



CAMBRIDGE
International Education

Syllabus

Cambridge O Level Sociology 2251

Use this syllabus for exams in 2028, 2029 and 2030.

Exams are available in the June and November series.

This syllabus is **not** available in all administrative zones.

Please check the syllabus page at www.cambridgeinternational.org/2251 to see if this syllabus is available in your administrative zone.



Version I

For the purposes of screen readers, any mention in this document of Cambridge IGCSE refers to Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education.

Why choose Cambridge?

We work with schools worldwide to build an education that shapes knowledge, understanding and skills. Together, we give learners the confidence they need to thrive and make a positive impact in a changing world.

As part of the University of Cambridge, we offer a globally trusted and flexible framework for education from age 3 to 19, informed by research, experience, and listening to educators.

With recognised qualifications, high-quality resources, comprehensive support and valuable insights, we help schools prepare every student for the opportunities and challenges ahead.

Qualifications that are recognised and valued worldwide

From the world's top-ranked universities to local higher education institutions, Cambridge qualifications open doors to a world of opportunities.

Setting a global standard

With over 160 years of experience in delivering fair, valid and reliable assessments to students worldwide, we offer a global, recognised performance standard for international education.

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Learning with lasting impact

Cambridge learners build subject knowledge and conceptual understanding, and develop a broad range of skills, learning habits and attributes to help make them ready for the world.

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Our trusted baseline and diagnostic assessments, together with our insights and evaluation service, help schools turn data into knowledge and actionable insights, to inform teaching decisions and improve learner outcomes.

Bringing together a community of experts

We bring together the collective knowledge of experts and our diverse community of educators worldwide, supporting them to learn from one another and share ideas and information.

Tackling the climate crisis together

We believe that education is key to tackling the climate crisis. Together with Cambridge schools, we can empower young people with the skills and knowledge to take action on climate change, helping them be ready for the world.

School feedback: 'We think the Cambridge curriculum is superb preparation for university.'

Feedback from: Christoph Guttentag, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions, Duke University, USA

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Important: Changes to this syllabus



The latest syllabus is version 1, published September 2025. There are no significant changes which affect teaching.

Any textbooks endorsed to support the syllabus for examination from 2025 are still suitable for use with this syllabus.

1 Why choose this syllabus?

Key benefits

Cambridge O Level is typically for 14 to 16 year olds and is an internationally recognised qualification. It has been designed especially for an international market and is sensitive to the needs of different countries. Cambridge O Level is designed for learners whose first language may not be English, and this is acknowledged throughout the examination process.

Our programmes promote a thorough knowledge and understanding of a subject and help to develop the skills learners need for their next steps in education or employment.

Cambridge O Level Sociology encourages learners to think critically about contemporary social, cultural and political issues. The syllabus provides opportunities to explore concepts and arguments that underpin the discipline of sociology. Learners are supported in developing key transferable skills such as the interpretation of evidence, analysis and evaluation while studying a range of stimulating topics and real-world issues.

Our approach in Cambridge O Level Sociology encourages learners to be:

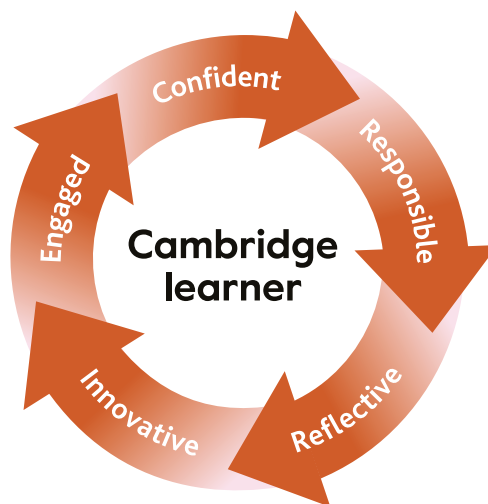
confident, developing the ability to express and communicate sociological ideas and arguments to others

responsible, developing sociological awareness of contemporary social, cultural and political issues, and a respect for different views

reflective, developing the skills that enable learners to take ownership of the process of learning, both individually and collaboratively

innovative, developing informed views on real-world issues and new ways of thinking about familiar topics

engaged, interested and ready to address social, cultural and political issues in a holistic way.



School feedback: ‘Cambridge O Level has helped me develop thinking and analytical skills which will go a long way in helping me with advanced studies.’

Feedback from: Kamal Khan Virk, former student at Beaconhouse Garden Town Secondary School, Pakistan, who went on to study Actuarial Science at the London School of Economics

Qualifications that are recognised and valued worldwide

Cambridge qualifications prepare and equip learners with the skills they need to thrive at university and beyond. The world's best higher education institutions recognise our qualifications and value the critical thinking skills, independent research abilities and deep subject knowledge that Cambridge learners bring.

We continually work with universities and colleges in every part of the world to ensure that they understand and accept our qualifications. Cambridge O Level provides a springboard to the Cambridge Advanced stage, as well as other post-16 routes. The combination of knowledge and skills in Cambridge O Level Sociology gives learners a solid foundation for further study. Candidates who achieve grades A* to C are well prepared to follow a wide range of courses including Cambridge International AS & A Level Sociology.

Many universities require a combination of Cambridge International AS & A Levels and Cambridge O Levels or equivalent to meet their entry requirements.

Learn more at [**www.cambridgeinternational.org/recognition**](https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/recognition)

Supporting teachers

We believe education works best when teaching and learning are closely aligned to the curriculum, resources and assessment. Our high-quality teaching support helps to maximise teaching time and enables teachers to engage learners of all backgrounds and abilities.

