pre-requisite, but resources will be provided for those who need to refresh their statistics foundations. The practical material will be covered through analyses and replications included in the problem sets, to be performed in R. Students are expected to conduct data pre-processing steps, model estimation, and interpretation of results.

Week 1: Introduction to Potential Outcomes and the experimental ideal

Week 2: Introduction to the Structural Causal Model and Directed Acyclic Graphs (DAGs)

Week 3: Selection on observables I (matching, regression, weighting)

Week 4: Selection on observables II (machine learning approaches)

Week 5: As-if-random assignment (instrumental variables and regression discontinuity)

Week 6: Parallel trends and beyond (difference-in-differences and synthetic control)

Week 7: Partial identification and sensitivity analysis

Week 8: Credible causal inference beyond research templates

Learning Outcomes:

On successfully completing this course, students should understand the central role of causality in the social sciences, and they should be able to cast a critical eye on the causal claims that social scientists make. Students should also have acquired a thorough knowledge of the potential outcomes and graphical approaches to causality, the central role of assumptions in identifying causal effects, and they should be able to estimate a wide range of models for causal inference.

Teaching Arrangements:

Weekly two-hour lectures.

Course Assessment:

Problem sets every other week. These include both theoretical and applied problems.

Key texts:

- Aronow, P. M., & Miller, B. T. (2019). *Foundations of Agnostic Statistics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Morgan, Stephen L. and Christopher Winship (2014). *Counterfactuals and Causal Inference: Methods and Principles for Social Research* (2nd edition), Cambridge University Press.
- Huntington-Klein, N. (2022). *The Effect: An Introduction to Research Design and Causality* (1st edition). Chapman and Hall/CRC.
- Angrist, Joshua and Jörn-Steffen Pischke (2009). *Mostly Harmless Econometrics*. Princeton University Press.
- Pearl, Judea, Madelyn Glymour and Nicholas P. Jewell. 2016. *Causal Inference in Statistics*. Wiley

Options Outside Sociology

MSc Sociology students may take one of their two option papers outside of the department. Permission must be sought from the supervisor and the department offering the alternative option. The student must complete an application form to be obtained from and submitted to the Graduate Studies Officer by the end of Week 4 of Michaelmas Term. The application must be approved by the Director of Taught Courses and classes for the external option paper must not conflict with timetabled departmental teaching.

MSc Thesis

Students should aim to write (the equivalent of) a publishable paper for an academic journal. They are discouraged from embarking on extensive data collection of their own for their thesis work as this is not usually practicable within the timescale of the MSc. Students working with data that is not publicly available must ensure that examiners will be able to access data if required. The thesis should contain details of how such access can be obtained. Students who make use of materials in languages other than English must, on request of the examiners, make available English translations (e.g., of transcriptions, code books, etc.) within a time period specified by the examiners, not usually expected to be more than one month. All students must complete an ethics application for their thesis in [WorkTribe](#) (see '*Ethical and Practical Considerations for MSc Thesis Research*' for practical details).

There is a compulsory Thesis Workshop for MSc students at the beginning of Trinity Term. Part-time MSc students must attend and present at the MSc Thesis Workshop in their second year of study. All MSc students should submit a Thesis Research Proposal (single side of A4, 12-point font) to their supervisor and Graduate Studies Officer by the date of the MSc Thesis Workshop.

Students can work on their thesis throughout July and August, but must be aware that supervisors may be away for conferences and on leave over the summer period. Students are urged to contact their supervisor well in advance to coordinate dates for meetings and the submissions of drafts for comments over the summer period.

Formatting

The thesis must:

- Use 12-point font, and preferably a serif font such as Times New Roman;
- Give the length of the text in number of words;
- Present the main text in double spacing with quotations and footnotes in single spacing. Place footnotes, where present, at the bottom of each page;
- Have numbered pages;
- Use referencing that corresponds to one of the established bibliographic conventions: preferably APA style and not Vancouver;
- Be submitted in English.
- Text must be presented on a white background with a margin of 3 to 3.5 centimetres on the left and right sides of the page.
- Have no mention of Supervisor, acknowledgements or any other identifying remarks;
- Be identified by candidate number and not by the candidate's name.

The thesis should be of **no more 10,000 words**, including **abstract, footnotes, and tables**, but excluding references and appendices. (Appendices should not usually be longer than 3,000 words). The abstract should not exceed 200 words.

Delivery and Examination

The thesis must be submitted as a PDF document via Inspira. It must be accompanied by a statement that the thesis is the candidate's own work except where otherwise indicated and this statement will be provided on the Inspira submissions site.

Please also submit the following electronically to the Graduate Studies Officer:

- If applicable, syntax files that were used for quantitative data analysis;
- In case of own data collection, a file (or files in a zip-archive) containing the raw data anonymised in accordance with the terms of the informed consent given by participants (transcripts of interviews, raw data from experiments, other collected material).

The data and syntax files remain the intellectual property of the student. The department will not use the submitted materials for any other purpose and will destroy both syntax files and own data collection after the final exam results for the student have been released.

See the relevant Examination Conventions for the course for information about examination of the MSc Thesis.

MSc Sociology Deadlines and Workshops

The main deadlines and workshops for core papers of the MSc Sociology are listed below. Course providers may request additional coursework with deadlines not included in this list. Further information about assessments and deadlines for optional papers may be found within the paper descriptions in this handbook.

Assessment Item, Task or Workshop	Submission Location	Deadline/Date
Complete the ' Online Avoiding Plagiarism Course '	CoSy	12 noon, Friday, Week 2, MT
SSD Introduction to Ethics Session	Online, SSD Research Ethics Manager	2-3pm, Wednesday, Week 4, MT
Submit Optional Paper Choices	Graduate Studies Officer	12 noon, Friday, Week 4, MT
Complete Examination Entry	Student Self-Service	Usually before 12 noon, Friday, Week 6, MT
Sociological Analysis Term Essay	Specified by Convenor	Specified by Convenor
Statistical Methods Assignment	Inspira	12 noon, Monday, Week 10 MT
Statistical Methods Examination	Exam Schools	Week 0, HT
Qualitative Methods Assignment	Inspira	12 noon, Friday, Week 0, HT
Complete the Research Integrity: Introductory Core Course	CoSy	Friday, Week 0, HT
Completion of an ethics application in WorkTribe	WorkTribe	12 noon, Wednesday, Week 1, HT
MSc Thesis Title Submission	Online Form	Friday, Week 8, HT
Research Design Critical Essay	Inspira	12 noon, Monday, Week 1, TT
MSc Thesis Workshop		Week 3, TT
MSc Thesis Research Proposal	Supervisor and GSO	Week 3, TT
Examinations (Sociological Analysis & Optional Papers if applicable)	Inspira	The exams <i>normally</i> take place during Week 8 and/or 9, TT
MSc Thesis	Inspira	12 noon, the weekday nearest to 31 st August

Examination Criteria and Marking Scale

MSc Sociology candidates are examined on the work they produce. This includes

examination scripts, coursework and a thesis. The main criteria applied by the

examiners in judging this material are analytical quality, ability to apply the theoretical and methodological approaches that have been taught, critical awareness of alternative approaches and sources of data, and knowledge of the substantive literature.

Candidates should refer to the MSc Sociology Examination Conventions and where applicable, the Examination Regulations, for further information regarding the requirements, examination and penalisation of marks for the course. The Examination Conventions for the course will be published on the [Department](#)

[of Sociology Student Information Canvas Page](#) at the beginning of the first term.

Examination conventions are the formal record of the specific assessment standards for the course or courses to which they apply. They set out how your examined work will be marked and how the resulting marks will be used to arrive at a result and classification of your award. They include information on marking scales, marking and classification criteria, scaling of marks, resits, penalties for late submission, and penalties for over-length work.

