

ANGLO-CHINESE JUNIOR COLLEGE
JC2 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION 2026

GENERAL PAPER

8881/01

Paper 1

August 2026

Additional Materials: Cover Page and Answer Paper

1 hour 30 minutes

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

Write your index number and name on all the work you hand in.
Write in dark blue or black pen on both sides of the paper.
Do not use staples, paper clips, highlighters, glue or correction fluid.

Answer **one** question.

Note that up to **20** marks out of **50** will be awarded for your use of language.

At the end of the examination, fasten all your work securely together.
All questions in this paper carry equal marks.

This document consists of **2** printed pages.



Answer **one** question.

Answers should be between 500 and 800 words in length.

- 1 'The fear of migrants is exaggerated.' Comment.
- 2 In today's world, should there be any restrictions on access to military technology?
- 3 How far do you agree that museums are more important than ever in your society?
- 4 'There are no heroes in politics today, only villains.' Discuss.
- 5 To what extent should the media shape public opinion rather than reflect it?
- 6 In a world that is rapidly changing, how far can companies afford to be loyal to their employees?
- 7 Assess the view that it does not matter why people exercise, as long as they do.
- 8 'Recent trends have made the raising of children an overwhelming task.' How far is this true in your society?

2026 ACJC Preliminary Exam Paper 1 Essay Outlines

Prelim Paper 1 Feedback

Content

Questions 5 and 8 were the most popular questions, while Question 6 was the least popular.

Many students would have benefited from more thorough preparation, particularly in selecting strong and relevant examples to support their arguments. Some responses also contained factual inaccuracies.

Students are reminded that every essay question is deliberately worded in a specific way. Thus, the analysis of keywords is critical in figuring out the debatable issue of the question. Many students failed to appreciate the specific nuances and implications of keywords, and consequently fulfilled the question requirements only partially or, in some cases, not at all.

For the purpose of clarity and effective argumentation, students are reminded that having a clear and well-reasoned topic sentence is essential in preventing unnecessary rambling that results in long paragraphs that lack a clear focus.

Many responses lapsed into a general discussion of the topic and failed to angle their examples in a way that catered to the logic of their argument, as well as the debatable issue of the question. As a result, examples were often descriptively written, and while some of these examples were apt and well-chosen for the question, the narrative approach adopted by students led to these examples losing its effectiveness in driving arguments.

Several students devoted an excessive amount of time and space to crafting a very lengthy hook for their introductions, neglecting other important parts of what the introduction paragraph should raise, such as giving a definition of key terms and a preview of the main points. In other cases, such an approach came at the expense of the students' conclusion, as they wrote a very short, underdeveloped one or omitted it altogether.

Language

Several scripts contained grammatical inaccuracies. In particular, some students struggled to deploy the comma effectively – they either do not use commas when needed or use commas when not needed.

Informal register such as contractions and the use of second-person address (the use of 'you') persists. Students are reminded of the need to maintain a formal register in argumentative writing.

Dangling modifiers, along with subject-verb agreement errors, were common grammatical errors exhibited by many students.

In addition, coherence and cohesion at the inter-paragraph and intra-paragraph levels were problematic. Students are reminded to signpost their paragraphs, as well as to signpost from one sentence to the next within a paragraph.

1. 'The fear of migrants is exaggerated.' Comment.

Question Type: Simple Polarity

Debatable Issue: is exaggerated vs is not exaggerated

Keywords:

'fear of migrants': a feeling of anxiety / distrust based on a perceived threat from foreigners living in one's country. Migrants can include those who move for economic, personal (family) and cultural reasons, and they can be living there on a short or long-term basis

'exaggerated': (a claim of something) being more than what it actually is/ beyond what it 'should be' or what is reasonable

Context:

Modern society: globalisation and the cross-national movement and settlement of people, latent xenophobia and nationalism which can be taken to extremes, economies in need of foreign labour, intercultural exchanges, mis / disinformation and conspiracy theories heightened by social media and the Internet.

Recommended/ possible approaches:

- Students should first establish what people fear about migrants and then evaluate whether that fear (perception) is unfounded or has a valid basis, justifying their opinions.
- Students may also consider the various aspects (cultural, political, economic, etc) in which migrants are perceived as a threat to cover a wider scope of issues.

Pitfalls:

- Students fail to weigh the perception (fear) against the actuality, giving only a one-sided description of either side.
- Students merely describe what the pros and cons of having migrants in one's country are.
- Students fixate on Singapore, even though this is not a 'your society' question.
- Students discuss whether a fear of migrants exists, rather than whether that fear is exaggerated.

Possible Stand 1: The fear of migrants is exaggerated. (The reality is not as bad).

- A. Given that xenophobia usually stems from a lack of familiarity or is stoked by mis/disinformation propagated by ignorant or malicious others in today's climate of cultural anxiety and algorithm-driven misinformation, these fears are usually not well-founded.

E.g. Far-Right movements across Europe, as well as the Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement, led by provocateurs such as Marine Le Pen and Donald Trump have painted migrants from Africa, Asia and South America as criminals, rapists and there to replace the local majority race population. In truth, data from the American Immigration Council confirms that immigrants in the United States—both documented and undocumented—have significantly lower incarceration and violent crime arrest rates than native-born U.S. citizens. Comprehensive studies from Texas show that undocumented immigrants have violent crime arrest rates roughly half that of native-born citizens (e.g., 96 per 100,000 vs. 213 per 100,000 in 2025).

- B. Not everyone, and in fact, a large proportion of society, have benefited from globalisation; as such, those who are disenfranchised and face economic insecurity often seek a scapegoat to pin their troubles on. Migrants are a convenient and politically/ socially vulnerable group who become victimised by locals, even though they are not the true source of their woes.

E.g. CECA (the India-Singapore Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement) is a bilateral free trade pact signed in 2005 to reduce trade tariffs, eliminate double taxation, and boost commercial partnerships between the two nations. There is a common misconception amongst Singaporeans that CECA gives Indian nationals unfettered, 'free pass' access to Singapore's job market despite the government repeatedly clarifying that foreign nationals must still pass the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) work pass requirements, which include stringent baseline salary and qualification checks.

- C. There are many processes that screen potential migrants and monitor their behaviour and activities, restricting the degree of harm they can cause. As it is, whenever a crime is committed by migrants, the perception that they pose a collective threat is blown out of proportion because of local hypersensitivity.

E.g. In Belfast, United Kingdom, migrants are primarily monitored through state-level immigration enforcement, housing contracts, and joint-agency border operations. Several specific monitoring and regulatory mechanisms include Immigration Enforcement and Police Operations which involve the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and UK Immigration Compliance and Enforcement (ICE) teams tracking travel routes like ports and ferries. Despite the existence of such strict controls, violent anti-immigration riots still broke out.