We aim to provide the following support for each Cambridge qualification:

- Syllabus
- Specimen question papers and mark schemes
- Specimen paper answers
- Schemes of Work
- Example candidate responses
- Past papers and mark schemes
- Principal examiner reports for teachers

These resources are available on the School Support Hub at www.cambridgeinternational.org/support, our secure online site for Cambridge teachers. Your exams officer can provide you with a login.

Additional teaching & learning resources are also available for many syllabuses and vary according to the nature of the subject and the structure of the assessment of each syllabus. These can include ready-built lesson materials, digital resources and multimedia for the classroom and homework, guidance on assessment and much more. Beyond the resources available on the Schools Support Hub, a wide range of endorsed textbooks and associated teaching and learning support are available from Cambridge at www.cambridge.org/education and from other publishers. Resources vary according to the nature of the subject and the structure of the assessment of each syllabus.

You can also contact our global Cambridge community or talk to a senior examiner on our discussion forums.

Sign up for email notifications about changes to syllabuses, including new and revised products and services, at www.cambridgeinternational.org/syllabusupdates

Professional development

Find the next step on your professional development journey.

- **Introduction courses** – An introduction to Cambridge programmes and qualifications. For teachers who are new to Cambridge programmes or new to a specific syllabus.
- **Focus on Teaching courses** – These are for teachers who want to explore a specific area of teaching and learning within a syllabus or programme.
- **Focus on Assessment courses** – These are for teachers who want to understand the assessment of a syllabus in greater depth.
- **Marking workshops** – These workshops help you become more familiar with what examiners are looking for, and provide an opportunity to raise questions and share your experiences of the syllabus.
- **Enrichment Professional Development** – Transform your approach to teaching with our Enrichment workshops. Each workshop focuses on a specific area of teaching and learning practice.
- **Cambridge Professional Development Qualifications (PDQs)** – Practice-based programmes that transform professional learning for practicing teachers. Available at Certificate and Diploma level.

For more information visit www.cambridgeinternational.org/support-and-training-for-schools

Supporting exams officers

We provide comprehensive support and guidance for all Cambridge exams officers.
Find out more at: www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide



2 Syllabus overview

Aims

The aims describe the purposes of a course based on this syllabus.

Students following a course based on this syllabus will:

- develop knowledge and understanding of sociological concepts, theories, methods and research findings
- understand issues and problems concerning the planning, implementation and evaluation of research enquiry and the collection, analysis and interpretation of data
- understand the ways in which personal and social identities are constructed and maintained
- encourage a critical awareness of social, economic and political structures and processes, and their effects on individuals and communities
- understand the tensions between individual free will and social structures, and continuity and change in societies
- gain an appreciation and understanding of individual, social and cultural diversity
- apply sociological knowledge and understanding to their own lives and their participation within society.

We are an education organisation and politically neutral. The contents of this syllabus, examination papers and associated materials do not endorse any political view. We endeavour to treat all aspects of the exam process neutrally.



Content overview

1 Research methods

- 1.1 How do sociologists approach the study of society?
- 1.2 What types of data and evidence do sociologists use?
- 1.3 How do sociologists investigate society?

2 Identity: self and society

- 2.1 How do we learn our identity?
- 2.2 How does society control us?
- 2.3 What influences our social identity?

3 Social stratification and inequality

- 3.1 What is social stratification?
- 3.2 What attempts have been made to reduce social inequalities?
- 3.3 How has globalisation affected inequalities between societies?

4 Family

- 4.1 What are the different types of families?
- 4.2 What is the role of the family for the individual and society?
- 4.3 How is family life changing?

5 Education

- 5.1 What is education and schooling?
- 5.2 What are the roles and functions of education?
- 5.3 What factors help to explain differences in educational achievement and experience?

6 Crime, deviance and social control

- 6.1 What are crime, deviance and social control?
- 6.2 What are the patterns of and explanations for crime and deviance?
- 6.3 How is crime dealt with in different societies?



This O Level syllabus shares content with other sociology syllabuses. For further support see the School Support Hub for IGCSE Sociology. Textbooks endorsed to support IGCSE Sociology are suitable for use with this syllabus.

Assessment overview

All candidates take two components. Candidates will be eligible for grades A* to E.

All candidates take:

Paper 1 2 hours
Research Methods, Identity and Inequality 50%
80 marks

Candidates answer two structured questions:

- Question 1 Research methods (compulsory)
– all candidates answer this question, which includes data response.
- Question 2 and Question 3 – candidates choose to answer either Question 2 or Question 3.

Externally assessed

and:

Paper 2 1 hour 45 minutes
Family, Education and Crime 50%
80 marks

Candidates answer two optional structured questions from a choice of three.

Externally assessed

Information on availability is in the **Before you start** section.

Assessment objectives

The assessment objectives (AOs) are:

AO1 Knowledge and understanding

Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of sociological concepts, theories, evidence, views and research methods.

AO2 Interpretation and application

Apply relevant sociological concepts, theories, evidence, views and research methods to support points or develop arguments.

Explain how sociological concepts, theories, evidence, views and research methods apply to a particular issue or question.

AO3 Analysis and evaluation

Analyse and evaluate sociological theories, evidence, views and research methods:

- explain the strengths and limitations of sociological theories, views and research methods
- construct, develop and discuss sociological arguments
- reach conclusions and make judgements based on a reasoned consideration of evidence.