Marking Scale

Coursework and Thesis		
80-100	Distinction	Superb work: Work is of exceptional quality based on a comprehensive knowledge of the chosen topic, a sustained high level of critical analysis combined with a genuine originality of approach. The work is tightly argued, meticulously organised, extremely well documented and will be, in principle, of publishable standard.
75-79	Distinction	Excellent work: Work displays many of the qualities for work in the 80+ range but falls short on one of the criteria listed above.
70-74	Distinction	Fine work: Work shows evidence of extensive relevant reading, a significant grasp of current major issues in the field and offers an original approach to the chosen topic. This knowledge is reviewed critically and with sufficient insight to challenge received ideas. The arguments are clearly and persuasively put.
65-69	Merit	Strong pass: Work shows consistency and fluency in discussing and evaluating evidence and theories from a wide range of sources. Work demonstrates the ability to relate this reading to their chosen topic and will clearly have understood and assimilated the relevant literature. The arguments are clear and well structured. The examples are pertinent and go well beyond standard or predictable cases.
55-64	Pass	Good pass: Work shows clear evidence of knowledge and understanding but ideas, critical comments or methodology are underdeveloped or oversimplified. Work shows significant room for improvement in the clarity and structure of the argument and although there is appropriate reference to relevant reading, it is not sufficiently extensive. Some irrelevancy may be present.
50-54	Pass	Pass: Work exhibits some knowledge of the chosen topic but displays weaknesses of understanding and thoroughness. Arguments are weakly structured and important information and references are

		lacking. A considerable proportion of this work is irrelevant or otherwise fails to directly address the question.
45-49	Fail	Marginal fail: Work is seriously flawed, displaying a lack of awareness of essential texts and incoherent arguments. The research involved is poorly organised and inadequately discussed, offering a fundamentally inadequate response to the chosen topic. Large parts of the work may be irrelevant.
0-44	Fail	Outright fail: Inadequate coverage or analysis or work not submitted.

Final Exams		
80-100	Distinction	Superb work: Answer to exam question is of exceptional quality based on a comprehensive knowledge of the chosen topic, a sustained high level of critical analysis combined with a genuine originality of approach. The work is tightly argued and meticulously organized.
75-79	Distinction	Excellent work: Answer to exam question displays many of the qualities for work in the 80+ range but falls short on one of the criteria listed above.
70-74	Distinction	Fine work: Answer to exam question shows evidence of extensive relevant reading, a significant grasp of current major issues in the field and offers an original approach to the chosen question. This knowledge is reviewed critically and with sufficient insight to challenge received ideas. The arguments are clearly and persuasively put.
65-69	Merit	Strong pass: Answer to exam question shows consistency and fluency in discussing and evaluating evidence and theories from various sources. Answer demonstrates the ability to relate this reading to their chosen topic. The arguments are clear and well structured. The examples are pertinent and go beyond standard or predictable cases.
55-64	Pass	Good pass: Answer to exam question shows clear evidence of knowledge and understanding but ideas and critical assessment is underdeveloped or oversimplified. Answer shows significant room for improvement in the clarity and structure of the argument and although there is some reference to relevant reading, it is not sufficiently extensive. Some irrelevancy may be present.
50-54	Pass	Pass: Answer to exam question exhibits some knowledge of the chosen topic but displays weaknesses of understanding and thoroughness. Arguments are weakly structured and important information and references are lacking. A considerable proportion of the answer is irrelevant or otherwise fails to directly address the question.
45-49	Fail	Marginal fail: Answer to exam question is seriously flawed, displaying a lack of awareness of essential texts and incoherent arguments. The discussion involved is poorly organized and offers a fundamentally inadequate response to the chosen question. Large parts of answer may be irrelevant.

0-44	Fail	Outright fail: Inadequate coverage and/or analysis, or no answer(s) at all.
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Marking and MSc Classifications

The Department of Sociology operates a rigorous assessment process which incorporates blind marking according to a system approved by the supervisory body. Moderation applies to all assessments for papers; the thesis is marked independently by two examiners. Candidates should consult the Examination Conventions for further information.

The final outcomes of the MSc Sociology examination are outlined below:

Distinction classification	The Board of Examiners may award a distinction for excellence in the whole examination. To obtain a distinction, candidates should obtain EITHER an overall average mark of 70 or above OR an overall average mark of 68 and above, with two assessed components at 70 or above. Candidates who have initially failed any element of the examination will not normally be eligible for the award of Distinction unless otherwise decided by the Board of Examiners.
Merit classification	The Board of Examiners may award a merit for strong work in the whole examination. To obtain a merit, candidates should obtain an overall average mark of 65 or above. Candidates who have initially failed any element of the examination will not normally be eligible for the award of Merit unless otherwise decided by the Board of Examiners.
Pass classification	To pass the degree of MSc in Sociology, candidates must achieve 50 or more in all five components. If a candidate fails just one component of the MSc and it is a marginal fail (i.e. not less than 48) they can still be awarded a degree without merit or distinction, unless otherwise decided by the Board of Examiners, if they achieve at least one mark of 64 or above in another component.
Fail classification	Candidates who receive a fail mark (0-49) in any component of the MSc Examination are deemed to have failed the degree of MSc in Sociology. A mark of 64 or above in one component may compensate for a fail mark of 48-49 on another component. Candidates should consult the Examination Conventions and the ' <i>Failing the MSc</i> ' section of this handbook for information about resits/resubmissions.

Managing Submission Deadlines and Deadline Extensions

Throughout your degree programme you will encounter a series of deadlines which will include formative assessments (work submitted to test and develop your understanding of material and on which you will receive feedback), and summative assessments (those which contribute towards progression and/or your final degree outcome and on which you may receive feedback) such as coursework assignments and your final thesis.

Deadlines are carefully set and optimised to ensure the timely provision of feedback (to support your continued learning) and to help to balance your workload across the degree programme. In particular, care will have been taken as far as possible not to cluster submission deadlines or for these to fall close other modes of assessment such as written examinations. Meeting these your deadlines will enable you to progress through the course with the optimum workload balance, and will ensure your performance on future assessments isn't negatively impacted.

Plan Ahead

You are strongly encouraged to implement the following steps, which will help you to manage your workload and be able to meet deadlines:

- Always plan ahead and ensure you know the key deadlines for your programme throughout the year.
- When taking on any additional responsibilities, consider the workload of these in relation to your assessment schedule. Don't take on responsibilities which will take significant time away from preparing for assessment.
- Make sure you know both when work will be set and due for submission so you know how much time you have to complete of each

task – it may be helpful to map this out in your calendar.

- Carefully check your understanding of the work required, the resources you may need to access and their availability, and familiarise yourself with the assessment criteria set out in the examination conventions for your programme.
- If in doubt, always discuss requirements with your supervisor.
- You may also find it helpful to seek informal peer support by talking to current DPhil students who have recently completed your programme.
- Making a start is often the hardest part so try to break down work into smaller sections and set yourself key milestones along the way, build in some contingency time, and always avoid leaving things to the last few weeks or days.
- If preparing written work for assessment, start writing as early as possible, don't wait until the reading and thinking is 'done'. Social scientists often write to think, and you need to make sure you leave plenty of time for the thinking, as this is where your original insights will occur.
- Try to also be conscious of when to stop - there will always be something which could be further researched, redrafted or refined, but try to understand when something is good enough.

Dealing with the Unexpected

Even with the best planning occasionally something unexpected may happen which disrupts your progress. Always be ready to re-prioritise and if you are unsure how to proceed, discuss with your supervisor or the paper provider/convenor and they will

be able to help you re-plan and decide how best to prioritise – for example, they may be able to offer greater flexibility on formative deadlines to enable you to meet summative deadlines. They may also be able to give further guidance on readings and co-curricular activities to prioritise.

In exceptional circumstances however, it is possible to apply for an extension to summative deadlines, and your college will be able to support you with the process, but always consider this the last resort. Further information about extensions to deadlines for summative assessments can be found on the [Oxford Students Website](#). **Extensions to deadlines for summative work must be made via your college to the Proctors or relevant body. Neither the department nor course convenor are able to grant extensions to summative deadlines.**

While an extension may be necessary in some cases where you have genuinely lost sufficient time that you are unable to complete a piece of work, be cognisant of the potential knock-on effects of extension also. There may include:

- Delays in receiving feedback which will support your further studies.
- Reduced time to complete other work due to clustering of deadlines.
- Delays in receiving marks, and in particular at the end of your programme extensions to the deadline for your dissertation/thesis may mean you receive your degree outcome later.
- Delayed completion of your programme could impact on being able to progress to further study or take up offers of employment and may delay your graduation so you cannot attend a Degree Ceremony with your peers.