- D. The fear that migrants drain resources and burden the economy is exaggerated, because in reality, migrants often fill critical labour shortages that host economies cannot fill on their own, driving growth that ultimately benefits everyone, including the locals who feared them.

E.g. Japan, a country long resistant to immigration due to concerns over cultural dilution, has been forced to relax its strict immigration policies as a rapidly ageing population leaves industries like construction, agriculture and eldercare chronically understaffed. Foreign workers filling these roles have kept essential services running and industries afloat, allowing the economy to continue functioning despite a shrinking domestic workforce. Far from being a drain, migrants have become indispensable to sustaining the very economy that once feared their presence.

Possible Stand 2: The fear of migrants is not exaggerated- it is justified or it is worse than perceived.

- A. In today's climate of rapid demographic change and heightened anxiety over national identity, the fear of migrants is not always exaggerated, because large-scale migration can create genuine integration pressures when newcomers struggle to acquire the dominant language or adapt quickly to shared civic and workplace norms.

E.g. After Germany took in a large wave of asylum seekers from 2015 onwards, it introduced mandatory courses requiring migrants to reach a working level of German. Yet many participants, especially those repeating the course after failing once, still struggle to reach that standard. This persistent language gap has led to the formation of ethnic enclaves and resulted in social tension as it generated fears of them not integrating into society. This has led to rising support for the right-wing AfD party, whose platform centres on integration anxieties — showing that language acquisition can be a genuine structural hurdle, not merely a manufactured fear.

- B. The fear of migrants is justified because rapid, unchecked demographic inflows can severely overwhelm infrastructure in major recipient nations and high-density urban hubs. When immigration rates outpace municipal planning, public service in areas such as housing and healthcare capacity, will face severe operational bottlenecks. This proves that public anxiety over resource depletion stems from real, measurable capacity constraints rather than mere xenophobia.

E.g. Canada serves as a prominent modern example of a country taking in more immigrants than it can handle. Driven by aggressive immigration targets, with permanent resident (PR) admissions at 380,000 per year, the nation experienced a massive demographic expansion, with population increases severely outpacing infrastructure and housing supply. The rapid influx triggered severe downstream crises, such as a housing crisis: the housing stock has not kept pace with the population growth, resulting in historically low vacancy rates and deeply unaffordable rental and real estate markets across major metropolitan areas.

- C. When migrant workers can be hired more cheaply than local workers of comparable skill, employers have a financial incentive to favour migrant labour over local labour, even when both groups are equally qualified — meaning some local jobseekers lose out not due to a lack of merit, but due to cost.

E.g. In the United States, many local tech workers feel IT jobs have been unfairly taken by foreign workers. This happened through the H-1B visa program which provides visas to foreign workers in specialised fields. Many large companies use this to hire IT workers from other countries, resulting in many local IT professionals lost their jobs and were forced to train their foreign replacements to get severance pay. This happened because foreign workers are often willing to accept lower wages. By US law, companies are supposed to prove that hiring a foreign worker will not hurt local workers, but critics say this rule is frequently bypassed.

Examiners' comments:

Many students struggled in understanding the full meaning of 'exaggerated', with weaker responses lapsing into listing why migrants are feared, or why migrants should or should not be feared. Weaker responses also illogically rejected the starting premise given by the question and argued that there is no fear of migrants to begin with. Students are reminded that 'exaggerated' already assumes that there is fear, and it is illogical for one to swing to an extreme to argue otherwise – the contention is just whether the fear is overblown.

2. In today's world, should there be any restrictions on access to military technology?

Question Type: Absolute

Debatable Issue: should not have any vs should have some

Keywords:

'should there be any restriction on': ought to impose some limitations, bans by some authority / rule based on morals and other consequences

'access: ability to procure, possess

military technology': the use of armaments, equipment and systems related to war / combat

Context:

Today's world: political alliances and international treaties are no longer as stable due to rising national self-interest and diminishing trust, markets and the global economy fluctuate with more uncertainty, reduced respect for the sovereignty of nations and international borders leading to a growing threat of territorial incursions, internal political polarisation and rising right-wing extremism, reversal of globalisation, increased use of asymmetrical / unconventional warfare such as cyberattacks, fake news and disinformation spreading through social media, amplified by algorithms, declining birth rates leading to potential manpower shortages.

Recommended/ possible approaches:

- Students should address the keyword 'any' by exploring the degree to which restrictions should be in place, such as stating there should still be some conditions or limitations, rather than none, or a full ban.
- Students may discuss the legitimacy of various authorities or overseeing parties who might be the ones responsible for enforcing or rescinding said restrictions, or otherwise giving permission / approval.
- Students may also consider what various political, economic, environmental, etc, consequences there may be, when such technologies are allowed to be acquired by various categories of people.

Pitfalls:

- Students discuss technology so broadly that there is no discernible link to the military.
- Students fail to raise possible restrictions that could be imposed — such as total or partial bans, funding limitations, or inspector oversight — and instead merely discuss the pros and cons of military technology.

Possible stand 1: In today's world, there should be no restrictions on access to military technology.

- A. Existing restrictions on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) to decrease the risk of nuclear conflict have often relied on the great powers refraining from threatening their weaker neighbours. However, with the great powers now showing a greater willingness to coerce or even invade these weaker or smaller countries, it might be necessary for weaker countries to acquire WMDs to defend themselves against aggressors or at least deter them.

E.g. In recent times, the USA has signalled its rising reluctance to honour its commitment to its mutual defence pact with NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) countries, leading Japan and South Korea to wonder if America's commitment to protect them is waning too. As such, some of their politicians and lawmakers are contemplating developing or acquiring nuclear weapons if they are left on their own to ward off the rising aggression from rivals North Korea and China. In 2023, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol suggested that South Korea might consider acquiring nuclear weapons 'if North Korean threats [became] more serious'. Although he later walked back these comments, the sentiment reveals they are entertaining such future actions.

- B. Restrictions on military technology increasingly fail where the underlying hardware is dual-use — serving legitimate civilian purposes as well as combat ones — because no restriction can distinguish a weapon from an ordinary commercial product built the same way, meaning any attempt to restrict this entire category is either unenforceable or ends up punishing legitimate civilian use instead.

E.g. DJI, the Chinese company that makes the world's most widely used commercial drones, sells small quadcopters intended for civilian photography and agriculture — the same kind used by hobbyists and farmers worldwide. In the Russia-Ukraine war, both sides have bought these off-the-shelf DJI drones and modified them into reconnaissance and strike weapons, often with minimal alteration. A restriction aimed at "military drone technology" cannot meaningfully separate this from the millions of identical drones sold for entirely peaceful purposes — proving that for an entire, growing category of modern weaponry, restriction is no longer a coherent policy option at all.