Weighting for assessment objectives

The approximate weightings allocated to each of the assessment objectives (AOs) are summarised below.

Assessment objectives as a percentage of the qualification

Assessment objective	Weighting in O Level %
AO1 Knowledge and understanding	39
AO2 Interpretation and application	39
AO3 Analysis and evaluation	22
Total	100

Assessment objectives as a percentage of each component

Assessment objective	Weighting in components %	
	Paper 1	Paper 2
AO1 Knowledge and understanding	35	43
AO2 Interpretation and application	40	37
AO3 Analysis and evaluation	25	20
Total	100	100

3 Subject content

This syllabus gives you the flexibility to design a course that will interest, challenge and engage your learners. Where appropriate you are responsible for selecting resources and examples, topics and subject contexts to support your learners' study. These should be appropriate for the learners' age, cultural background and learning context as well as complying with your school policies and local legal requirements.

The content is organised into six topics, which explore the nature of social relationships, processes and structures. The first topic provides a foundation for the other topics of the syllabus by considering the methods and procedures employed in sociological research. Promoting candidates' understanding of research methods and their strengths and limitations is a key feature of the syllabus and this underpins each of the other topics.

Teachers should emphasise how different levels of social life (macro and micro) are interconnected and encourage candidates' awareness of the interrelated nature of the social structure. Candidates will also be expected to recognise the significance of class, gender, ethnic and age differences within societies. Cross-cultural and historical comparisons, analysis and use of examples are encouraged.

The Cambridge IGCSE Sociology syllabus has been designed so that teachers in any society can apply candidates' own experiences, local case studies and sociological work relating to their own way of life to an understanding of the central ideas and themes of sociology in modern industrial societies.

There are three topics in Paper 1:

- 1 Research methods
- 2 Identity: self and society
- 3 Social stratification and inequality.

All three topics are fundamental to the study of sociology and provide a foundation for studying the topics in Paper 2. Teachers should teach all three topics in Paper 1.

There are three topics in Paper 2:

- 4 Family
- 5 Education
- 6 Crime, deviance and social control.

Teachers should teach two of these. For Paper 2, candidates must answer questions on two of the topics.

Paper 1 Research Methods, Identity and Inequality

1 Research Methods

This topic considers the approaches and procedures used in sociological research. This provides a basis for understanding the uniquely sociological way of studying society. Candidates will be required to make and justify a plan of research on a specified topic.

1.1 How do sociologists approach the study of society?

1.1.1 The positivist approach:

- The scientific method
- A macro view
- Social facts
- Quantitative data
- Causation and correlation
- Patterns and trends
- Objectivity and reliability

1.1.2 The interpretivist approach:

- A micro view
- Meanings and motivations
- Qualitative data
- In-depth
- Subjectivity
- Validity and verstehen

1.1.3 Approaches that combine different research methods and evidence:

- Triangulation
- Longitudinal studies

1.1.4 The analysis and evaluation of research choices:

- Bias
- Interviewer effect
- Hawthorne/Observer effect
- Validity
- Reliability
- Representativeness
- Generalisability

1.2 What types of data and evidence do sociologists use?

1.2.1 Sources of data:

- Differences between primary and secondary sources of data
- Differences between qualitative and quantitative data
- Strengths and limitations of each type of data

1.2.2 Secondary evidence:

- Examples of:
 - official statistics
 - historical and personal documents
 - digital sources
 - media content
- Strengths and limitations of each type of evidence

1.2.3 Analysis, interpretation and evaluation of data from qualitative and quantitative sources:

- Summaries of sociological studies
- Diagrams
- Tables
- Charts
- Graphs

1.3 How do sociologists investigate society?

1.3.1 The stages in research design:

- Selection of topic
- Aims
- Hypothesis
- Target population
- Methods
- Operationalisation
- Pilot studies

1.3.2 Sampling:

- Sampling frames
- Sampling techniques:
 - random
 - systematic
 - stratified
 - snowball
 - quota
- Strengths and limitations of each technique

continued

1.3 How do sociologists investigate society? continued**1.3.3 Quantitative and qualitative primary research methods:**

- Surveys
- Questionnaires
- Interviews (structured, semi-structured, unstructured, group)
- Observations (participant, non-participant, covert, overt)
- Strengths and limitations of each method

1.3.4 Types of question:

- Open
- Closed
- Multiple choice
- Scaled

1.3.5 The theoretical and practical issues affecting research:

- Researcher perspective (positivist/interpretivist)
- Access to sample
- Response rate
- Funding/cost
- Time

1.3.6 Ethical issues affecting research:

- Informed consent
- Privacy/confidentiality
- Deception
- Prevention of harm
- Legality

2 Identity: self and society

This topic considers the relationship between the individual and society, what constitutes our identity and how identity and behaviour are shaped by social processes.

