



THE LOOKING GLASS

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This briefing rounds up developments from the UK over the past seven days that double as ready-made, up-to-date examples for A-level Sociology essays and short-answer questions. Each story is tagged to the AQA 7192 specification and paired with a note on the perspective, concept or debate it illustrates best.

EDUCATION



A-level results day exposes a widening regional divide

13 AUGUST 2026

Students across England, Wales and Northern Ireland collected their A-level results on 13 August 2026. The proportion of entries graded A or A* rose to 28.3%, with A* grades reaching 9.6% of all entries, slightly up on 2025. The overall pass rate held at 97.5%.

The headline figures conceal a sharp geographical split. London recorded the highest share of top grades, at 32.7%, while the North East and East Midlands lagged behind on 23.1%, a gap of 9.6 percentage points. This is the widest regional divide since the current grading system began in 2010.

The gap between school types was starker still. Independent schools recorded top grades for 48.6% of entries, compared with 25.4% in the state sector, a difference of over 23 percentage points. Henri Murison of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership called the widening North-South gap “disappointing”, while Nick Harrison of the Sutton Trust argued that “a young person's chances shouldn't depend so heavily on where they go to school”.

WHY IT'S A GOOD EXEMPLAR: A live illustration of the persistent link between social class and educational achievement, despite decades of reform. Useful for essays on cultural capital (the knowledge, tastes and qualifications that give middle-class children an advantage, a term developed by Pierre Bourdieu), material deprivation, or the correspondence principle (the Marxist argument that schooling mirrors the hierarchy of the workplace, associated with Bowles and Gintis).

SPECIFICATION LINKS *AQA 7192 3.1.1 (Education). Develops the core theme of social differentiation, power and stratification.*

FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS



Government consults on new legal rights for cohabiting couples

CONSULTATION CLOSED 14 AUGUST 2026

A government consultation on reforming the legal position of cohabiting couples closed on 14 August 2026. It proposes a statutory scheme giving cohabitants of at least three years, or sooner if they have children, the right to make a financial claim on separation, based on need rather than automatic equal sharing.

A second strand addresses intestacy (dying without a valid will), which currently gives cohabitants no automatic inheritance rights even after decades together. The consultation proposes extending inheritance protections closer to those already available to married and civil-partnered couples.

The government said the aim is to close a “longstanding anomaly” facing economically vulnerable partners in unmarried households. It also aims to correct a common misconception, sometimes called the “common law marriage myth”, that long-term cohabitation already carries legal protection similar to marriage.

WHY IT'S A GOOD EXEMPLAR: A useful case study for family diversity and social policy debates. Postmodernist and personal life perspectives read cohabitation as evidence of family practices (a term used by David Morgan for the everyday, negotiated activities that make up family life) becoming more individually negotiated, echoing Anthony Giddens' idea of the pure relationship (a relationship sustained by mutual satisfaction rather than economic or legal necessity). New Right commentators, by contrast, often see policy that formalises cohabitation as weakening marriage's status as the normative family form.

SPECIFICATION LINKS AQA 7192 3.2.2 (*Families and Households*). Develops the core theme of socialisation, culture and identity.

CRIME AND DEVIANCE



Crime and Policing Act 2026 tightens the law on knife sales and possession

UPDATED 14 AUGUST 2026

Provisions of the Crime and Policing Act 2026 covering knives and crossbows were updated on 14 August 2026. Anyone buying a blade or crossbow online will now need to show photographic identification, such as a passport or driving licence, both at purchase and on delivery.

Retailers must report bulk purchases of six or more knives by the same buyer within 30 days. Police gain new “Content Removal Notices”, forcing illegal weapon marketing offline within 48 hours, backed by fines of up to £60,000 for companies. The maximum sentence for unlawful knife possession rises from six months to two years, with a new seven-year maximum where possession is linked to intent to commit violence.

WHY IT'S A GOOD EXEMPLAR: A clear instance of right realist criminal justice policy (a New Right-influenced perspective that explains crime through weak deterrents and opportunity, favouring tougher enforcement over tackling structural causes). Good material for evaluating target-hardening approaches to knife crime against left realist arguments that emphasise relative deprivation and marginalisation as underlying causes.

SPECIFICATION LINKS AQA 7192 3.3.1 (*Crime and Deviance*). Also relevant to *Theory and Methods* (3.3.2) when discussing how legislation constructs what counts as criminal.



Over 1,000 people cross the Channel in a week, reviving the media framing debate

WEEK TO 14 AUGUST 2026

Home Office figures recorded 1,004 people arriving in the UK on small boats across the Channel in the seven days to 14 August 2026, across eleven boats. Numbers were uneven day to day: 423 arrivals came on a single day, while four consecutive days recorded none.

Channel crossings have remained a near-constant feature of UK news coverage and political debate this year, generating extensive rolling commentary each time weekly totals are published.

WHY IT'S A GOOD EXEMPLAR: Well suited to Stanley Cohen's moral panic framework (a concept describing how media coverage can exaggerate and amplify concern about a group, turning them into “folk devils”), since Channel crossings are typically reported as a running numerical total rather than through the lived experience of those making the journey. Where Global Development is studied, the story also supports discussion of global inequality as a driver of migration.

SPECIFICATION LINKS AQA 7192 3.2.7 (*The Media*), where studied. Also relevant to AQA 7192 3.2.6 (*Global Development*), where studied, given the link between global inequality and migration. Check which Paper 2 options this cohort is taking before using this story.



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SOURCES

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Stephens Scown LLP, “A fairer end to relationships: understanding the government's 2026 family law consultation”.

GOV.UK, “Crime and Policing Act 2026: knife crime and crossbows factsheet”, updated 14 August 2026.

GOV.UK, “Small boat arrivals: last 7 days”, data to 14 August 2026.