C. Restrictions on selling military technology to specific "rogue" states are enforced selectively — applied against some countries while conveniently ignored for politically favoured ones — revealing that the criterion for restriction is not a country's actual danger, but its alignment with whichever great power is imposing the ban. A restriction whose enforcement depends entirely on politics rather than principle cannot claim the moral authority to bind every country equally, and should not be treated as a legitimate basis for restricting access at all.

E.g. The UN Security Council's Resolution 1929 formally bans the sale of major conventional weapons to Iran — yet permanent Council members with veto power, whose own arms exports to allied states with comparable human rights records face no equivalent restriction, were the ones who imposed it. The ban's survival depends less on Iran's conduct than on whether the states with veto power currently wish to isolate it. Since the same standard is never applied consistently to politically favoured states, the restriction functions as a tool of great-power politics rather than a principled judgment about who should have access to military technology — undermining any single authority's claim to decide who is restricted at all.

Possible stand 2: In today's world, there should be some restrictions on access to military technology.

A. Today, in terms of political alliances, there is the risk of countries switching sides or betraying each other at any time, as national interests shift or when a new government successor takes over and drastically changes national policies. As such, countries that invent the most advanced military technology have to exercise great prudence in whom they sell it to, lest its designs are leaked to enemy forces.

E.g. In 2026, Norway reversed its sale of weapons to Malaysia because of significantly tightened export control regulations restricting the sale of sensitive, Norwegian-developed defence technology. Norway blocked the export of the Naval Strike Missile (NSM) systems that Malaysia had ordered in 2018 for its fleet of new combat ships. Officially, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that recent, major shifts in the global and European security landscape had prompted the government to strengthen its defence technology export restrictions. However, the timing of the cancellation fuelled speculation because it coincided with the launch of the US-Israel war on Iran. Given that Kuala Lumpur has maintained cordial relations with Tehran and has been outspoken in its criticism of Israel's regional policies, some analysts opine that this has contributed to the Norway's decision.

B. Given that global norms of diplomacy and political engagement are waning, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction exponentially increases the risk of untold suffering or mutually assured destruction, therefore there needs to be strict enforcement to restrict the procurement of chemical, biological and weapons, especially against rogue / failed states.

E.g. North Korea developed nuclear weaponry and the Hwasong (Mars) series and Pukguksong (Polar Star) series of cruise missiles, enabling North Korea to threaten South Korea and Japan. Despite signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1985, Pyongyang delayed inspections and ultimately withdrew from the treaty in 2003 to conduct its first underground nuclear test in 2006. This unfortunate scenario highlights how important restrictions and its enforcement are for international political stability and informs America's stance and approach to containing Iranian ambitions to get The Bomb.

C. Even as political polarisation and instability increase, some countries have home grown rebel groups that want to overthrow what they believe is an illegitimate or oppressive government. Private individuals and groups should not be allowed to acquire military grade weapons from internal or external suppliers in order to prevent mass shootings and the outbreak of civil war.

E.g. In America, even with liberal gun rights and laws based on their Constitution's Second Amendment, there is increasing concern with extremist individuals or militias, such as The Oath Keepers which was founded in 2009 who pledge to defend the U.S. Constitution against all enemies and focuses heavily on gun rights and resisting perceived government overreach. Ahead of the January 6 Capitol Attack, members of the Oath Keepers spent thousands of dollars on firearms, ammunition, and other tactical gear. They also established heavily armed 'Quick Reaction Force' (QRF) teams stashed in nearby Virginia hotels with their arsenals including AR-platform rifles, Israeli-made semiautomatic shotguns, and night-vision devices, all of which are considered military-grade equipment.

Examiners' comments:

- *This question proved challenging for many students. Students clearly struggled in offering meaningful content for this question, where 'restricting access' was often left vague as to what such restrictions would involve or how to enforce them, often defaulting to the unrealistic solution of outright bans without considering their practicality. Many responses also limited the discussion to overly binary options of complete bans vs no restrictions at all.*
- *Some students did not specify the types of technology they discussed, giving examples without highlighting its military application, often broadly conflating it simply with access to weapons regardless of technology, most commonly in terms of discussing gun control.*
- *Some better scripts were able to offer more conditional nuance in noting that restricting access should depend on the countries involved such as in terms of their track record or the likelihood of conflict.*

3. How far do you agree that museums are more important than ever in your society?

Question Type: Time-based

Debatable Issue: more important than ever in my society vs not more important than ever (their importance has remained the same or diminished)

Keywords:

'museums': institutions that collect, preserve and exhibit cultural, historical, artistic or scientific artefacts; includes history museums, art museums and virtual museums

'more important than ever': the value or relevance of museums today exceeds their value in the past

Context:

'your society': (Singapore context) Land-scarce country with competing priorities, rise of digital media and virtual experiences as alternatives to physical museum visits, increasing emphasis on heritage preservation amid rapid urban redevelopment, growing use of museums for education, tourism and national identity-building, competition for attention from other forms of leisure and entertainment

Recommended/ possible approaches:

- Students should discuss the extent to which museums have become more important in Singapore today compared with the past, evaluating the changing significance of their various roles.
- Students should consider the different functions museums serve—such as preserving heritage, strengthening national identity, educating the public, supporting tourism, promoting social cohesion and contributing to the economy—and assess whether these functions have become more or less significant in Singapore's changing context.
- Students may compare how the role of museums has evolved over time, considering broader developments such as rapid urban redevelopment, increasing multiculturalism, digitalisation, changing educational approaches, and the growing emphasis on preserving Singapore's heritage and identity.
- Students may also consider whether alternative institutions or technological developments (such as schools, digital archives, virtual museums, online learning platforms or other cultural spaces) have enhanced, complemented or reduced the importance of physical museums today.

Pitfalls:

- Students merely describe the functions or activities of museums without evaluating whether these have become more or less significant over time.
- Students discuss museums in isolation without considering the changing context or characteristics of their society or explaining how these have influenced the importance of museums.

Possible stand 1: Museums are more important than ever in my society (Singapore).

- A. As urban redevelopment has accelerated in land-scarce Singapore, heritage has become increasingly non-recoverable once lost, making museums more important than ever as custodians of irreplaceable national memory.

E.g. With physical sites of historical and cultural significance demolished to make way for development and the redevelopment of areas such as the former Bukit Brown Cemetery and various kampongs, institutions like the National Museum of Singapore and the Asian Civilisations Museum have taken on greater importance in documenting and preserving artefacts and oral histories that would otherwise be permanently lost.

E.g. The Indian Heritage Centre and Malay Heritage Centre have become increasingly important as physical ethnic enclaves (e.g. parts of Little India and Kampong Glam) undergo gentrification and commercialisation, diluting their organic heritage character. These places serve as stabilising anchors of authenticity for a multi-ethnic young nation like Singapore.

- B. As Singapore becomes increasingly globalised and demographically fluid, museums and heritage institutions are more vital than ever to anchor national identity—both by bridging the growing gap in shared nation-building memories and by safeguarding unique local heritage against cultural dilution.