2.1 How do we learn our identity?

2.1.1

(a) Society as a product of social construction:

- Culture
- Norms
- Values
- Customs
- Roles
- Status (achieved/ascribed)
- Stereotypes

(b) How these concepts influence individual behaviour and social identity

2.1.2 The social construction of our identity:

- The nature–nurture debate
- The relativity of culture
- Socialisation
- Norms and values

2.1.3 Primary and secondary socialisation:

- Key agencies of socialisation:
 - family
 - education
 - peer group
 - media
 - religion
 - workplace
- The effectiveness of each agency in the socialisation process

2.1.4 Processes used by agencies of socialisation, e.g.:

- Canalisation
- Hidden curriculum
- Media representations
- Peer pressure
- Religious teachings
- Role modelling
- Workplace training

continued

2.1 How do we learn our identity? continued

2.1.5 The debate between sociological perspectives and theories on socialisation:

- Consensus and conflict
- Functionalist ideas:
 - inadequate socialisation
 - social cohesion/value consensus
- Marxist ideas:
 - socialisation into capitalist ideology
 - reproduction of social class
- Feminist ideas:
 - gender role socialisation into masculinity/femininity

2.2 How does society control us?

2.2.1 Social control:

- Difference between formal and informal types of social control
- Positive and negative sanctions
- Effectiveness of these in producing social conformity

2.2.2 The debate between consensus and conflict views of social control:

- Functionalism
- Marxism
- Feminism

2.2.3 The effectiveness of agencies of formal social control:

- Government
- Police
- Courts
- Penal system
- Armed forces

2.2.4 Methods of control used by formal agencies in achieving social conformity, e.g.:

- Law-making
- Coercion
- Digital surveillance
- Arrest
- Sentencing
- Imprisonment

continued

2.2 How does society control us? continued

2.2.5 The effectiveness of agencies of informal social control:

- Family
- Education
- Peer group
- Media
- Religion
- Workplace

2.2.6 Methods of control used by informal agencies in achieving social conformity:

- Positive and negative sanctions, e.g.:
 - ostracism
 - parental rewards
 - social media 'likes'
 - religious rewards/sanctions
 - school punishments
 - dismissal from a job

2.2.7 Resistance to social control through protest groups and sub-cultures:

- Reasons why some people join them
- Deviant and non-conformist behaviour
- Examples of:
 - protest groups
 - online sub-cultures
 - youth sub-cultures
 - religious sub-cultures

2.3 What influences our social identity?

2.3.1 Social identity:

- Key aspects of social identity:
 - age
 - gender
 - ethnicity
 - social class
- Impact of each aspect on individuals and social groups in different societies

2.3.2 The digital self and online identities:

- Positive and negative impacts of social networks, social media and virtual communities on identity

continued

2.3 What influences our social identity? continued

2.3.3 Globalisation:

(a) Globalisation's influence on individual and social/cultural identities, e.g.:

- Cultural defence
- Hybrid identities
- The homogenisation of identities

(b) Positive and negative impacts on identity of:

- Cultural diversity
- Multiculturalism
- Global culture

2.3.4 Postmodernist views of identity as chosen rather than given:

- Digital identities
- Identities linked to consumption patterns and lifestyle in a 'pick and mix' society

3 Social stratification and inequality

This topic explores how societies are stratified. It examines the reasons why inequalities exist and how they are created and perpetuated. It also explores attempts to reduce inequalities and the extent to which these have been seen as successful.

3.1 What is social stratification?

3.1.1 Social stratification in open and closed societies:

- Achieved and ascribed status
- Poverty and wealth
- Power
- Social mobility
- Meritocracy
- Modern slavery
- The caste system

3.1.2 Differences in life chances affected by age, gender, ethnicity and social class:

- Life chances in:
 - education
 - employment
 - health
 - housing
 - life expectancy

continued

3.1 What is social stratification? continued

3.1.3 The intersectionality of age, ethnicity, gender and social class in understanding the impact of inequality on individuals

3.1.4 Different sociological theories on social inequality:

- Labelling theory, e.g.:
 - stereotypes
 - master status
 - self-fulfilling prophecy
- Marxism, e.g.:
 - exploitation of the proletariat
 - ideological control
 - poverty trap
 - reserve army of labour

3.2 What attempts have been made to reduce social inequalities?

3.2.1 The use of legislation within societies to reduce inequality, e.g.:

- Progressive taxation
- The redistribution of wealth through benefits
- A minimum wage
- Equal opportunities laws
- Other government measures

3.2.2 The development and impact of welfare states on life chances:

- Free and/or universal education
- Unemployment benefits
- Pensions
- Low-cost housing
- Free healthcare
- Universal basic income

3.2.3 The global work of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to reduce inequalities:

- Reducing poverty
- Providing medical assistance
- Promoting business
- Improving education

continued

3.2 What attempts have been made to reduce social inequalities? continued

3.2.4 Sociological views of the success of attempts to reduce social inequalities:

- New Right criticisms of the welfare state/underclass
- The culture of poverty and the dependency culture
- Marxist criticisms of the welfare state
- Criticisms of NGOs
- Feminist criticisms of equality legislation

3.3 How has globalisation affected inequalities between societies?

3.3.1 The impact of migration on societies:

- Immigration/emigration
- Push and pull factors
- Increasing cultural diversity
- Economic consequences
- Negative perceptions of migrants

3.3.2 The impact of global ecological issues on societies:

- The influence of transnational companies
- Climate change
- Pollution
- Urbanisation

3.3.3 Sociological explanations for global inequalities:

- Marxist views of capitalist exploitation
- Colonialism
- Feminist ideas of patriarchy

Paper 2 Family, Education and Crime

4 Family

This topic explores the sociology of the family in a modern global context, including different types of families, alternatives to the family and changing roles and relationships within the family. The views of different sociological theories on the role of the family will also be explored.