If you do think you will need an extension, do consider discussing this with your supervisor as well as with your college, as they will be well placed to help you to consider the academic impacts, and as noted above, may be able to provide alternative suggestions for how to reprioritise your work to enable you to meet the original deadline.

Course Evaluation and Student Feedback

The Department of Sociology is concerned that students have the opportunity to comment on the structure, teaching and content of each of the courses. Student feedback will thus be sought through the use of student evaluation forms.

Students on full-time and part-time matriculated courses are surveyed once per year on all aspects of their course (learning, living, pastoral support, college) through the Student Barometer. [Previous results](#) can be viewed by students, staff and the general public.

Feedback on Formative and Summative Assessments

Feedback is an important element of all programmes at Oxford and may be provided informally or formally. Formative assessment does not contribute to the overall outcome of your degree and has a developmental purpose designed to help you learn more effectively. Summative assessment contributes to your degree result and is used to evaluate formally the extent to which you have succeeded in meeting the published assessment criteria.

Feedback on formative assessment e.g. course essays or assignments, should provide guidance to those for whom extended pieces of writing are unfamiliar forms of assessment; will indicate areas of strength and weakness in relation to an

assessment task; and will provide an indication of the expectations and standards towards which students should be working. Feedback on summative assessment such as the MSc Thesis should provide a critical review of the work and provide suggestions for improvements and future development of the topic of research, to enable students to develop their work for doctoral study if appropriate. Students can expect to receive informal feedback on their progress and their formatively assessed work.

Students will receive some written feedback on formative work for core papers. For Optional Papers, course providers will give students written comments on essays submitted in Hilary Term.

All students on taught master's programmes can expect to receive formal written feedback on at least one designated piece of formative assessment that is normally submitted during the first term (or very early in the second term) of the course.

Students studying for the MSc will receive formal written feedback on their Sociological Analysis Term Essay which is submitted on a date specified by the course provider.

Students will receive formal written feedback on their MSc Thesis. The feedback will be sent via email in due course after the meeting of the Exam Board at which their final results are confirmed.

MSc Supervision

All graduate students have a University Supervisor who guides them through their course of study.

The Supervisor reports on the student's progress to the Taught Course Director and will also provide feedback to the student. The advice of the Supervisor will always be sought by the GSC before recommending any change in status, transfer between courses, and so on. It is of great importance for the student to keep in regular contact with their Supervisor and to keep the Supervisor fully informed as to the progress of their studies.

The Department recommends that each MSc Sociology student has eight to twelve meetings with their thesis supervisor, distributed over the year.

The Supervisor will provide feedback on the proposed thesis topic, suggest alternative angles on a topic, and critique the proposed research question (including suggestion of modifications or refinements to the question proposed by the student). Occasionally, they will propose the research topic, or play a significant role in the formulation of the research question.

Students and Supervisors are required to electronically submit a termly progress report by completing Graduate Supervision Reporting (GSR).

Graduate Supervision Reporting (GSR)

Graduate Supervision Reporting (GSR) is used by Supervisors each term to review, monitor and comment on their student's academic progress and performance and to assess skills and training needs. Students are given the opportunity to contribute to their termly supervision reports by reviewing and commenting on their own academic progress. **All students are required to submit a GSR report each term.**

Students will receive a report of their termly supervision from their Supervisor. Divisions, Departments and Colleges use the completion of supervision reports as an essential means of monitoring student progress.

The supervision reporting process is controlled by a structured timetable with automatic notifications and reminders. Once reports are submitted, they are immediately available to the student, Supervisor and DGS for review. Additionally, Subject Administrators, College Advisors, College Administrators and Scholarship and Funding Administrators are able to view reports.

Graduate students will also all have a College Adviser. The role of the College Adviser is to provide pastoral and general academic advice. They can be particularly helpful if the student has any academic or other difficulties that they do not feel able to discuss with their University Supervisor.

Change of Supervisor

It may be appropriate in some cases to change Supervisor if, for example, the direction of the student's work changes. The Graduate Studies Committee and all

university Supervisors also recognise that occasionally there can arise incompatibilities of temperament or approach between Supervisor and student. Because of the central importance Oxford attaches to the relationship between Supervisor and student, students are urged to discuss any problems of this kind freely and in full confidence with the Taught Course Director. Alternatively, a student may wish to approach their College Advisor or College Tutor for Graduates for advice and support. **A change of Supervisor requires the approval of the Graduate Studies Committee.**

Code of Practice for Supervisors of Taught Course Students

Supervisors responsible for oversight of progress of master's students on taught courses are expected to:

- Meet with students (in general twice or more per term)
- Discuss progress, feed-back comments to course providers and the Director of Taught Courses
- Assist in choice of options papers
- Help in the development of thesis topic

- Write termly reports on the student on GSR

In addition to the above, Supervisors are expected to provide the following with respect to master's theses:

- Frequent meetings with students to discuss progress of thesis (an informal guideline is three meetings during summer vacation)
- Timely responses to materials submitted for comment
- In particular, comment on final drafts in good time for students to respond before final submission
- Ask to see transcripts of interviews, or syntax files in data analysis to check that the thesis is indeed the student's own work

This last depends on Supervisors' availability in Oxford during the summer vacation months, and on students' timely submission of drafts. Supervisors should provide a reasonable level of availability during the summer; it is the student's responsibility to arrange dates for submission of work to Supervisors—but it would be helpful if Supervisors could warn students of any extended period of unavailability during the month before the thesis submission date.

Ethical and Practical Considerations for MSc Research

Research Ethics Deadlines and Workshops for the MSc

What?	Deadline/Date
SSD Introduction to Ethics Session (<i>compulsory for all MSc Sociology students</i>)	Wednesday, Week 4, MT
Complete the Research Integrity: Introductory Core Course	Friday, Week 0, HT
Complete an ethics application in WorkTribe	Noon, Wednesday, Week 4, HT

The Introductory Ethics Session will be hosted by the Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Team. The introductory session is compulsory, and **all MSc Sociology students must attend it**. All students must complete an ethics application within WorkTribe by 12pm Wednesday Week 4, HT. Depending on the assigned risk level (low, medium, or high), the approval process can expect to take up to 60 days. Please plan your research timeline accordingly.

Researcher Integrity Training

All MSc Sociology students must successfully complete the [University's introductory research integrity training course](#) by Friday of Week 0 of Hilary Term.

Successful completion of the course requires a mark of 80% in a test and a certificate of completion will be sent via

email upon successful completion. This email should be retained as evidence of successful completion of the course and the certificate of completion should be emailed to the Graduate Studies Officer by the deadline.

WorkTribe application: review and approval

The University's policy and guidance on the ethical review of research undertaken by staff and students which involves human participants or their data is [available on the University website](#).

Why is ethics scrutiny and approval important?

- It is part of the responsible conduct of research.
- It demonstrates that your research has been conducted according to the highest ethical standards. It is important to protect the dignity, rights and welfare of all those involved in the research (whether they are participants, researchers or third parties)
- It is a University requirement.
- It is the expectation - and in some cases formal requirement - of funding bodies.

What to do:

- **Apply well in advance:** You will not be able to undertake any research until your relevant ethics application has been approved. Please start the process of completing the application as soon as possible. When writing any ethics application, be sure to explain your project methods clearly and simply, as if to non-experts. This includes giving a

clear idea of potential ethical issues and how you propose to address them.

It is likely your application will need documents to support it and help to explain what you are doing. These documents can be broadly split into two categories: for external (participant) or internal (researcher) use. Documents for external use include invitation letters/emails, information sheets, written consent forms, oral consent scripts, project recruitment advertisements, participant-completion surveys or questionnaires (paper or online). Please see the page on [informed consent for more details](#). Documents for internal use include sample research instruments (researcher-completion surveys or questionnaires, semi-structured interview guides), detailed study protocols, oral consent record forms or evidence of data access arrangements.

In most cases, the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) will want to see final versions of external use documents in order to check compliance with the relevant University policy. We are aware that survey questions and other research instruments might evolve as part of refining project methodology.

- Complete and submit your online ethics application using [Worktribe](#) application system where you would be required to log in using your SSO.
- Please note that the anticipated turnaround on ethics applications is between 30 days for low and 60 days for high-risk projects, respectively. Once your research has received ethical approval, you will be notified by DREC.