E.g. The National Museum of Singapore's permanent galleries on the Singapore Story are frequently used as part of Singapore Citizenship Journey (SCJ), the citizenship and naturalisation programme, to help new citizens internalise the nation's history and values. By grounding new arrivals in the nation's core historical milestones and values, museums serve as indispensable tools to create shared reference points within an increasingly fluid population.

E.g. At National Day Rally 2026, Prime Minister Lawrence Wong announced the establishment of the Singapore Chinese Heritage Gallery to counter the dilution of Singapore's distinct localized Chinese identity. As historical dialect-group nuances risk getting flattened into a generic or English-dominant monoculture, this gallery institutionalises how local Chinese culture evolved through multicultural co-existence, signalling to broader society that these distinct heritage roots remain essential national assets.

- C. As Singapore's economy matures, national competitiveness increasingly depends not only on economic efficiency but also on cultural capital and global liveability. Museums have therefore become more important than ever as strategic assets that showcase Singapore's cultural richness and draw tourists eager to engage with the nation's heritage and identity.

E.g. The National Gallery Singapore, housed in restored Supreme Court and City Hall buildings, was a deliberate state strategy to position Singapore as a regional art hub, attracting significant tourist footfall and international attention. ArtScience Museum at Marina Bay Sands has become one of Singapore's most globally recognisable attraction, contributing to Singapore's identity as a 'must-visit' destination and moving beyond the image of a purely efficiency-driven city-state and is an important way for Singapore to shed its reputation of being a 'cultural desert'.

**Possible Stand 2: Museums are not more important than ever in my society.
(The importance has remained unchanged/ The importance of museums has diminished)**

- A. Museums continue to be perceived as niche institutions in our pragmatic society, where they are seen neither as a major national priority nor central to the everyday lives of Singaporeans. Singapore continues to prioritise national survival and economic resilience above cultural institutions, just as it has throughout its history.

E.g. Even in a knowledge economy, national urgency is directed toward future-oriented survival needs (e.g. Smart Nation, digital economy, ageing population pressures), rather than retrospective cultural expansion. Compared to large-scale, recurring investments in public housing upgrades (HDB renewal schemes), defence capability, or digital infrastructure, heritage funding via the National Heritage Board remains comparatively modest and often justified in terms of tourism value or soft power branding rather than existential national necessity.

E.g. Museums continue to be viewed as a luxury or occasional leisure expense by the average citizen. While visitorship numbers spike during special events, many locals continue to view museums as one-off novelty attractions rather than cultivating a deep, lifelong museum-going culture. If the draw is purely the novelty or the air-conditioning on a hot afternoon, the actual *cultural importance* of the museum is arguably overstated.

- B. In Singapore, where younger generations increasingly consume information and culture through digital and social media, museums are no longer relevant as the means through which they engage with history and culture, as digital platforms now perform many of these functions more immediately, interactively and at a much greater scale.

E.g. Digital creators such as *Our Grandfather Story* document the lives of elderly Singaporeans (such as Samsui women, traditional craftsmen, or old-school gangsters), disappearing trades and forgotten landmarks through short, emotionally engaging videos that attract large Gen Z and Millennial audiences. Similarly, nostalgia-focused TikTok and Instagram accounts such as *@remembersg* use archival photographs, historical footage and visual effects to show how neighbourhoods like Queenstown and Tiong Bahru looked decades ago. By embedding history within everyday social media consumption, these platforms often reach youths more effectively than visits to the museum.

E.g. Hidden Singapore transforms heritage districts such as Chinatown and Katong into real-world puzzle adventures where participants learn local history through teamwork and problem-solving. Likewise, locally developed video games such as Ghostlore introduce players to Southeast Asian folklore and cultural traditions through familiar gaming mechanics. These platforms engage younger audiences by embedding cultural learning within entertainment and social interaction, reducing the relative importance of museums as sites of cultural engagement.

- C. Museums have not become more important because they no longer possess exclusive authority over how Singapore's history is interpreted. As Singaporean society becomes more historically conscious and pluralistic, citizens increasingly engage with community-led initiatives and multiple interpretations of the past rather than relying solely on official museum narratives.

E.g. Faced with the proposed redevelopment of the Bukit Brown Cemetery, historians, heritage activists and community volunteers documented graves, collected oral histories, organised public walks and created digital archives that brought previously overlooked stories of early migrants and local communities into public consciousness. Rather than looking primarily to museums to understand Singapore's past, many Singaporeans engaged directly with these grassroots initiatives, demonstrating that historical authority has become increasingly shared across society rather than concentrated within museums alone.

Examiners' comments:

Responses to this question showed some understanding, although many would have benefited from greater depth and more developed analysis. Even though most students were able to fulfil question requirements, their content knowledge on museums in Singapore appears to be significantly limited. Weaker responses merely discussed the reasons as to why museums are important or not important in Singapore, failing to capture the time and comparative factor as demanded by 'more important than ever'.

4. 'There are no heroes in politics today, only villains.' Discuss.

Question Type: Absolute

Debatable Issue: there are no heroes, only villains vs there are both heroes and villains

Keywords:

'heroes': persons of great capabilities, renown and achievements who possess high moral standards and principles

'politics': the arena in which issues of national and governmental import are played out

'villains': persons of evil or selfish character who set out to hurt others for their own gain or agenda

Context:

'modern society today': the slowing down or reversing trend of globalisation, increasing nationalism and political polarisation / extremism, widening social gaps in terms of class, race, gender, etc, weaponisation of social media via fake news, etc, disillusionment and cynicism amongst people

Recommended/ possible approaches:

- Students should address the absolute keywords 'no' and 'only'.
- Students may agree with the absolute claim, as long as they provide strong justification without sounding biased or one sided
- Students may raise some past political heroes and villains, as well as how the political realm has evolved, and consider whether contemporary politics has actually produced fewer heroes and more villains, or whether increased scrutiny has simply made political wrongdoing and political disagreement more visible.

Pitfalls:

- Students fail to give current day examples, only discussing very historical political figures.
- Students do not match the intensity implied within the keywords, merely stating how politicians are just 'good' or 'bad'.

Possible Stand 1: There are no heroes in politics today, only villains.

- A. Given that government is inextricably intertwined with large, capitalistic firms today, the political arena is filled either with opportunists who run for office for personal gain, or naive, noble-minded changemakers who will inevitably be seduced or pressured by to do the bidding of these powerful corporations.

E.g. Lawmakers across the political spectrum in the United States have faced criticism for scaling back their anti-monopoly or regulatory platforms due to intense lobbying from tech giants like Amazon, Apple, Google, and Meta. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer blocked bipartisan antitrust bills targeting tech conglomerates from reaching a floor vote following intense corporate lobbying. By quietly stalling accountability measures, an elected leader protected corporate monopolies at the expense of consumer protection. This shows how even leaders who once presented themselves as champions of the public can end up functioning as villains, not through open corruption, but by quietly protecting the powerful at the expense of those they were elected to serve.