4.1 What are the different types of families?

4.1.1 Different family structures:

- Nuclear
- Extended, e.g. modified, horizontal, vertical/beanpole
- Reconstituted
- Lone parent
- Empty nest
- Childless
- Strengths and limitations of different family structures
- If appropriate to the local context and not restricted by law or regulation, other family types may also be taught, such as polygamous family and same-sex family

4.1.2 Variations and diversity in the family:

- Cross-cultural
- Social class
- Ethnicity

4.1.3 Sociological views on family diversity:

- New Right views on family diversity and dysfunctional families
- Postmodernist views on the positive aspects of family diversity
- The extent of family diversity and the dominance of the nuclear family

4.1.4 Alternatives to the family:

- Single person households
- Shared households
- Friends as family

4.1.5 Variations in types of marriage:

- Arranged
- Empty shell
- Love
- Monogamy
- Serial monogamy
- If appropriate to the local context and not restricted by law or regulation, other types of marriage may also be taught such as polygamy and same-sex marriage

4.2 What is the role of the family for the individual and society?

4.2.1 Functionalist views:

- How the family benefits its members and society
- Functions of the family
- The loss of functions debate
- How family functions have changed over time
- 'Warm bath' theory
- Importance of the nuclear family

4.2.2 Marxist views:

- How the family benefits capitalism
- Exploitation of family members
- Reproduction of class inequalities
- Family as a unit of consumption
- Family and ideological control

4.2.3 Feminist views:

- How the family benefits patriarchy and male power
- The domestic division of labour
- Domestic violence and abuse
- Joint and segregated conjugal roles
- Dual burden / triple shift
- Decision-making
- Gendered socialisation

4.2.4 Strengths and limitations of functionalist, Marxist and feminist views of the role of the family

4.2.5 Debates about whether the experience of family life is positive or negative for family members

4.3 How is family life changing?

4.3.1 Demographic factors and their effects on family life:

- Family size
- Birth rates
- Life expectancy
- Ageing population
- Having children in later life

4.3.2 The impact of industrialisation and urbanisation on family structures and roles

4.3.3 Explanations of changing patterns and trends in marriage, divorce and cohabitation:

- Legislation
- Societal attitudes and values
- Role of the internet
- Secularisation
- Cultural expectations
- Changes in the status and power of women / female empowerment

4.3.4 Alternatives to marriage:

- Cohabitation
- Singlehood
- Lone parents
- Civil partnerships

4.3.5 Changing family roles:

- Changing conjugal roles:
 - more diverse family types
 - segregated to joint conjugal roles, e.g. symmetrical family, dual worker family
 - the pivot/sandwich generation
- Changing roles of children:
 - economic burden/cost
 - child-centredness
 - boomerang children
- Changing roles of grandparents:
 - childcare
 - economic support
 - wisdom and advice
 - dependent / a burden

5 Education

This topic explores the influence of education on the individual and society and what is meant by education and schooling. This includes the views of different sociological theories on the role and functions of education, patterns and explanations of educational achievement and differences in global education.

5.1 What is education and schooling?

5.1.1 Formal and informal education:

- Differences between formal and informal education
- The official curriculum: testing, syllabus content and subjects
- The hidden curriculum: norms and values, punctuality, conformity, gender roles

5.1.2 Different types of schools:

- The effectiveness of different types of schools, e.g.:
 - state/public
 - private
 - selective/non-selective
 - single-sex
 - co-educational
 - faith schools
 - international
- Strengths and limitations of each type of school

5.1.3 Alternative approaches to education:

- Online learning
- Homeschooling
- Unschooling
- Vocational learning
- Progressive schooling
- Strengths and limitations of different approaches to education

5.2 What are the roles and functions of education?

5.2.1 The functionalist view:

- The positive roles and functions of education:
 - the roles of education: socialisation, social control, economic, selective
 - meritocracy and social mobility
 - role allocation
 - value consensus
 - equal opportunities
 - standardised testing
 - setting by ability
 - vocationalism
- Strengths and limitations of the functionalist view

continued

5.2 What are the roles and functions of education? continued

5.2.2 The Marxist view:

- The roles and functions of education in the reproduction of class inequalities:
 - socialisation and social control as capitalist ideological control
 - the hidden and official curriculum
 - the middle-class culture in schools, e.g. the importance of cultural capital
 - the myth of meritocracy
 - material factors, e.g. access to digital technology
 - setting by ability
- Strengths and limitations of the Marxist view

5.2.3 The feminist view:

- The roles and functions of education in perpetuating gender inequalities:
 - the patriarchal culture of education
 - male power
 - gender hierarchy
 - role models
 - access to education
 - gendered curriculum / subject choice
 - teacher expectations
 - peer groups and social control
- Strengths and limitations of the feminist view

5.3 What factors help to explain differences in educational achievement and experience?

5.3.1 Patterns in educational achievement and experience:

- Social class
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Global differences

5.3.2 Explanations for differences in educational achievement and experience based on social class:

- Material factors, e.g. access to digital technology
- Cultural and social factors
- Cultural capital
- Home/community factors
- Linguistic factors
- Compensatory education
- In-school factors, e.g. pro- and anti-school sub-cultures
- Selective and private education
- Labelling theory
- Marxist explanations

continued

5.3 What factors help to explain differences in educational achievement and experience? continued

5.3.3 Explanations for differences in educational achievement and experience based on ethnicity:

- Institutional racism
- Ethnocentric curriculum
- Role models
- Linguistic factors
- Cultural, material and social factors
- Home/community factors
- In-school factors, e.g. pro- and anti-school sub-cultures, ethnic sub-cultures
- Labelling theory

5.3.4 Explanations for differences in educational achievement and experience based on gender:

- Differential gendered socialisation and social control
- Teacher expectations
- Cultural and social factors
- Access to education
- In-school factors, e.g. pro- and anti-school sub-cultures, gendered sub-cultures
- Labelling theory
- Feminist explanations, e.g. patriarchy

5.3.5 Global differences in educational achievement and experience:

- Reasons for differential achievement and experience in different countries, e.g.:
 - availability of schools
 - poverty/wealth
 - access to education for girls
 - class sizes
 - norms, values and cultural differences
 - access to the internet / digital resources

5.3.6 Strengths and limitations of the different explanations for differences in educational achievement and experience:

- Social class
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Global differences

6 Crime, deviance and social control

This topic explores criminal and deviant behaviour and how it is dealt with and understood in different social contexts. This includes the views of different sociological theories on the definitions, patterns and explanations of crime.

