



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.

THE MEDIA



Amodei, Altman and Musk unite behind calls to slow the pace of AI development

12 SEPTEMBER 2026

Anthropic's chief executive, Dario Amodei, published an essay on 12 September 2026 arguing that artificial intelligence (AI) companies should deliberately slow, or “pace”, the development of their most advanced models. He wrote that pacing “does not mean halting model training or technical progress”, but ensuring firms take enough time to align (make an AI system's behaviour match human intentions and values) and safeguard their models before releasing them. Anthropic said it would bring in third-party evaluators with office access similar to its own internal risk teams.

OpenAI's Sam Altman quickly backed the idea, pledging to bring in independent evaluators with “employee-like access” to scrutinise the company's safety practices, while Elon Musk, whose company xAI competes directly with both firms, simply wrote “Dario is right”. The rare show of unity among rival chief executives followed the high-profile resignation of AI researcher Jacob Coxon, who accused leading AI firms of “gambling with our lives” by racing toward increasingly powerful systems.

WHY IT'S A GOOD EXEMPLAR: Competing tech billionaires suddenly agreeing with one another is a striking, quotable hook for the sociology of the media and of risk. It fits well with Ulrich Beck's idea of the “risk society” (a modern society increasingly organised around managing dangers it has itself created through technology), and it raises a sharp evaluation question: are these firms responding to a genuine danger, or using dramatic warnings about AI to shape media coverage and regulation in their own favour, a form of agenda-setting by powerful, self-interested sources.

SPECIFICATION LINKS AQA 7192 3.2.7 (*The Media, where studied*): the social construction of news, and sources' power to set the media agenda.



New phone rules and a tougher Ofsted toolkit greet pupils as the school year begins

1 SEPTEMBER 2026

Pupils across England returned for the new school year this week under two significant changes to national policy. Statutory guidance (rules schools are legally required to follow) on mobile phones became binding from 1 September 2026, requiring every school to be a phone-free environment by default. The Department for Education's guidance states that anything other than this "should be by exception only", with schools expected to use methods such as lockers or staff collecting phones at the start of the day, while making reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils and those with relevant medical conditions.

At the same time, Ofsted's (the schools inspectorate for England) new inspection toolkit took effect for the 2026/27 academic year. Inspectors will now compare schools' results against similar schools rather than national averages alone, and check that pupils facing barriers to learning receive genuine support to take part and to meet behavioural expectations. Schools must also publish clearer inclusion strategies and stronger safeguarding arrangements, including dedicated allergy policies.

Together, the two changes place schools under closer central regulation just as public debate continues about the effects of smartphones and social media on young people's wellbeing and attention.

WHY IT'S A GOOD EXEMPLAR: This pairing of policies lets you apply several perspectives to a single event. Functionalists would emphasise how phone-free classrooms support secondary socialisation (learning society's norms and values outside the family) and social order, while the New Right's stress on discipline and school accountability fits neatly with the tighter Ofsted framework. The strength of public and media concern about phones and childhood also makes a useful, low-key case of moral panic theory (Stanley Cohen's idea that media and public reaction can exaggerate a threat) in action.

SPECIFICATION LINKS AQA 7192 3.1.1 (Education). The perspectives applied also draw on 3.1.3 (Theory and Methods).



Wales's science scores fall further behind the rest of the UK, PISA data shows

8 SEPTEMBER 2026

New analysis published on 8 September 2026 found that 15-year-olds in Wales performed significantly below their counterparts in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland in science, according to PISA (the Programme for International Student Assessment, an international test comparing pupils' skills across countries). The gap continues a longer pattern of Wales trailing the other UK nations in international rankings.

Education policy has been devolved to the Welsh Government since 1999, and Wales has followed its own path since 2022 through the Curriculum for Wales, which replaced fixed subject content with broader "Areas of Learning and Experience". Commentators disagree about how far curriculum design, funding or wider social factors explain the gap between the UK nations.

WHY IT'S A GOOD EXEMPLAR: Comparing outcomes across the UK's devolved nations is a ready-made way to test explanations of differential educational achievement. It supports evaluation of material deprivation (a lack of money, housing or other physical resources) and cultural capital (Pierre Bourdieu's term for the knowledge, skills and tastes that advantage some pupils) against purely in-school explanations such as curriculum design, and it is a useful reminder to distinguish correlation from causation.

SPECIFICATION LINKS AQA 7192 3.1.1 (Education).

FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS



Peers question ministers on the Domestic Abuse Act, five years on

3 SEPTEMBER 2026

The House of Lords' Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Committee took oral evidence on 3 September 2026 as part of its formal review of the Act, five years after it became law. Witnesses included the Victims Minister, Alex Davies-

Jones, who answered questions on how well the Act's provisions, including the statutory definition of domestic abuse and the office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, are working in practice.

The 2021 Act was the first time domestic abuse (a pattern of controlling, coercive or violent behaviour between people who are personally connected) had its own legal definition in England and Wales, recognising economic and psychological abuse alongside physical violence. This review is examining what difference that has made to victims, agencies and the courts.

WHY IT'S A GOOD EXEMPLAR: A five-year review of landmark family legislation is a strong, non-graphic source for the long-running debate about the darker side of family life. Radical feminists such as Rebecca and Russell Dobash have argued the family can be a site of patriarchal control rather than the harmonious unit functionalists like Talcott Parsons describe, and this story links that theoretical debate directly to a live piece of social policy rather than a hypothetical example.