- B. In today's political climate, many leaders govern less for the national interest than for their own status, wealth or survival in power — behaving as villains who exploit their position for personal gain rather than public good.

E.g. In the UK, former Prime Minister Boris Johnson resigned in disgrace after 'Partygate', where it emerged that he and his staff held gatherings in Downing Street while the public was legally barred from seeing dying relatives under his own lockdown rules — a case of a leader protecting his own social life while enforcing sacrifice on others. Around the same period, government contracts for pandemic supplies were found to have been steered toward companies with personal or political connections to ministers, rather than the most qualified bidders. Opposition figure Nigel Farage has faced similar accusations, allegedly failing to declare financial gifts from wealthy allies ahead of the 2024 election. These cases highlight politicians prioritising personal status and privilege over public duty.

- C. In authoritarian countries where media narratives are controlled, propaganda will depict oppressive dictators in a favourable light, but once and where the truth can be exposed, these apparent heroes will be scorned and treated as the villains they truly are.

E.g. North Korean propaganda portrays Kim Jong Un as a peerless patriot, a benevolent father figure, and a military mastermind who protects the nation from foreign aggressors and guides the country toward modernity. State media and educational curriculums utilise several core narratives to construct this heroic image. Their media extols Kim as an extraordinary genius: state propaganda and school curricula depict Kim as a prodigy from early childhood, claiming he possesses exceptional military and leadership abilities, such as learning to drive at the age of three. Kim is also depicted as the all-compassionate father. Outside of the propaganda bubble in North Korea, the testimony of North Korean defectors has attested to the cruelty and suffering the Kim regime has perpetuated.

- D. Even the most accomplished and respected politicians today have their secret flaws and sins, some of which can be fatal for their reputation once revealed. With the dogged inquisitiveness of the media today, all too often they will be found out and end up being outed as villains as their final legacy, their contributions forgotten by a vindictive public who expect their leaders to be perfect.

E.g. Several prominent world leaders and politicians were named in the Panama Papers leak published by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). They include: The former Prime Minister of Pakistan who faced intense pressure and was eventually disqualified from office after his family's offshore shell companies were exposed; Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson, the former Prime Minister of Iceland resigned after the leak revealed he and his wife co-owned an undisclosed offshore company holding millions in bonds; and Ilham Aliyev, the President of Azerbaijan who was linked to an empire of secret offshore companies used to hold luxury assets and properties.

Possible Stand 2: There are also heroes and not only villains in politics today.

- A. The rise and presence of villains or heroes in politics today often depends on the cultures and prevalent political systems within a given society. Strong, principled governments with third party oversight will weed out self-serving politicians and encourage the proliferation of ethical leaders, while weak governments will allow for the rise in corrupt politicians through cronyism and nepotism.

E.g. Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew is widely credited with building one of the cleanest civil services in the world, partly by paying public servants very high salaries so they would not be tempted by graft. The same leader, in the same era, is also widely criticised for cracking down hard on press freedom and political opposition. Both are well documented. Neither cancels the other out. On the other hand, strongman leaders such as Suharto of Indonesia, where corruption was endemic, surrounded themselves with other ministers loyal only to him, who then abused their positions because their positions were secure.

- B. As political polarisation hardens into open authoritarianism in some states, in the face of oppression and injustice, the actions of political villains will often create the conditions and impetus for heroes to rise up and resist the regime.

E.g. Phyo Zeya Thaw was a Burmese musician turned pro-democracy lawmaker who joined resistance efforts after Myanmar's 2021 coup and was executed by the junta in 2022. The junta that ordered his death, led by Min Aung Hlaing, seized power illegally and has ruled through repression ever since. Thaw's sacrifice and the junta's brutality sit on opposite sides of the same political struggle.

- C. There are also heroes in politics today because rising political polarisation and the accompanying violence have made public political life genuinely dangerous, such that only those with real conviction to do what is best for the nation are still willing to serve despite the risks to their safety.

E.g. The murders of UK MPs Jo Cox and David Amess, along with former Japanese PM Shinzo Abe, highlight that modern political life carries deadly personal danger— exemplifying that many who enter public service are driven by true conviction over self-interest. A politician motivated purely by self-interest has little reason to accept this level of personal risk when safer, better-paid careers are available; the fact that people still stand for office under these conditions suggests they are driven by something sturdier than personal ambition.

Examiners' comments:

Keyword analysis is a major factor in determining the success of the responses for this question. Even if students managed to offer apt examples, many struggled to meaningfully define heroism and villainy in terms more meaningful than simply 'good' and 'bad'. In addition, weaker responses neglected the absolute in the question, resulting in an incomplete fulfilment of question requirements.

5. To what extent should the media shape public opinion rather than reflect it?

Question Type: Comparison

Debatable Issue: should shape public opinion rather than reflect it vs should reflect public opinion rather than shape it

Keywords:

'the media': traditional media (newspapers, television, radio) and new media (social media platforms, online news outlets, influencers)

'shape': actively influence, guide or change through the framing, selection or interpretation of information

'reflect': represent or report by presenting information that mirrors what society thinks or values

'public opinion': public attitudes, beliefs, behaviours or concerns

Context:

Modern world: increasingly fragmented media landscape; algorithm-driven platforms that personalise information; declining trust in traditional media; growing concerns over misinformation, political polarisation and media bias; greater public participation in news creation through social media; increasing expectations for the media to play a role in addressing major social, political and environmental issues.

Recommended/ possible approaches:

- Students should discuss the extent to which the media should prioritise shaping public opinion or reflecting it and evaluate the implications of each role for society. Students should differentiate between 'shape' and 'reflect'.
- Students may consider the different roles and responsibilities expected of the media, such as informing the public, holding those in power accountable, representing diverse viewpoints, promoting social cohesion and facilitating democratic participation in evaluating whether it should shape public opinion or reflect it.
- Students may compare how the appropriate role of the media varies across different political systems, media environments or types of media, and how these contexts influence whether shaping or reflecting public opinion should be prioritised.
- Students may also consider how the changing media landscape, including social media, algorithms, citizen journalism and declining trust in traditional media, has affected the relationship between the media and public opinion.

Pitfalls:

- Students merely discuss the influence or importance of the media without addressing whether it should primarily shape or reflect public opinion.
- Students discuss only one role of the media without comparing it against the alternative role required by the question.
- Students merely discuss how the media reports on facts and events, rather than people's opinions.

Possible Stand 1: The media should shape public opinion rather than reflect it.

- A. The media should shape rather than merely reflect public opinion when important issues remain invisible because victims are marginalised, evidence is hidden or public awareness is low. In such situations, merely mirroring existing opinion perpetuates ignorance rather than informing society.

