A-Level Sociology

# Five questions on what is happening now

DATA AS AT 15 NOVEMBER 2026 · NEW QUESTIONS EVERY WEEK

How to use this pack. Time yourself, write a full answer, then check it against the mark scheme. Questions 1 and 2 include our mark scheme. Questions 3 to 5 have mark schemes you can unlock free on the website. Marks and skills follow the Curriculum Circle framework. Exam boards set the marks and wording for real papers, so always check your specification.

## In the news: the education gap for poorer pupils

**19.0**
months: the GCSE English and maths disadvantage gap in England in 2025, joint-highest since the series began in 2013
Source: Education Policy Institute

**3.16 → 3.22**
England's Key Stage 2 disadvantage gap index, 2025 to 2026 (provisional)
Source: Department for Education

**1 in 3**
Key Stage 2 pupils in England counted as disadvantaged in 2026
Source: Schools Week

**−5.5 vs −2.1**
points: fall in top GCSE grades for free-school-meal pupils versus classmates in Wales, 2026
Source: Nation.Cymru

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**QUESTION 1** 4 MARKS · CALCULATE AND EXPLAIN · APPLICATION · ANALYSIS

## Using the data, (a) calculate the change in England's Key Stage 2 disadvantage gap index between 2025 and 2026 (provisional) and state whether the gap widened or narrowed. (b) Explain one limitation of using free school meal eligibility as a measure of disadvantage.

Plan for about 5 minutes.

CC MARK SCHEME · FREE · Application 2 | Analysis 2

- (a) 3.22 − 3.16 = 0.06 (1 mark). A higher index means a bigger gap, so the gap widened (1 mark).
- (b) Up to 2 marks for a developed limitation. For example: free school meal eligibility measures whether a family qualifies, not how poor they are (1). Some families who are poor do not qualify or do not claim, so the measure may miss some disadvantage, and sources define "disadvantaged" differently (1).

Common mistakes: Saying the gap narrowed because the number is "small". Giving a limitation of the data without explaining why it matters for the conclusion.

**QUESTION 2** 6 MARKS · EXPLAIN · KNOWLEDGE · APPLICATION

## Explain two ways in which material deprivation may lead to lower educational achievement.

Plan for about 8 minutes. Link each way to achievement.

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- Each way: identify (1) and explain the link to achievement (2). Maximum 3 marks per way.
- Possible ways: no quiet study space, device or internet access, so homework and revision suffer; poor housing or diet affecting health, attendance and concentration; costs of equipment, uniform, trips and materials limiting participation; having to work or care for others.
- Application: a strong answer can refer to the scale of disadvantage in the data, for example that 1 in 3 Key Stage 2 pupils in England were counted as disadvantaged in 2026.

Common mistakes: Naming a factor without saying how it lowers achievement. Two points that are really the same point (for example, "can't afford books" and "no resources").

**QUESTION 3** 9 MARKS · ANALYSE · KNOWLEDGE · APPLICATION · ANALYSIS

## Analyse how cultural capital may help to explain social class differences in educational achievement.

Plan for about 12 minutes. Name a sociologist and use the data where you can.

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**QUESTION 4** 12 MARKS · EVALUATE · KNOWLEDGE · APPLICATION · EVALUATION

Evaluate the view that in-school factors are more important than home background in explaining class differences in achievement.

Plan for about 15 minutes. Use at least two sociological explanations.

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**QUESTION 5** 20 MARKS · EVALUATE · KNOWLEDGE · APPLICATION · EVALUATION

Using the data and your wider knowledge, evaluate the view that material deprivation is the main cause of differences in educational achievement by social class.

Plan for about 30 minutes. Draw on at least two sociological explanations and use the evidence critically.

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## Keep practising

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