6.1 What are crime, deviance and social control?

6.1.1 The difference between crime and deviance:

- Definitions of crime and deviance
- The relativity of crime and deviance: crime and deviance vary within and between societies, cultures, situations and across time

6.1.2 Formal social control:

- Formal agencies of social control:
 - the police
 - courts
 - armed forces
 - government
 - penal system
- How formal agencies control individuals and prevent crime and deviance

6.1.3 Informal social control:

- Informal agencies of social control:
 - family
 - education
 - workplace
 - peer group
 - traditional and digital media
 - religion
- How informal agencies control individuals and prevent crime and deviance

6.1.4 The effectiveness of agencies and methods of social control in achieving conformity and preventing crime and deviance

continued

6.1 What are crime, deviance and social control? continued**6.1.5 Different types and examples of crimes:**

- Violent crime
- Property crime
- White-collar/corporate crime
- Expressive crime
- Instrumental crime
- Gang crime
- Green crime
- Global crime, e.g. organised crime
- Cyber crime
- Hate crime
- Domestic crime

6.1.6 Measuring crime:

- Measurements of crime:
 - official statistics
 - self-report studies
 - victim surveys (local and national)
- Strengths and limitations of each measurement of crime
- The problem of unreported and unrecorded crime

6.2 What are the patterns of and explanations for crime and deviance?**6.2.1 Patterns of crime and victimisation:**

- Age
- Social class
- Gender
- Ethnicity

6.2.2 Explanations for crime and deviance based on age:

- Police targeting / stop and search
- Self-fulfilling prophecy
- Stereotyping
- Gang culture
- Socialisation and social control
- Lack of opportunity
- Status frustration

continued

6.2 What are the patterns of and explanations for crime and deviance? continued**6.2.3 Explanations for crime and deviance based on ethnicity:**

- Institutional racism
- Prejudice and discrimination
- Police targeting / stop and search
- Material and relative deprivation
- Stereotyping
- Gang culture
- Status frustration

6.2.4 Explanations for crime and deviance based on gender:

- Chivalry thesis
- Culture of masculinity
- Socialisation and social control
- Misogyny
- Stereotyping
- Gang culture
- Lack of opportunity

6.2.5 Explanations for crime and deviance based on social class:

- Social exclusion
- Material and relative deprivation
- Inadequate socialisation
- Lack of opportunity
- Status frustration
- Power inequalities
- Police targeting / stop and search

6.2.6 Sociological theories on crime and deviance:

- Postmodernism
- Interactionism (including labelling and moral panic theory)
- Functionalism (including the New Right, subculturalism and strain theory)
- Marxism
- Feminism

6.2.7 Strengths and limitations of the different explanations for crime and deviance:

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Social class
- Different sociological theories

6.3 How is crime dealt with in different societies?

6.3.1 Aims of punishment:

- Protection of citizens
- Deterrence
- Retribution
- Incapacitation
- Rehabilitation

6.3.2 The effectiveness of different types of punishment:

- Community sentencing
- Financial penalties
- Prison
- Rehabilitation programmes
- Capital punishment
- Corporal punishment
- Exile
- Ostracism
- Non-custodial sentencing, e.g. electronic tagging, curfews, restraining orders
- Probation
- Police cautions
- Social media and vigilante groups

6.3.3 The effectiveness of policing and law enforcement:

- Policing strategies, e.g. targeting and stop and search
- Surveillance, including digital surveillance
- Crime prevention
- Community and military style policing

Faculty feedback: ‘Understanding how and why our climate is changing and providing the knowledge and skills to explore the challenges plays a key role in every student’s education.’

Feedback from: Dr Amy Munro-Faure, Head of Education and Student Engagement of Cambridge Zero

4 Details of the assessment

Paper 1 – Research Methods, Identity and Inequality

Written paper, 2 hours, 80 marks

Paper 1 has three questions. Candidates answer **two** questions. Question 1 is compulsory, candidates choose to answer **either** Question 2 **or** Question 3.

The questions are on the following topics:

Question 1 Research methods (compulsory)

Question 2 Identity: self and society

Question 3 Social stratification and inequality

Candidates must study all three topics.

Each question is worth 40 marks.

Question 1 Research methods

Question 1 is compulsory. The question has five parts (a–e). Candidates must answer all of the parts.

Q1(a) has three parts (i, ii, iii). The questions are based on source material printed in the question paper. The source material will contain qualitative or quantitative information or a mixture of both. Candidates must identify information, explain an aspect of the research, and explain problems or issues with the evidence from the source.

These questions assess AO2 and AO3 skills.

Q1(b) and Q1(c) are short-answer questions. They require candidates to show knowledge and understanding of concepts, ideas and examples related to sociological research methods.

These questions assess AO1 and AO2 skills.