E.g. Investigative journalism, such as the New York Times and New Yorker's reporting on the Harvey Weinstein allegations in 2017, actively shaped public opinion and catalysed the global #MeToo movement, an issue that had long been normalised. Had these outlets simply reflected prevailing attitudes at the time, the culture of silence surrounding sexual misconduct in Hollywood would likely have persisted unchallenged; instead, deliberate, sustained reporting forced a reckoning that public sentiment alone had not yet demanded.

E.g. Climate journalism by outlets such as The Guardian, which made an editorial decision to use stronger language like 'climate emergency' instead of 'climate change', has played a role in shaping greater public urgency around environmental issues rather than merely reflecting pre-existing (often complacent) attitudes.

- B. The media should shape rather than reflect opinion when prevailing beliefs are distorted by misinformation, since reflection risks legitimising falsehoods while shaping can restore an informed basis for public decision-making.

E.g. During the COVID-19 pandemic, public health authorities and credible media outlets actively worked to shape public opinion against vaccine misinformation, recognising that merely 'reflecting' widespread public scepticism (often fuelled by social media misinformation) would have been harmful to public health outcomes.

E.g. Public-health campaigns demonstrate that reflecting existing beliefs is not always socially beneficial, particularly when those beliefs contribute to harmful behaviour. In Australia, graphic anti-smoking advertisements sought to transform public attitudes towards smoking rather than reinforce its social acceptability. Likewise, in India, media campaigns countered misconceptions about vaccination (it causes infertility) and diseases (it can be prevented through traditional remedies) recognising that merely reflecting such beliefs would perpetuate poor health outcomes.

- C. Rather than merely reflecting inaccurate and ill-informed public views, the media should shape opinion by introducing expertise, context and analysis, particularly on issues whose complexity exceeds ordinary public knowledge. Reflection captures what citizens think; shaping helps citizens think better.

E.g. Explanatory science journalism, such as the New York Times' 'The Daily' podcast and its coverage of climate science, breaks down complex topics like carbon budgets and IPCC reports into accessible narratives, enabling readers to grasp the mechanisms behind climate change rather than simply reacting to alarming headlines.

E.g. During debates over AI regulation, outlets like The Economist and MIT Technology Review have run in-depth explainers on how large language models work and what risks they actually pose, helping the public move beyond either blind techno-optimism or uninformed fear towards a more technically grounded opinion on regulation.

Possible Stand 2: The media should reflect public opinion rather than shape it.

- A. Reflecting public sentiment safeguards democratic integrity by ensuring the public's genuine voice drives policy, whereas shaping opinion allows media moguls and elites to manipulate public discourse for private interests. When media outlets manufacture sentiment instead of reflecting it, they subvert democracy by replacing authentic public priorities with elite agendas.

E.g. Outlets like Rupert Murdoch's News Corp actively shaped public opinion through biased framing, substituting owner preferences for balanced debate. Similarly, in the lead-up to the Brexit referendum in the UK, tabloid newspapers were criticised by media analysts for actively shaping public opinion through one-sided framing of the EU, rather than providing balanced information that would allow the public to form their own views. *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* advocated for Brexit while *The Daily Mirror* advocated for 'Remain'. Contrasted with reflective reporting that empowers citizens with objective facts, opinion-shaping turns the media into a tool for elite manipulation rather than democratic accountability.

- B. The media should reflect rather than shape opinion because governments require accurate feedback to address genuine societal needs and maintain democratic accountability. When media outlets manipulate public opinion instead of reflecting it, they mislead decision-makers, leading to flawed policies and eroded trust.

E.g. Publishing objective public polling, such as Gallup or Pew Research data on voter priorities, provides policymakers with an unvarnished view of citizen concerns regarding healthcare or the economy. By accurately reflecting public sentiment, the media ensures governments remain accountable to actual voter needs rather than media-driven agendas.

E.g. Local Singaporean media outlets such *The Straits Times* and *Channel NewsAsia* report ground-up public reactions and publish forum letters on issues like housing affordability and cost of living. By channelling raw feedback directly to decision-makers, media reflection enables targeted policy refinements, showing how mirroring public opinion fosters responsive governance.

- C. The media should prioritise reflecting diverse viewpoints because mirroring diverse viewpoints sustains a shared informational space, whereas attempting to shape opinion drives audiences into hostile partisan camps. While shaping opinion reinforces ideological echo chambers, reflecting the full spectrum of public sentiment fosters mutual understanding across society.

E.g. While US partisan outlets like Fox News and MSNBC actively shape opinion and deepen political polarization, public broadcasters like Singapore's Channel NewsAsia focus on reflecting broad ground-up citizen feedback. This contrast demonstrates that reflecting public views preserves social cohesion, whereas shaping sentiment actively fractures society.

- D. The media should prioritise reflecting public opinion because institutional credibility relies on neutral reporting rather than persuasive activism. When media outlets attempt to shape public views, they erode public trust by appearing biased; conversely, a reflective approach centred on verification and factual reporting, is more likely to maintain credibility across ideological divides.

E.g. Initiatives like Reuters' Fact Check service maintain high credibility by strictly assessing the factual veracity of political debates without adding persuasive commentary. This highlights that news organizations preserve public trust when they act as neutral mirrors of truth rather than partisan actors attempting to shape public sentiments.

Examiners' comments:

Despite being one of the most popular questions, this question was not done well. Many students struggled to differentiate between shaping and reflecting public opinion, and attempts at comparison often result in confusing and contradictory logic – where attempts at showing “shaping public opinion” were actually “reflecting public opinion” and vice versa. In addition, content knowledge was a problem as many students relied too heavily on social media examples without addressing the media more broadly or considering its core functions. Weaker responses also misread ‘public opinion’ to mean factual information, resulting in the response to go off- topic.