Approval of research using publicly available data is routine. **You should have completed the process of receiving ethical approval by the time you submit**

your thesis topic to the Graduate Studies Officer. Please ensure that you leave enough time to complete the forms, collect the requisite signatures, and for the approval process to take place. For straightforward projects, applications submitted early in Hilary Term should have sufficient time for approval. If you need further guidance or advice, please contact drec@sociology.ox.ac.uk, as soon as possible in Michaelmas Term for advice.

Other Resources

- Oxford Research Support Service offers several different [training courses](#) for preparing for ethical review.

Risk Assessment, Insurance and Safety Considerations for Any Travel or Fieldwork

Many students will, as part of their course, be required to undertake fieldwork. Fieldwork is considered as any research activity contributing to your academic studies, and approved by your department, which is carried out away from the University premises. This can be overseas or within the UK. The safety and welfare of its students is of paramount importance to the University. This includes fieldwork and there are a number of procedures that you must follow when preparing for and carrying out fieldwork.

Preparation

Safe fieldwork is key for successful fieldwork. Thorough preparation can preempt many potential problems. When discussing your research with your supervisor please think about the safety implications of where you are going and what you are doing. Following this discussion and before your travel will be

approved, you will be required to complete a travel risk assessment form. This requires you to set out the significant safety risks associated with your research, the arrangements in place to mitigate those risks and the contingency plans for if something goes wrong. There is an expectation that you will take out [University travel insurance if travelling to fieldwork outside the UK](#). Your department also needs accurate information on where you are, and when and how to contact you while you are away. The travel risk assessment process should help to plan your fieldwork by thinking through arrangements and practicalities. The website for the Social Sciences Division provides [videos detailing fieldwork experiences](#) that may be useful for reference.

It is vital that supervisor-approved risk assessments and travel insurance applications are submitted around one month before planned travel. Forms for high-risk travel should be submitted even further in advance, to allow the forms to be approved by the Divisional Safety Officer, and possibly by the University Safety Office. You are advised to talk to your Supervisor at the earliest opportunity.

The need to complete a risk assessment should not be seen as an obstacle, but as an integral and fundamental part of travel and fieldwork preparation. Those conducting interviews in **areas of high risk** (e.g. areas of serious political unrest) or in **an environment which poses a higher risk than the normal place of work** (e.g. interviewing street protest participants) must be able to demonstrate that they have thought properly about where risk may be present and describe clearly their proposed actions to mitigate such risk as far as is reasonably possible. The University ethics website provides a selection of useful [best practice guidance](#) to support researchers.

As part of your fieldwork preparation, you should provide the department with an itinerary and contact details for your next of kin, in order to meet university regulations.

Training

Training is highly recommended for all students as part of your preparation. Even if you are familiar with where you are going there may be risks associated with what you are doing. In May 2025 the university issued a [safety instruction](#) to require that all students undertaking either medium or high-risk overseas travel or fieldwork need to have received a minimum level of suitable training.

Social Sciences Division Research and Skills Training (termly)

Full details and dates [on the Social Sciences Division website](#).

- Preparation for Safe Fieldwork. A half day course for those carrying out social science research in rural and urban contexts
- An Insider's Guide to fieldwork. A student led course on negotiating the practical aspects of fieldwork.
- Vicarious trauma workshops. For research on traumatic or distressing topic areas or contexts.

Useful Links

- [Fieldwork | Social Sciences Division](#)
- [Overseas Travel and Fieldwork | Safety Office](#)

Health and Safety

[The Safety Office](#) offers training and guidance including 'Emergency First Aid for Fieldworkers' and 'Fieldwork Safety

Overseas: A full day course geared to expedition-based fieldwork’.

Travel Insurance

A separate online form is needed to apply for the University’s travel insurance. Please note that the University’s insurance application will not be validated without a risk assessment and completed in good time in advance. There is no cost to students associated with taking out University travel insurance, and the policy offers a good quality of coverage.

More information on the university’s scheme is available [online](#).

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office gives up-to-date advice on travel to anywhere in the world, country by country. You are strongly advised to refer to this in any case. All travel plans to FCO advisory areas must be referred to the Safety Office by the Head of Administration and Finance for approval. To check if your travel plans

might be affected by an FCO advisory please [check the website](#).

Some Key Points

- Allow plenty of time (at least one month) before the start of your trip to do the planning and get any approvals
- The University has a duty of care to you wherever you are - when you are there on what may be perceived as legitimate university business. Research would count as such. Even if your trip is taking you home to your own country (e.g. you are a Turkish national going to do fieldwork in Turkey), you will still need to demonstrate that you have considered the risks and completed a risk assessment.

If your fieldwork involves data collection with no interaction with human participants (e.g. from social media) or use previously collected personal data (not fully anonymised), you will also need to consider the ethical implications of such activity. Please refer to the [university’s policy for research ethics](#)

Regulations Governing Graduate Degree Courses

The most relevant rules are summarised below. In exceptional circumstances, it may be possible to seek dispensation from these rules. Students should consult the [Examination Regulations](#) for the full text and seek further advice from their supervisor.

Plagiarism

What is Plagiarism?

The University defines plagiarism as follows:

“Presenting work or ideas from another source as your own, with or without consent of the original author, by incorporating it into your work without full acknowledgement. All published and unpublished material, whether in manuscript, printed or electronic form, is covered under this definition, as is the use of material generated wholly or in part through use of artificial intelligence (save when use of AI for assessment has received prior authorisation e.g. as a reasonable adjustment for a student’s disability). Plagiarism can also include re-using your own work without citation. Under the regulations for examinations, intentional or reckless plagiarism is a disciplinary offence.”

The university approved submission system, Inspira, is integrated with Turnitin. Turnitin may therefore be used to detect instances of poor academic practice and/or plagiarism in coursework submissions and online examination scripts. Where assessment includes open-book examinations, candidates will be required to sign up to the University’s [honour code](#).

You may be found guilty of plagiarism if:

- You are presenting or passing off another person’s work as your own
- You import into your own work ‘more than a single phrase from another person’s work without the use of quotation marks and identification of the source’
- You make ‘extensive use of another person’s work, either by summarising or paraphrasing it merely by changing a few words or altering the order of the presentation, without acknowledgement’
- You use ‘the ideas of another person without acknowledgement of the source’ or submit or present work as your own’ which is substantially the ideas or intellectual data of another’
- You make ‘a deliberate attempt at passing off the ideas or writings of another person as your own’
- You take ‘the words, ideas and labour of other people and give the impression that they are your own.’

[From *Beat the Witch-hunt! Peter Levin’s Guide to Avoiding and Rebutting Accusations of Plagiarism for Conscientious Students*]

Online Plagiarism Quiz and Resources

All students are required to complete the [Online Avoiding Plagiarism Course](#) and to email a copy of the certificate of completion to the Graduate Studies Officer by no later than the end of Week 2 of Michaelmas Term.

Students should carefully read the [Oxford Students website guidance](#) for the avoidance of plagiarism, as well as refer to relevant [study skills and training for good academic practice](#).

In addition, the resources below (available in various libraries across Oxford) will help you identify and avoid plagiarism in your work:

Neville, Colin (2007) *The complete guide to referencing and avoiding plagiarism* Maidenhead; New York: Open University Press [[SOLO link](#)]

Pears, Richard and Graham Shields (2016) *Cite them right : the essential referencing guide [electronic resource]* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan [[SOLO link](#)]

Plagiarism and University Policy

Cases of plagiarism are taken extremely seriously and where examiners suspect that this has occurred, they bring the matter to the attention of the Proctors.

If a marker, or a Turnitin report generated in the course of examination procedures, raises concerns about the proper attribution of a passage or piece of submitted work, the matter will be reported to the Chair of Examiners. The Chair will compile and retain any evidence and decide whether or not the case is one which may be dealt with by the Board (poor academic practice) or whether it is one that requires reference to the Proctors for investigation and possible disciplinary action.

Penalties for poor academic practice in submitted work and open-book online examinations are outlined in the [MSc Sociology Examination Conventions](#). Students should refer to the [University Student Handbook](#) for information about the Proctors, Disciplinary Procedures and outcomes in relation to plagiarism.