Q1(d) is a short essay-style question that requires candidates to evaluate a methodological view, approach or concept.

This question assesses AO1, AO2 and AO3 skills.

Q1(e) asks candidates to explain the primary methods, sampling and secondary evidence that they would use to investigate a specified topic and give reasons for their choices. No subject knowledge of the topic under investigation is required as candidates will be assessed on their knowledge of sociological research methodology. Candidates will **not** be expected to evaluate their chosen methodology.

This question assesses AO1, AO2 and AO3 skills.

Question 2 Identity: self and society and Question 3 Social stratification and inequality

Candidates choose to answer **either** Question 2 **or** Question 3.

Each question has six parts (a–f). Each question has the same structure.

Parts (a) and (b) require short answers. They test candidates' knowledge and understanding of terms, ideas and examples, and require candidates to select and apply their sociological knowledge to a specific area of the topic.

These questions assess AO1 and AO2 skills.

Parts (c) and (d) require candidates to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of sociological concepts, theories, evidence and views within a specified area of the topic. Candidates should be encouraged to refer to sociological evidence and examples in their answer.

These questions assess AO1 and AO2 skills.

Part (e) requires candidates to discuss a sociological issue or view. Candidates will need to write about issues or topics in depth in a structured way and support their ideas with relevant evidence.

This question assesses AO1, AO2 and AO3 skills.

Part (f) is a short essay-style question. Candidates will need to be able to develop reasoned arguments on both sides of a debate and support their points with relevant sociological evidence.

This question assesses AO1, AO2 and AO3 skills.

Paper 2 Family, Education and Crime

Written paper, 1 hour 45 minutes, 80 marks

Paper 2 has three questions. Candidates choose to answer **two** of the three questions.

The questions are on the following topics:

Question 1 Family

Question 2 Education

Question 3 Crime, deviance and social control

Each question has six parts (a–f). Each question has the same structure.

Each question is worth 40 marks.

Parts (a) and (b) require short answers. They test candidates' knowledge and understanding of terms, ideas and examples, and require candidates to select and apply their sociological knowledge to a specific area of the topic.

These questions assess AO1 and AO2 skills.

Parts (c) and (d) require candidates to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of sociological concepts, theories, evidence and views within a specified area of the topic. Candidates should be encouraged to refer to sociological evidence and examples in their answer.

These questions assess AO1 and AO2 skills.

Part (e) requires candidates to discuss a sociological issue or view. Candidates will need to write about issues or topics in depth in a structured way and support their ideas with relevant evidence.

This question assesses AO1, AO2 and AO3 skills.

Part (f) is a short essay-style question. Candidates will need to be able to develop reasoned arguments on both sides of a debate and support their points with relevant sociological evidence.

This question assesses AO1, AO2 and AO3 skills.

Some subject content for Paper 2, topic 4 Family may be taught if appropriate to the local context. Teachers should decide whether to teach this content, taking into account learners' ages, cultural backgrounds, learning contexts, school policies and local legal requirements. This content will not be assessed, but may be used by candidates to support their responses where relevant.

Command words

Command words and their meanings help candidates know what is expected from them in the exams. The table below includes command words used in the assessment for this syllabus. The use of the command word will relate to the subject context.

Command word	What it means
Assess	make an informed judgement
Define	give precise meaning
Describe	state the points of a topic / give characteristics and main features
Develop	take forward to a more advanced stage or build upon given information
Discuss	write about issue(s) or topic(s) in depth in a structured way
Evaluate	judge or calculate the quality, importance, amount, or value of something
Explain	set out purposes or reasons / make the relationships between things clear / say why and/or how and support with relevant evidence
Give	produce an answer from a given source or recall/memory
Identify	name/select/recognise
Justify	support a case with evidence/argument
Outline	set out the main points
State	express in clear terms
Suggest	apply knowledge and understanding to situations where there are a range of valid responses in order to make proposals / put forward considerations
Summarise	select and present the main points, without detail

5 What else you need to know

This section is an overview of other information you need to know about this syllabus. It will help to share the administrative information with your exams officer so they know when you will need their support. Find more information about our administrative processes at www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide

Before you start

Previous study

We recommend that learners starting this course should have studied a broad curriculum such as the Cambridge Lower Secondary programme or equivalent national educational framework.

We do not expect learners starting this course to have previously studied sociology.

Guided learning hours

We design Cambridge O Level syllabuses to require about 130 guided learning hours for each subject. This is for guidance only. The number of hours a learner needs to achieve the qualification may vary according to each school and the learners' previous experience of the subject.

Availability and timetables

All Cambridge schools are allocated to one of six administrative zones. Each zone has a specific timetable. Find your administrative zone at www.cambridgeinternational.org/adminzone. This syllabus is **not** available in all administrative zones. To find out about availability check the syllabus page at www.cambridgeinternational.org/2251

You can view the timetable for your administrative zone at www.cambridgeinternational.org/timetables

You can enter candidates in the June and November exam series.

Check you are using the syllabus for the year the candidate is taking the exam.

Private candidates can enter for this syllabus. For more information, please refer to the *Cambridge Guide to Making Entries*.

Combining with other syllabuses

Candidates can take this syllabus alongside other Cambridge International syllabuses in a single exam series. The only exceptions are:

- Cambridge IGCSE Sociology (0495)
- syllabuses with the same title at the same level.

Cambridge O Level, Cambridge IGCSE and Cambridge IGCSE (9–1) syllabuses are at the same level.