6. In a world that is rapidly changing, how far can companies afford to be loyal to their employees?

Question Type: Polarity with specific context

Debatable Issue: can afford to vs cannot afford to

Keywords:

'rapidly changing world': broad, accelerating shifts across technological (automation, AI), economic (globalisation, market volatility, recessions), and social (changing workforce expectations, demographic shifts) dimensions, not limited to technology alone, with an emphasis on rapidly transforming industries, trade disruptions, agility in moving between markets

'companies': businesses across various sectors, sizes and countries, such as large multinationals, small and medium enterprises,

'afford':

'loyal to their employees': prioritising job security, long-term employment, retraining and employee welfare, even when this may conflict with cost-efficiency, competitiveness or adaptability

Context:

'Modern world: rapid automation and AI adoption alongside economic volatility (e.g. inflation, interest rate shifts, supply chain disruption), shifting workforce expectations (e.g. demand for flexibility, purpose-driven work), short-term contracts, growing public and governmental pressure on companies to act responsibly towards workers

Recommended/ possible approaches:

- Students should consider the pressures companies face due to fast pace of change (e.g. need to automate to remain competitive, skills mismatches, cost pressures) and how these pressures affect a company's ability to retain and support employees
- Students should consider what 'loyalty' entails in practice (e.g. retraining programmes, job security guarantees, severance support, flexible work arrangements) and assess the costs and benefits of providing these amid broader disruption
- Students may consider the context of 'a world that is rapidly changing' in its different aspects, such as economic, social or geopolitical and not just technological.
- Students may consider differences across company size, sector and country (e.g. large multinationals vs SMEs, developed vs developing economies) since capacity to afford loyalty amid change is not uniform

Pitfalls:

- Students discuss whether companies should be loyal to employees without addressing whether they can afford to be loyal given the practical constraints imposed by the fast pace of change.
- Students limit their discussion of 'a world that is rapidly changing' to just technological change alone
- Students provide a one-size-fits-all response without considering how the pace of technological change or the ability to remain loyal may differ across industries, companies or economic contexts.

Possible Stand 1: In a world that is rapidly changing, companies can no longer/ cannot afford to be loyal to their employees.

- A. In an era of frequent and severe economic disruptions, companies often face sudden, unpredictable drops in demand or revenue that make maintaining full employment commitments financially unsustainable, regardless of prior loyalty intentions.

E.g. During the COVID-19 pandemic, airlines such as Singapore Airlines and international hotel chains were forced into unpaid leave arrangements and large-scale layoffs and despite decades of prior reputations for strong employee loyalty, illustrating how sudden global shocks can override even well-established employment commitments.

E.g. Escalating Iran-US tensions and energy shocks in the Persian Gulf can lead to heavy financial losses as fuel and fertiliser prices surge, forcing businesses into rapid layoffs and unpaid leave. This demonstrates how sudden disruptions to global supply chains can quickly drain cash reserves, forcing companies to prioritise basic financial survival over job security.

- B. Rapid shifts in consumer demand and business models mean the skills and roles a company needs can become obsolete faster than employees can be retrained, making full loyalty commitments increasingly impractical. Remaining loyal to employees is irrelevant if the company or even industry itself is under threat.

E.g. Traditional retail chains such as many high-street department stores globally have undergone repeated rounds of store closures and layoffs as e-commerce (e.g. Amazon, Shopee) rapidly reshaped consumer shopping habits, a pace of change that outstripped what internal retraining could realistically absorb. Print media organisations worldwide have significantly downsized editorial and production staff as digital-first and social-media-driven news consumption rapidly displaced print circulation, reflecting how fast-moving shifts in an entire industry's business model can make sustained loyalty to a previous workforce structure unaffordable.

E.g. In the banking sector, the rise of digital banking and AI-driven customer service has led major banks (e.g. various banks in Singapore such as DBS) to reduce traditional teller and back-office roles, citing the scale of technological change as a reason for significant workforce restructuring despite previous norms of long-term employment in the sector.

- C. As geopolitical tensions, trade wars and supply chain disruptions increase the cost of production and business operations, companies may no longer be able to afford traditional forms of employee loyalty, as maintaining competitiveness increasingly requires difficult cost-cutting decisions.

E.g. The US-China trade war prompted many manufacturers to relocate production from China to countries such as Vietnam and Mexico to avoid tariffs. While this helped firms remain competitive, it often resulted in factory closures and workforce reductions in existing locations, illustrating how geopolitical shifts can make maintaining long-term employment commitments financially unsustainable.

E.g. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, many European manufacturers faced soaring energy prices and raw material costs, forcing firms in energy-intensive industries such as chemicals and steel to reduce production, freeze hiring or retrench workers despite previous commitments to employee stability.

Possible Stand 2: In a world changing so rapidly, companies can still afford to be loyal to their employees.

- A. Even though rapid technological and organisational change continually reshapes industries, companies can still afford to invest in reskilling existing employees because preserving institutional knowledge is often more economical than repeated replacement, making employee loyalty a strategic investment rather than an unaffordable cost.

E.g. AT&T's 'Future Ready' initiative invested over a billion dollars in retraining hundreds of thousands of employees for new technology-driven roles rather than mass layoffs, demonstrating that large-scale reskilling investments can be a cost-effective alternative to workforce replacement while preserving experienced talent.

E.g. Japan's tradition of monozukuri (craftsmanship) illustrates how employee loyalty supports long-term excellence, emphasising continuous improvement (kaizen), deep technical mastery, and pride in incremental refinement. This ethos is reflected in firms like Toyota, where long-term employee development and accumulated expertise are prioritised to sustain precision and quality, showing how retaining and developing workers can be more valuable than constant replacement even in technologically advanced industries.

- B. As remote and hybrid work technologies have matured, companies can still afford to be loyal to their employees because these tools let them demonstrate meaningful loyalty — accommodating employees' personal circumstances, avoiding forced relocations or layoffs during downturns — at relatively low cost, even while facing pressure to cut costs elsewhere in a rapidly changing world.

E.g. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated companies' adoption of videoconferencing and cloud-based collaboration tools, which firms such as Airbnb and Dropbox then used to make 'work from anywhere' a permanent policy. Rather than requiring employees to relocate or resign when offices downsized, these companies retained staff across dispersed locations, using the same technology that disrupted traditional office work as a low-cost way of extending loyalty instead of resorting to layoffs.

- C. As rapid technological and economic change increasingly disrupts employment, governments and labour market institutions have expanded policies that share the costs of workforce transition, enabling companies to remain loyal without bearing the full financial burden alone.

E.g. In Singapore, initiatives like Career Conversion Programmes offer substantial government wage and training subsidies, enabling companies to absorb the financial cost of retraining and redeploying workers facing technological displacement. Combined with SkillsFuture co-funding for upskilling, these support schemes from the government offsets significantly reduce restructuring expenses, demonstrating how state support how government subsidies make workforce retention realistic and affordable.

E.g. In several European countries (e.g. Germany's 'Kurzarbeit' short-time work scheme), government-subsidised programmes allow companies to retain employees during periods of technological or economic disruption by reducing hours rather than laying off staff, demonstrating how policy frameworks make loyalty more affordable and, in effect, expected.

Examiners' comments:

This was the least popular question. Some students who attempted it fell into the pitfall of arguing why companies should be loyal to their employees, rather than assessing whether companies can afford to be loyal. Additionally, several students did not adequately explore what 'loyalty' to employees entails.