Third Party Proof-Readers

Students have authorial responsibility for the written work they produce. Proof-reading represents the final stage of producing a piece of academic writing.

Students are strongly encouraged to proof-read their own work, as this is an essential skill in the academic writing process. However, for longer pieces of work it is considered acceptable for students to seek the help of a third party for proof-reading. Such third parties can be professional proof-readers, fellow students, friends, or family members. This policy does not apply to the supervisory relationship, nor in the case where proof-reading assistance is approved as a reasonable adjustment for disability.

The use of third-party proof-readers is not permitted for work where the word limit is fewer than 10,000 words. The guidance below applies to all assessed written work where the word limit is 10,000 words or greater.

What a proof-reader may and may not do

Within the context of students' written work, to proof-read is to check for, identify and suggest corrections for errors in text. In no cases should a proof-reader make material changes to a student's writing (that is, check or amend ideas, arguments or structure), since to do so is to compromise the authorship of the work.

A proof-reader may

- Identify typographical, spelling and punctuation errors;
- Identify formatting and layout errors and inconsistencies (e.g. page numbers, font size, line spacing, headers and footers);
- Identify grammatical and syntactical errors and anomalies or ambiguities in phrasing;
- Identify minor formatting errors in referencing (for consistency and order);
- Identify errors in the labelling of diagrams, charts or figures;
- Identify lexical repetition or omissions.

A proof-reader may not

- Add to content in any way;
- Check or correct facts, data calculations, formulae or equations;

- Rewrite content where meaning is ambiguous;
- Alter argument or logic where faulty;
- Re-arrange or re-order paragraphs to enhance structure or argument;
- Implement or significantly alter a referencing system;
- Re-label diagrams, charts or figures;
- Reduce content so as to comply with a specified word limit;
- Translate any part of the work into English.

Authorial responsibility

Students have overall authorial responsibility for their work and should choose whether they wish to accept the proof-reader's advice. A third-party proof-reader should mark up the student's work with suggested changes which the student may then choose to accept or reject.

Failure to adhere to these guidelines could constitute a breach of academic integrity and contravene the Regulations for Examinations. It is therefore the student's responsibility to provide the proof-reader with a copy of this [policy statement](#).

Entering for Examinations

In order to complete your examination entry successfully, you must have completed your University registration within the student registration window. You can check whether your registration is complete by logging in to Student Self Service. A full guide to the examination process is available [here](#) and students are strongly encouraged to read it carefully.

Applying for Exam Adjustments

Students should apply for exam adjustments after matriculation and no later than Friday of Week 4 of the term before the exam is due to take place. It is the responsibility of the student to request

exam adjustments and provide any supporting evidence required. Requests may, for urgent reasons, be considered nearer to the date of your exam. Information about exam adjustments and instructions for the application process can be found on the [Oxford Students Website](#).

Mitigating Circumstances Notices to Examiners (MCEs)

If you experience problems before or during your exams, or in relation to your submitted work, which you think may have seriously impacted your performance you should contact your college office as soon as possible, and they will help you submit a mitigating circumstances notice. Further guidance is available [here](#).

A candidate's final outcome will first be considered using the classification rules/final outcome rules as described in the Examination Conventions. The Exam Board will then consider any further information they have on individual circumstances.

Where a candidate or candidates have made a submission, under Part 13 of the Regulations for Conduct of University Examinations, that unforeseen circumstances may have had an impact on their performance in an examination, a subset of the board will meet to discuss the individual applications and band the seriousness of each application on a scale of 1-3 with 1 indicating minor impact, 2 indicating moderate impact, and 3 indicating very serious impact.

The Panel will evaluate, on the basis of the information provided to it, the relevance of the circumstances to examinations and assessment, and the strength of the evidence provided in support. Examiners will also note whether all or a subset of papers were affected, being aware that it is possible for circumstances to have different levels of impact on different papers. The banding information will be used at the final Board of Examiners meeting to decide

whether and how to adjust a candidate's results.

Failing the MSc

Candidates should refer to the Examination Conventions for the course for information on re-sits, resubmissions and implications of the failure of one or more components of the MSc.

Candidates who have previously failed an element of the MSc without extenuating circumstances cannot achieve more than a pass degree unless otherwise decided by the Board of Examiners.

In the event of a failure of a component of the MSc, candidates are allowed to retake/resubmit that component on one further occasion, normally with the next cohort the following academic year unless otherwise specified by the Board of Examiners. Work submitted for a resit should be a completely new submission unless otherwise specified by the Board of Examiners, with the exception of the thesis which may be reworked and resubmitted in the case of a resit owing to an academic failure.

A candidate may only retake/resubmit elements of those components that received a fail mark overall. If a candidate failed a component for which assessment is comprised of one or more parts, only those parts that received a fail mark may be resubmitted/retaken. Any parts for which the candidate achieved a pass mark cannot be resubmitted/retaken. Any parts that contribute to a component that received a pass mark overall cannot be retaken/resubmitted, even if there are particular parts of the component that received a fail mark. Marks for any elements that are not retaken or resubmitted will not change. Resits following non-attendance at examination or non-submission of written work will be capped at the pass mark (50). Resits owing to an academic failure will be marked based on the merits of the work submitted.

If a student does not submit their thesis or another piece of summative work, or fails to attend an examination (whether online or in-person), the student will be deemed to have failed the paper and will be allowed to resubmit the piece or work or resit the exam one time; the mark of this second submission/sitting will be capped at the pass mark. (In most cases, it is better to hand in a bad thesis/complete an exam and fail, than to hand nothing in at all. If you find yourself in this situation, please contact your College as soon as possible to discuss the situation with them, as all extensions or applications for 'mitigating circumstances' must go through the College in the first instance.)

If a candidate fails just one component of the MSc and it is a marginal fail (i.e. not less than 48) they can still be awarded a degree without merit or distinction, unless otherwise decided by the Board of Examiners, if they achieve at least one mark of 64 or above in another component.

Any resubmitted written work (including the thesis) will be examined afresh. While there is no requirement to make substantial changes to written work before resubmission, candidates should note that fail marks are never awarded without careful consideration and minor editing is unlikely to be sufficient to transform even a marginal fail mark into a pass mark.

Candidates that wish to retake any exam or resubmit any assessed component must re-enter and pay the relevant re-entry fee. Candidates are advised to contact their college for assistance with this, and the onus is on the student to arrange their re-entry and any resubmissions.

For students whose thesis fails to attain a pass mark, the Department may provide two Supervisory sessions before resubmission: one at the beginning of the academic year and one when the student has a complete draft of the (revised) thesis. If a student is retaking a component of the MSc that is assessed by unseen examination, the Department may provide a single Supervisory session to review the student's

knowledge and understanding of the subject and advise on appropriate further study and revision. If a student is retaking a piece of coursework, arrangements may be made for the student to discuss with the relevant course provider an appropriate course of action to enable the coursework to be completed. Additional provision of assistance may be available to those who failed or could not complete the MSc due to illness or circumstances outside their control.

Release of Examination Marks

All marks agreed at the full Exam Board in July will be released to MSc students in the days after; this will typically be every assessment mark with the exception on the Thesis, which will be released following the final Exam Board in September. There will be no exceptions to this.

Details of Examiners and Rules on Communicating with Examiners

The External Examiner for the MSc in Sociology for the 2025-26 academic year is to be confirmed.

The internal examiners are stated within the Examination Conventions for the course.

Students are strictly prohibited from contacting the external examiner directly. If you are unhappy with an aspect of your assessment, you may make a complaint or appeal (see the section titled '*Complaints and Academic Appeals within the Department of Sociology*').

Students may access the Examiners' reports.

Fees

[Course fees](#) are published on the university website and payable to the student's college at the start of the course. MSc students pay three terms of fees in total.

Fees are charged whether or not the student is working in Oxford. Fees are not charged if the student status is formally suspended by the Graduate Studies Committee.

Residence Requirements

The [University's residency requirements](#) apply to all full-time students and the residence for the MSc Sociology is **three terms**. Students must be in Oxford for this period. Residence as a Recognised Student does not count towards residence required for Oxford degrees. Additional residence requirements may apply to scholarships or other forms of funding. Overseas students must familiarise themselves and comply with any UK Visa Rules and Regulations.