SPECIFICATION LINKS AQA 7192 3.2.2 (*Families and Households, where studied*). Also relevant to 3.3.1 (*Crime and Deviance*) on victims and victimology.

CRIME AND DEVIANCE



Reform UK reports itself to police as two aides resign over a donations row

4 SEPTEMBER 2026

Reform UK was reported to the police by the Liberal Democrats, Labour and the Green Party on 3 and 4 September 2026, after Channel 4 News and undercover journalists working for Verbatim alleged the party had used money from a US company to fund three opinion polls costing £32,500, a possible breach of UK electoral law's ban on foreign political donations. Two senior aides, James Orr and Dan Jukes, stood down from their roles pending an internal investigation.

Party leader Nigel Farage rejected the claims, telling reporters "this was an exercise in entrapment" and insisting the party had "done nothing wrong, taken no illegal money". Reform chairman Lee Anderson said of the two aides, "they won't be coming back". The Metropolitan Police confirmed it was aware of the allegations and would assess them.

WHY IT'S A GOOD EXEMPLAR: This story is a rare, current illustration of what the sociologist Edwin Sutherland called white-collar crime (rule-breaking by people of high social status carried out through their legitimate work), a category that is often policed and reported very differently from "street" crime. Farage's "entrapment" defence is also a textbook example of Sykes and Matza's techniques of neutralisation (the excuses offenders use to deny responsibility or injury), giving you a genuine quotation to analyse rather than a paraphrase.

SPECIFICATION LINKS AQA 7192 3.3.1 (*Crime and Deviance*): white-collar and corporate crime, and the media construction of crime.

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT



Farage and Bardella sign a Channel migration pact at Reform's Birmingham conference

4 SEPTEMBER 2026

At Reform UK's annual conference in Birmingham on 4 September 2026, Nigel Farage and Jordan Bardella, president of France's National Rally, signed what they called a memorandum of understanding, committing both parties, if elected, to ending irregular Channel crossings "forever". Farage described the agreement as a "genuine new entente cordiale" between the two countries.

Bardella said "the United Kingdom must not be the destination for illegal immigrants entering France. They must be sent back to their countries of origin", and argued that "if France managed its borders better, no one would leave Calais". The pact has no legal force unless both parties form governments able to put it into practice.

WHY IT'S A GOOD EXEMPLAR: Political set-pieces like this are a good, current test of moral panic theory: small boat migrants are cast as an urgent threat, close to Stanley Cohen's idea of the "folk devil" blamed for a wider social anxiety.

The episode also illustrates a genuine tension within Global Development between globalisation (the increasing movement of people, goods and ideas across borders) and a nationalist push to reassert border control, useful for essays evaluating whether globalisation is advancing or provoking a backlash.

SPECIFICATION LINKS AQA 7192 3.2.6 (Global Development, where studied): globalisation and the nation state. Also relevant to 3.3.1 (Crime and Deviance) on media, moral panics and the social construction of deviance.

HEALTH



NHS data links GP and dental care experience to class and housing tenure

10 SEPTEMBER 2026

The Office for National Statistics published new analysis on 10 September 2026 linking survey data on patients' experiences of GP practices, collected between February and April 2026, to the 2021 Census. It found that people with no formal qualifications were 23 per cent more likely than degree holders to report difficulty contacting their GP practice, and 33 per cent more likely to report a poor overall experience of their GP.

People in routine occupations and those renting from a council or housing association also reported worse experiences than people in higher managerial roles or outright homeowners, with social renters facing 26 to 31 per cent higher odds of a poor overall experience. A related strand on NHS dentistry found that only 53.4 per cent of adults without their own NHS dentist even attempted to get an urgent appointment, and just 16.0 per cent succeeded, compared with 90.5 per cent and 86.6 per cent respectively for those who already had a dentist.

WHY IT'S A GOOD EXEMPLAR: These figures update the kind of evidence behind the 1980 Black Report (an influential government study of health inequalities) with fresh, officially linked data broken down by exactly the measures sociologists use to operationalise social class: occupation, qualifications and housing tenure. It is strong material for essays weighing material, cultural and behavioural explanations of the class gradient in health, or for a methods-in-context answer on the strengths and limitations of linking survey data to Census records.

SPECIFICATION LINKS AQA 7192 3.2.3 (Health, where studied). Also relevant to 3.2.8 (Stratification and Differentiation, where studied) on operationalising social class.

IN OTHER NEWS

Five more developments worth a closer look, if you want to widen your reading beyond this week's main stories.

- **Faith school joins the state sector** – A Barnet primary school's move from independent to state funding, and objections to its uniform policy from the National Secular Society, are worth following for Beliefs in Society and debates about religion, gender and pluralism.
- **Cohabiting couples' rights consultation continues** – Ministers are considering a new statutory scheme for unmarried couples who separate, a useful update to family law content for Families and Households.
- **TUC Congress opens in Brighton** – Delegates gather from 13 to 16 September to debate pay, artificial intelligence and workers' rights, a good primary source for Marxist and functionalist views of industrial relations.
- **Ofcom's TikTok investigation continues** – The regulator is examining whether the platform is doing enough to protect children from harmful content, relevant to debates about media effects and regulation.
- **Gambling harm among young people back in focus** – A House of Lords Library briefing revisits calls for tighter controls on gambling advertising aimed at children, useful for Health and Culture and Identity option topics.



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