Making entries

Exams officers are responsible for submitting entries. We encourage them to work closely with you to make sure they enter the right number of candidates for the right combination of syllabus components. Entry option codes and instructions for submitting entries are in the *Cambridge Guide to Making Entries*. Your exams officer has access to this guide.

Exam administration

To keep our exams secure, we produce question papers for different areas of the world, known as administrative zones. We allocate all Cambridge schools to an administrative zone determined by their location. Each zone has a specific timetable.

Some of our syllabuses offer candidates different assessment options. An entry option code is used to identify the components the candidate will take relevant to the administrative zone and the available assessment options.

Support for exams officers

We know how important exams officers are to the successful running of exams. We provide them with the support they need to make entries on time. Your exams officer will find this support, and guidance for all other phases of the Cambridge Exams Cycle, at **www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide**

Retakes

Candidates can retake the whole qualification as many times as they want to.

Learn more about retake entries, including definitions and information on entry deadlines, at **www.cambridgeinternational.org/retakes**

To confirm what entry options are available for this syllabus, refer to the *Cambridge Guide to Making Entries* for the relevant series. Regulations for carrying forward component marks can be found in the *Cambridge Handbook* for the relevant year of assessment at **www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide**

Language

This syllabus and the related assessment materials are available in English only.

Accessibility and equality

Syllabus and assessment design

At Cambridge we recognise that our candidates have highly diverse socio-economic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and may also have a variety of protected characteristics. Protected characteristics include special educational needs and disability (SEND), religion and belief, and characteristics related to gender and identity.

We follow accessible design principles to make our syllabuses and assessment materials as accessible and inclusive as possible. We review language accessibility, visual resources, question layout and the contexts used in questions. Using this approach means that we give all candidates the fairest possible opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding.

Access arrangements

Our design principles aim to make sure our assessment materials are accessible for all candidates. To further minimise barriers faced by candidates with SEND, illness or injury, we offer a range of access arrangements and modified papers. This is the principal way in which we comply with our duty to make 'reasonable adjustments', as guided by the UK Equality Act 2010.

Important:

Requested access arrangements should be based on evidence of the candidate's barrier to taking an assessment and should also reflect their normal way of working. For Cambridge to approve an access arrangement, we need to agree that it constitutes a reasonable adjustment and does not affect the security or integrity of the assessment. This is explained in section 1.3 of the *Cambridge Handbook*

www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide

Applying for access arrangements

- Details of our standard access arrangements and modified question papers are available in section 1.3 of the *Cambridge Handbook* **www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide**
- Centres are expected to check the availability of access arrangements and modified question papers at the start of the course. Check the *Cambridge Handbook*, the assessment objectives listed in the syllabus document and, where applicable, any access arrangement restrictions listed in the syllabus document.
- Contact us at the start of the course to find out if we can approve an access arrangement that is not listed in the *Cambridge Handbook*.
- All applications should be made by the deadlines published in the *Cambridge Handbook*.

After the exam

Grading and reporting

Grades A*, A, B, C, D or E indicate the standard a candidate achieved at Cambridge O Level.

A* is the highest and E is the lowest. 'Ungraded' means that the candidate's performance did not meet the standard required for grade E. 'Ungraded' is reported on the statement of results but not on the certificate.

In specific circumstances your candidates may see one of the following letters on their statement of results:

- Q (PENDING)
- X (NO RESULT).

These letters do not appear on the certificate.

On the statement of results, Cambridge O Level is shown as GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION ORDINARY LEVEL.

On certificates, Cambridge O Level is shown as General Certificate of Education.

How students and teachers can use the grades

Assessment at Cambridge O Level has two purposes:

- 1 to measure learning and achievement
The assessment confirms achievement and performance in relation to the knowledge, understanding and skills specified in the syllabus.
- 2 to show likely future success
The outcomes help predict which students are well prepared for or likely to be successful in a particular course or career.
The outcomes help students choose the most suitable course or career.

Changes to this syllabus for 2028, 2029 and 2030

The syllabus has been updated. This is version 1, published September 2025.

You must read the whole syllabus before planning your teaching programme. We review our syllabuses regularly to make sure they continue to meet the needs of our schools. In updating this syllabus, we have made it easier for teachers and students to understand, keeping the familiar features that teachers and schools value.

There are no significant changes which affect teaching.



Any textbooks endorsed to support the syllabus for examination from 2025 are still suitable for use with this syllabus.

Syllabuses and specimen materials represent the final authority on the content and structure of all of our assessments.

With a Customer Services team available 24 hours a day, 6 days a week, and dedicated regional teams supporting schools in 160 countries, we understand your local context and are here to guide you so you can provide your learners with everything they need to prepare for Cambridge O Level.



Quality management

We are committed to providing exceptional quality. In line with this commitment, our quality management system for the provision of international education programmes and qualifications for students aged 5 to 19 is independently certified as meeting the internationally recognised standard, ISO 9001:2015.

Learn more at www.cambridgeinternational.org/about-us/our-standards/

We are committed to making our documents accessible in accordance with the WCAG 2.1 Standard. We are always looking to improve the accessibility of our documents. If you find any problems or you think we are not meeting accessibility requirements, contact us at **info@cambridgeinternational.org** with the subject heading: Digital accessibility. If you need this document in a different format, contact us and supply your name, email address and requirements and we will respond within 15 working days.

Cambridge International Education, The Triangle Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge, CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
t: +44 (0)1223 553554 email: info@cambridgeinternational.org www.cambridgeinternational.org