Suspension of Status as a Graduate Student

With the support of their supervisor and college, students may apply to the Graduate Studies Committee for suspension of status for a specified period. The Graduate Studies Committee may consider applications for suspension where the student is prevented from pursuing their course of study in circumstances which are outside their control though there are good grounds for believing that they will be able to resume work within a reasonable period (e.g. medical problems, mental health concerns, maternity leave, paternity leave and unexpected domestic crises). Candidates are expected to endeavour to complete their studies within the normal time limits for the course in question and the Graduate Studies Committee is not prepared to consider applications for suspension merely on the ground that a candidate wishes to engage, for personal

reasons, in some other activity and then return to their graduate work at some later date.

If an application for the suspension of status is granted, MSc Sociology students will be suspended for the duration of 3 terms on the basis that the MSc is a structured taught course. Please see [‘Graduate Forms for Exceptional Circumstances’](#) for application forms for ‘Suspension of Status’ and ‘Return from Suspension of Status’.

A candidate for the MSc whose illness is not serious enough or of too short duration to justify suspension of status may nevertheless feel that it is likely to have an adverse effect on their academic performance. In this case, they should seek advice from their college, the *‘Mitigating Circumstances Notices to Examiners (MCEs)’* section of this handbook and the [Oxford Students website](#).

Paid Work

Your first commitment must be to your Oxford degree work, which is demanding and intensive. If you need, or wish, to undertake paid employment of any kind (whether inside or outside the University), you must first obtain the approval of your college and your supervisor. The College or the Department might have small jobs available, some of which can be combined with study. The norm for the number of hours of paid employment that graduate students may undertake for the Department are as follows **a maximum of six hours per week for taught course students**.

Students may be permitted to work beyond these norms during vacations, subject to the explicit approval of their supervisor.

Departmental teaching assistantships and research assistantships are advertised as and when they become available.

Please be aware that if you are a Tier 4 student visa holder you will have restrictions, which are set by the Home Office, on the number of hours you are permitted to work each week during term

time. Paid and unpaid work within the University, for colleges, and for external organisations counts towards your permitted weekly hours.

Please also consult the [Education Committee’s paid work guidelines for Oxford graduate students](#).

Students with external funding will need approval from their funding body before accepting employment as college lecturers, Junior Research Fellows or in other similar posts. In all such cases both student and supervisor must act in accordance with the rules of the funding body. Any ESRC-funded students must consult the ESRC Studentship Officer at the Social Sciences Division to check whether the proposed employment contradicts the terms of their ESRC studentship.

Transferring Between Courses

Students that wish to apply to transfer between the MSc Sociology and the MPhil Sociology and Demography upon starting their course must apply for this transfer of programme **by no later than the end of Week 3 of Michaelmas Term of their first year of study**. Applications should be made to the Graduate Studies Officer for the consideration of the Graduate Studies Committee. Students that wish to transfer must be able to complete the course in accordance with the structure outlined in the relevant student handbook. No applications for dispensation for papers to be taken out of the usual order will be made unless the circumstances are exceptional.

Students applying to transfer between programmes should also consider the costs and practical constraints of applying for a new visa (if applicable) for a course of a different duration, particularly if visa re-application requires a return to their home country and resultant inability to fulfil the university residency requirements.

Committees and Representation

Sociology Graduate Studies Committee (GSC)

The members of the Sociology Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) for 2025-26 are:

- Professor Ridhi Kashyap, Director of Graduate Studies (Chair)
- Professor Michael Biggs, Taught Course Director
- Dr Lindsay Richards
- Student representative or representatives (who attend only the unreserved business)

The committee will:

- Consider applications for admission,
- Appoint a University Supervisor for each student,
- Consider applications from students during the course of study (e.g. change of course; Transfer of Status; Confirmation of Status; Extensions of time etc.)
- Appoint examiners for MLitt and DPhil candidates
- Review the programme of teaching and consider changes in regulations etc.

The Committee meets twice a term (normally Tuesdays in weeks 2 and 7). It is important that students submit any applications (and all accompanying material) to the Committee (via the Graduate Studies Officer by Friday of week 1 and Friday of week 6) in good time for its meetings. While some matters may be dealt with under Chair's action during the vacations, this is not the norm and will not always be appropriate. Enquiries about the work of the Graduate Studies Committee should be made to the Graduate Studies Officer.

Academic records of all students are maintained centrally on the University student database. Each new record is opened on the issue of a formal notice of admission. Further information is added to students' records during their first term from matriculation forms and all records are continually updated as students progress on their course.

Graduate Joint Consultative Committee (GJCC)

The GJCC exists to provide a forum for graduate students to put forward suggestions, comments and grievances about the courses and facilities provided by the department. It will usually meet once per term. Membership includes student representatives from each degree programme, the Director of Graduate Studies, the Taught Course Director and the Graduate Studies Officer. The Head of the Department and the Head of Administration and Finance may also attend, along with other departmental administrative staff.

All students are welcome to attend and are encouraged to submit items for discussion via their student representatives. Students are encouraged to put themselves forward for this committee and if there are more volunteers than places, an election will be held.

Divisional and University Representation

Student representatives sitting on the Divisional Board are selected through a process organised by the Oxford University Student Union (Oxford SU). Details can be found on the Oxford SU website along with information about student representation at the University level.

Supporting You

Problems and Advice

Students experiencing academic, administrative, or personal problems have several possible courses of action open to them.

Every college has their own system of support for students. Please refer to your College handbook or website for more information on who to contact and what support is available through your college. Details of the wide range of sources of support available more widely in the University are available from the [Oxford Students website](#), including in relation to mental and physical health and disability. Furthermore, students may:

- Consult their Supervisor or the Graduate Studies Officer in the first instance. The Taught Courses Director, the Director of Graduate Studies or the Head of Department will, if necessary, consult the appropriate authorities on your behalf. For issues about a particular course, please first talk to the course provider in the first instance.
- At your college, consult the Senior Tutor, the Tutor for Graduates or your own College Advisor, who will give similar help.
- Consult the elected graduate representatives in the Department who will give what help and advice they can.
- Consult the Graduate Studies Office in the University Offices or the [Graduate Studies section of the University website](#), which will advise on the obtaining of necessary forms, submission of applications, dates and deadlines, deposit of theses, etc.
- Students who are not satisfied that the

Department has addressed their concerns should consider making a formal complaint to the Head of Department, Professor Colin Mills. There are also some issues which the Department cannot address, e.g. complaints relating to exams, and a formal complaint to the Proctors must be made in these circumstances.

- On a more personal level, the [University Counselling Service](#) is able to support students experiencing a range of problems, including those relating to mental health and academic work. Additionally, [Nightline](#) (01865 270270) is a confidential listening and information service run for students by students and is open from 8pm until 8am from 0th to 9th week each term.
- The Disability Coordinator for the Department is the Graduate Studies Officer.
- If you are looking for work or developing your employability skills, you can access the support and advise [here](#). To help you prepare for after graduation or career development, including information on Career Fairs can be found [University Careers Service](#).

English Language Support

The [University of Oxford Language Centre](#) provides a wide range of general and specialised courses in foreign languages and Academic English.

Student Welfare and Support Services

The University's unique and close-knit collegiate system provides a wealth of pastoral and welfare services for students to support engagement with studies and University life, promoting student wellbeing by providing opportunities for social interaction and sport and arts. Additionally, the central Student Welfare and Support Services department offers professional support that complements provision in colleges and departments. More detail can be found in the [University's Common Approach to Support Student Mental Health](#).

The [Disability Advisory Service \(DAS\)](#) can provide information, advice and guidance on reasonable adjustments to teaching and assessment. DAS can also assist with organising disability-related study support, such as a [Student Support Plan \(SSP\)](#).

The [Counselling Service](#) is here to help you address personal or emotional problems that get in the way of having a good experience at Oxford and realising your full academic and personal potential. They offer a free and confidential service and the counselling team are committed to providing culturally sensitive and appropriate psychological services. Students can request to see a male or female therapist, a Counsellor of Colour, or to attend a specialist group such as the LGBTQ+ or Students of Colour Groups. All support is free and confidential.

[The Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service](#) provides a safe and confidential space for any student, of any gender, sexuality or sexual orientation, who has been impacted by sexual harassment or violence, domestic or relationship abuse, coercive control or stalking, whenever or wherever this took place.

A range of [peer support services](#) led by students are available to help provide support to other students, including the

peer supporter network, the Oxford SU's Student Advice Service and Nightline.

Students may also take interest in the campaigns and activities of the [Oxford Students' Union](#), as well as the numerous [university clubs and societies](#) covering a wide variety of interests.

Student Conduct

Students at Oxford are subject to two separate (but complementary) sets of disciplinary regulations: the rules and by-laws of your college provided in your college handbook, or equivalent document, and the University's conduct regulations including the Code of Discipline.

Students should consult the '[Student Conduct](#)' page on the [Oxford Students Website](#) for information about the University conduct regulations and the Proctors' role in enforcing disciplinary regulations under statutes IX and XI.

As a student, it is your responsibility to consult and be familiar with the [Statutes](#) and [Regulations](#), which include rules on non-academic behaviour and academic conduct. Students who intentionally or recklessly breach regulations, or incite or conspire with others to do so, may face disciplinary action.

Freedom of Speech

The Department adheres to the University's statement of principles:

"Free speech is the lifeblood of a university.

It enables the pursuit of knowledge. It helps us approach truth. It allows students, teachers and researchers to become better acquainted with the variety of beliefs, theories and opinions in the world. Recognising the vital importance of free expression for the life of the mind, a university may make rules concerning the

conduct of debate but should never prevent speech that is lawful.

Inevitably, this will mean that members of the University are confronted with views that some find unsettling, extreme or offensive. The University must therefore foster freedom of expression within a framework of robust civility. Not all theories deserve equal respect. A university values expertise and intellectual achievement as well as openness. But, within the bounds set by law, all voices or views which any member of our community considers relevant should be given the chance of a hearing. Wherever possible, they should also be exposed to evidence, questioning and argument. As an integral part of this commitment to freedom of expression, we will take steps to ensure that all such exchanges happen peacefully. With appropriate regulation of the time, place and manner of events, neither speakers nor listeners should have any reasonable grounds to feel intimidated or censored.”

The new code of practice on free speech can be found on the [University website](#).

Complaints and Academic Appeals within the Department of Sociology

The University, the Social Sciences Division and the Department of Sociology all hope that provision made for students at all stages of their course of study will result in no need for complaints (about that provision) or appeals (against the outcomes of any form of assessment).

Where such a need arises, an informal discussion with the person immediately responsible for the issue that you wish to complain about (and who may not be one of the individuals identified below) is often the simplest way to achieve a satisfactory resolution.

Many sources of advice are available from colleges, faculties/departments and bodies like the Counselling Service or the Oxford SU Student Advice Service, which have extensive experience in advising students. You may wish to take advice from one of those sources before pursuing your complaint.

General areas of concern about provision affecting students as a whole should be raised through the Graduate Joint Consultative Committee (GJCC) or via student representation on the department’s committees.

Complaints

If your concern or complaint relates to teaching or other provision made by the department, then you should raise it with the Director of Graduate Studies, Professor Ridhi Kashyap.

Complaints about departmental facilities should be made to the Graduate Studies Administrator, Adrian Wilson. If you feel unable to approach one of those individuals, you may contact the Head of Department, Professor Colin Mills. The officer concerned will attempt to resolve your concern or complaint informally.

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome, you may take your concern further by making a formal complaint to the Proctors under the [University Student Complaints Procedure](#).

If your concern or complaint relates to teaching or other provision made by your college, you should raise it either with your tutor or with one of the college officers, Senior Tutor, Tutor for Graduates (as appropriate). Your college will also be able to explain how to take your complaint further if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of its consideration.

Academic Appeals

An academic appeal is an appeal against the decision of an academic body (e.g. boards of examiners, transfer and confirmation decisions etc.), on grounds such as procedural error or evidence of bias. There is no right of appeal against academic judgement.

If you have any concerns about your assessment process or outcome it is advisable to discuss these first informally with your subject or college tutor, Senior Tutor, course director, director of studies, supervisor or college or departmental administrator as appropriate. They will be able to explain the assessment process that was undertaken and may be able to address your concerns. **Queries must not be raised directly with the examiners.**

If you still have concerns, you can make a formal appeal to the Proctors who will consider appeals under the [University Academic Appeals Procedure](#).

Harassment

The Department is committed to fostering an inclusive culture which promotes equality, values diversity and maintains a working, learning and social environment in which the rights and dignity of all students are respected. Harassment or victimisation is regarded as unacceptable behaviour and is not tolerated in any form. All members of the University are expected to treat each other fairly and with respect, courtesy, and consideration.

Help and advice can be found in the Department by contacting your supervisor, or the DGS.

The Equality and Diversity Unit also supports a broad network of harassment advisors in departments/faculties and colleges as part of the Harassment Advisory Service. The University's Harassment and Bullying policy can be found on the [Equality and Diversity Unit website](#), along with information about the support available for students.

Policies and Regulations

The University has a wide range of policies and regulations that apply to students. These are easily accessible through the A-Z of University regulations, codes of conduct and policies available on the [Oxford Students website](#).

Students' attention is also drawn to the [Policy on recording lectures by students](#).

Equality and Diversity at Oxford

"The University of Oxford is committed to fostering an inclusive culture which promotes equality, values diversity and maintains a working, learning and social environment in which the rights and dignity of all its staff and students are respected. We recognise that the broad range of experiences that a diverse staff and student body brings strengthens our research and enhances our teaching, and that in order for Oxford to remain a world-leading institution we must continue to provide a diverse, inclusive, fair and open environment that allows everyone to grow and flourish." - [University of Oxford Equality Policy](#)

As a member of the University you contribute towards making it an inclusive environment and we ask that you treat other members of the University community with respect, courtesy and consideration.

The Equality and Diversity Unit works with all parts of the collegiate University to develop and promote an understanding of equality and diversity and ensure that this is reflected in all its processes. The Unit also supports the University in meeting the legal requirements of the Equality Act 2010, including eliminating unlawful discrimination, promoting equality of

opportunity and fostering good relations between people with and without the 'protected characteristics' of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and/or belief, sex and sexual orientation. [Visit our website](#) for further details or contact us directly (equality@admin.ox.ac.uk) for advice.

There are a range of faith societies, belief groups, and religious centres within Oxford University that are open to students. Further details can be found on the [Equality and Diversity Unit website](#).

Who to Contact for Help

Academic Matters	• Supervisor • Graduate Studies Officer graduate-studies@sociology.ox.ac.uk • Director of Taught Courses Professor Michael Biggs, michael.biggs@sociology.ox.ac.uk • Director of Graduate Studies Professor Ridhi Kashyap, ridhi.kashyap@nuffield.ox.ac.uk
Business of the Graduate Studies Committee (GSC)	• Graduate Studies Officer graduate-studies@sociology.ox.ac.uk
DREC/CUREC Ethics Forms	• Research Facilitator DREC@sociology.ox.ac.uk
Departmental Facilities	• Graduate Studies Officer graduate-studies@sociology.ox.ac.uk
Computing and IT	• <u>Manor Road IT</u> itsupport@manor-road.ox.ac.uk
Change of Supervisor	• Supervisor • Graduate Studies Officer graduate-studies@sociology.ox.ac.uk • Director of Taught Courses Professor Michael Biggs, michael.biggs@sociology.ox.ac.uk
Advice Relating to Harassment, Illness, Disability, or other Personal Matters	• See the 'Supporting You' section of this handbook.

Every college has their own system of support for students. Please refer to your College handbook or website for more information on who to contact and what support is available through your college.

Details of support available more widely within the University are available from the [Oxford Students website](#), including in relation to mental and physical health and disability.

List of Abbreviations

For any further puzzling Oxford abbreviations and acronyms, visit the [Online Glossary](#).

CUREC and **DREC** – University and Department Research Ethics Committees respectively, these terms also used to refer to the Ethics assessment forms

GSO - Graduate Studies Office, part of the central University

DAS – Disability Advisory Service

GSR – Graduate Supervision Reporting

DGS – Director of Graduate Studies

NCRM – National Centre for Research Methods. Maintains a UK research training courses database and offers bursaries.

DPhil – Doctor of Philosophy

PGT – Taught graduate

DTP – Doctoral Training Partnership. Oxford is part of the Grand Union DTP with Brunel and the Open University. It is funded by the ESRC and it is the means by which several of our doctoral students receive financial support. It is also facilities various training activities open to all Oxford students.

PGR - Research graduate

EPC – Education Policy Committee

Proctors – The two Proctors (Senior and Junior) have responsibilities under the statutes and regulations for aspects of student discipline, for ensuring the proper conduct of examinations and for dealing with complaints.

ESRC – Economic and Social Research Council

PRS – Probationer Research Student

GJCC – Graduate Joint Consultative Committee

SSD – Social Sciences Division

Grey Book – The Exam Regulations (now not produced in hard copy, can only be found online).

SSP – Student Support Plan

TCD – Taught Courses Director

GSC – Graduate Studies Committee

TNA – Training Needs Analysis

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Annexe A: Guidance on Generative Artificial Intelligence Use

Scope and Background

This document sets out the principles of the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) tools for taught courses and masters' and doctoral research projects within the Department of Sociology, including thesis work. The document is written to provide department-specific guidance in the context of typical courses and projects within the Sociology department, and should be seen in conjunction with the University's guidance on the use of Gen AI¹, other relevant documents such as the University's Honour Code², and general information and guidance on academic conduct provided in the University's student handbook.³

We have defined different categories (A, B, C) of Gen AI use for courses in the Sociology department. Different courses will fall into one of these three categories, so please check with the course convenor what the policy for a given course is.

When you are permitted to use Gen AI tools to assist your learning and information-seeking in a course, we encourage you to use these tools in a responsible and critical way. In general, when using these tools, ask yourself whether using these tools is helping you learn and assisting the development of the skills that the course is intended to teach. There are well-known

problems with AI tools, e.g. hallucination of papers and/or concepts, and it is your responsibility to follow up on information provided by these tools and verify their credibility. When feeding in any data into AI, carefully consider if the data is sensitive or confidential in any way, and consider the information security⁴, data protection⁵ and copyright risks of feeding data into Gen AI tools⁶.

For all formative and summative assessments, where AI use is permitted in a specific way (Category A/B below), we require you to submit an AI disclosure statement to outline how you have used AI in the work submitted, including the model and version. If you did not use AI, you should also state this explicitly. By default, in timed, closed-book examinations no gen AI use is permitted.

AI Use Categorisation for Taught Courses

Category A: no AI use is permitted in summative assessments, but is permitted in formative assessments

For formative assessments (e.g. essays, presentations and/or problem sets), you are permitted to use AI to do background research or in an assistive capacity (for example to find recent articles or to help understand a concept). You must not use AI to summarize readings, as this will not provide sufficient knowledge or analytical ability to understand the nuances of the argument. You are also welcome to use AI after you have written the essay to correct grammar, spelling and/or academic tone.

¹ <https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/ai-use-in-summative-assessment> and <https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/research-practice/policy-generative-ai-research>

²

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/exams/open-book/honour-code>

³

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/student-handbook>

⁴ <https://www.infosec.ox.ac.uk/guidance-policy>

⁵ <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/data-protection-policy>

⁶ <https://infosec.ox.ac.uk/use-generative-ai-services-such-as-chatgpt-safely>

The use of Gen AI for editing is to provide suggestions for corrections and improvements, but you should ensure you make these changes yourself. For any text generation, do not under any circumstances copy text generated by a Gen AI tool into any piece of work or read out such text in a presentation. You are not permitted to use AI to write, produce or co-author an essay.

Unauthorised uses of AI such as those outlined above constitute plagiarism as per university policy and these will be referred to the proctors (as noted in departmental exam regulations). You are also cheating yourself of the opportunity to learn. Also, remember that in a closed-book exam you will have no recourse to AI.

All formative assessments should include an AI disclosure statement, e.g. at the end of your essay (after the references), include a few sentences saying how you used AI, and noting which model and version. If you did not use AI, state this explicitly.

Category B: AI use for formative and summative assessment permitted, but in an assistive capacity (e.g. assignments) – also applies to theses

You are permitted to use AI tools in a limited but assistive capacity to support your learning and to support you in completing formative and summative assessments. In courses with multiple summative assessments, it could be that AI use is permitted for one assessment but not another – please refer to your course convenor for specific guidelines. By default, no AI use is permitted in closed-book unseen examination. When AI use is permitted for a summative assessment, AI cannot be used to complete the assessment (entirely or in part) such that AI

would be considered an author or co-author of the assessment.

Examples of assistive capacity include: (1) for background literature search, assistance in finding references, understanding or engaging with an idea or concept; (2) proof-reading and editing text for grammar, spelling and/or academic tone, but only in a suggestive capacity and not to write new text; (3) for data entry or extraction tasks (e.g. from a PDF or a .CSV); (4) for improving code efficiency and testing/troubleshooting code and its execution, but not for setting up the fundamentals of the quantitative analysis, or delegating the quantitative analysis to AI around central decisions, such as choosing of the statistical or computational model, estimation procedures, variables etc.⁷ In most cases it is not advisable to feed in your data into an AI model (see above also issues around data licences, information security, and data protection that are relevant when sharing any data with Gen AI tools). Consider also issues of Intellectual Property or Copyright when feeding in information into Gen AI tools. For quantitative assessments, while it may be tempting to use AI to solve the problems it will limit your opportunity to learn key concepts and build essential skills.

If there is reason to suspect AI was used extensively to author an assignment or for improper academic practice, this will be referred to the proctors. For all assessments in this category and the thesis, an AI disclosure statement that outlines how AI was used in the production of the work is required, including the model and version. If AI was not used, please also note this explicitly.

⁷ Unless a course convenor specifies otherwise, this is the default position for Gen AI use in quantitative and/or coding applications.

Category C: no AI use permitted entirely for formative or summative assessments

In these cases, no AI tools are permitted for use in either formative or summative assessments. If there is suspected reason to believe AI is used in these courses, it will be referred to the proctors.

AI Use for Doctoral Projects

The Department recognises that there are different types of doctoral projects that are undertaken and linked to this there may be different use cases of Gen AI with each. The guidance here is intended to provide broad general principles, but we encourage students to discuss these in more detail with their supervisors. This document should also be read in conjunction with the University policy for using Generative AI in Research.⁸

You are permitted to use AI tools in an assistive capacity to support your doctoral research. However, AI cannot be used to do substantive work entirely or in part such that AI would be considered author or co-author of the doctoral work. Examples of assistive capacity could include: (1) for background literature search, assistance in finding references, explanation of concepts and ideas; (2) for machine translation of foreign language texts; (3) for proof-reading and editing text for grammar, spelling and/or academic tone, but only in a suggestive capacity and not to write new text; (3) for data entry or extraction tasks (e.g. from a PDF or a .CSV); (4) for improving code efficiency and testing/troubleshooting code and its execution, but not for setting up the fundamentals of the quantitative analysis such as choosing of the statistical or computational model, estimation procedures, variables etc. In most cases, it is not advisable to feed in your data into an

AI model (see above also issues around data licences, information security and data protection that are relevant when sharing any data with Gen AI tools). Consider also issues of Intellectual Property or Copyright when feeding in information into Gen AI tools.

In establishing the framework or plans for data analysis, it may be helpful to use Gen AI tools as an interlocutor, i.e. to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of planned methods or approaches or to elicit feedback on your plans or ideas. This is an acceptable use. However, ultimately, the decision to use a given model or approach and its credibility is a decision that you must make in conversation with your supervisor(s). Remember that in your doctoral milestone assessments you will be expected to explain and justify your research, including detailed aspects of the methods. In these oral assessments you will not have access to AI.

While there are many opportunities offered by AI, there are also known limitations with current Gen AI tools such as hallucination of concepts and/or citations, biases, and/or their probabilistic nature that challenges core ideas of research reproducibility and robustness. Ultimately the validity and integrity of what you write in your doctoral thesis is your own responsibility.

For your summative milestone assessments of transfer and confirmation of status, you will be required to submit an AI disclosure statement as a part of your submission. This statement should outline how AI was used in the production of the work, including model and version. If AI was not used, please also note this explicitly.

⁸ <https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/research-practice/policy-generative-ai-research>