7. Assess the view that it does not matter why people exercise, as long as they do.

Question Type: Simple polarity

Debatable Issue: it does not matter vs it matters

Keywords:

'matter': of great importance or deep concern

'exercise': physical activities usually for fitness or health

'as long as they do': ultimately, that is what matters most of all

Context:

Modern world: the importance of exercise given rising health concerns – personal and national, declining fitness given a more sedentary and luxurious lifestyle, greater abundance of food and convenience in everyday tasks, concerns over the media's influence on the definitions of beauty, body image, and self-confidence, commercial interests and profitability in the exercise industry / market

Recommended/ possible approaches:

- Students should weigh between the intentions of why people exercise against the outcomes, answering whether intentions make any significant difference to the outcomes, and assess them.
- Students may consider the viewpoints of multiple stakeholders from those who are the ones exercising (the young, working adults, the elderly) to others who are impacted by their motivations and actions (family members, the government, businesses).

Pitfalls:

- Students merely describe the benefits of exercise without evaluating the intentions behind them, and considering what unintended, unnoticed negative consequences could emerge.
- Students narrowly focus on sports alone, instead of the wider topic of exercise (sports can be a form of exercise, but it is a subset of it), delving into less relevant elements of sports that do not address the question well.
- Students must work with the assumption that people are exercising in the first place. Students focus on how people may not be exercising at all.

Possible Stand 1: It does not matter why people exercise, as long as they do (i.e. because the presumably positive outcomes are what ultimately matter, regardless of their intentions)

- A. Even if people exercise out of vanity, what matters more is that the population is broadly healthy and tries to reduce the toll on governmental resources for healthcare.

E.g. In the United Kingdom (UK), where body image is important, nearly two-thirds of Britons exercise for at least an hour a week, with about 35% exceeding three hours. In England, roughly 63.7% of adults meet the Chief Medical Officers' guidelines of at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per week. However, the UK's National Health Service (NHS) is currently experiencing some of the most severe year-round pressures in its history, defined by record waiting lists, severe workforce shortages, and crumbling infrastructure, largely due to structural mismanagement. Millions of patients remain on treatment waiting lists for routine hospital care and elective surgery. As terrible as this may be, the situation would have been even worse if there were much fewer people exercising to keep healthy.

- B. In some places, it is compulsory for employees to start the workday with some simple morning exercises as a form of team bonding and to better prepare their minds and bodies for the tasks ahead. Regardless of whether one is willing or unwilling to participate, such a workout can help workers improve their productivity and focus.

E.g. Some Swedish employers have made on-the-job exercise compulsory. Every Friday, employees of fashion and sportswear retailer Bjorn Borg leave their desks at the company's Stockholm headquarters to get their weekly workout at a nearby gym. For more than two years the company founded by the Swedish tennis legend has made on-the-job exercise mandatory at the initiative of chief executive Henrik Bunge, a 44-year-old built like a wrestler. The main aims of the policy – shared by other firms such as city water company Kalmar Vatten and construction consultancy Rotpartner – are to boost productivity and profitability while fostering camaraderie in the work force. In 2014, a University of Stockholm study showed that exercising during the workday was advantageous for both employees and the employer. The study found there was a 22 percent decline in work absences, not negligible in a country where the average person is on sick leave four percent of the time, twice the European average.

- C. There are some cases where people are able to parlay the exercise they engage in, in exchange for money, such as countries whose military force relies on the draft and reservists. Here, even if their primary motivation is for profit, this is irrelevant, as long as there is a minimum level of fitness for its soldiers to be ready to defend the nation.

E.g. The Singapore Armed Forces rewards reservists \$300 and \$500 respectively when they attain a silver or gold award for their compulsory Individual Physical Proficiency Test which consists of three stations: push-ups, sit-ups and a 2.4km run. Many pragmatic Singaporeans train up to hit the required standards to gain an extra buck, which then serves the greater national interest in keeping its soldiers fit.

Possible Stand 2: It matters why people exercise.

- A. When exercise is driven by external validation rather than internal well-being — as with young people shaped by social media's fitness ideals — the resulting compulsion to keep training past the point of benefit raises the risk of injury and lasting harm to self-worth.

E.g. Fitness influencers such as Chris Bumstead, a multiple-time Mr. Olympia Classic Physique champion with millions of followers, and Chloe Ting, whose "two-week shred" challenges went viral among home exercisers, have inspired huge audiences to train. But research on "fitspiration" content has repeatedly linked exposure to idealised fitness imagery with body dissatisfaction and compulsive exercise, while muscle dysmorphia ("bigorexia") — a preoccupation with never being muscular enough — is rising among young men who measure themselves against physiques that are professionally, and sometimes chemically, maintained.

- B. Extrinsic motivation to exercise — a mandatory test, a doctor's orders, family pressure — tends to disappear the moment the external pressure is removed, meaning it produces a brief spike of effort rather than a genuinely improved, sustainable lifestyle: the motivation was never really theirs to begin with, so nothing remains once the requirement is satisfied.

E.g. Epidemiological data from Japan's national Diagnosis Procedure Combination database shows that while nearly 40% of cardiovascular patients complete doctor-supervised inpatient cardiac rehabilitation, approximately 95% abandon their exercise routines upon hospital discharge. This drastic post-discharge drop-off demonstrates that externally imposed clinical mandates achieve only temporary compliance, failing to instill the intrinsic motivation required to sustain long-term physical activity.

- C. When the underlying motive is to win or dominate rather than genuine health, exercise can push individuals toward practices that endanger not just themselves but other people around them.

E.g. Strava, the fitness-tracking app used widely by amateur runners and cyclists, has turned recreational exercise into a competitive leaderboard, with users racing to claim "King/Queen of the Mountain" titles on popular routes. This has led to cyclists blowing through red lights, weaving through pedestrian-heavy paths, and speeding downhill on shared public roads in pursuit of a faster segment time — behaviour that has resulted in collisions with pedestrians and other road users. Some routes have even been flagged by local safety authorities after cyclists, chasing Strava records, caused accidents involving cars and passers-by. Here, the motive to dominate a leaderboard transforms exercise from a personal health pursuit into a public safety hazard.

Examiners' comments:

This question yielded many successful responses. Many students were able to see that people's motivations for exercising were central to the question and gave well-considered arguments, along with effective examples that were well evaluated. Weaker responses focused on the advantages and disadvantages of exercise without considering the motivations that people might have, or factoring in the condition of 'as long as they do'.

8. 'Recent trends have made the raising of children an overwhelming task.' How far is this true in your society?

Question Type: Cause and Effect, Excess

Debatable Issue: overwhelming vs not overwhelming

Keywords:

'recent trends': the latest developments in politics and governmental policies, advances in technology (social media, artificial intelligence) and knowledge (scientific studies in psychology, child development and special needs), and patterns in consumption and education

'raising of children': the process of nurturing and bringing up of offspring to become actualised, upstanding members of society (by various stakeholders)

'overwhelming': excessively tough or problematic; more than what one can handle - the demand exceeds the parent's capacity (their time, money, energy, knowledge or control) to cope with it

Context:

'your society (Singapore)': high exposure to global media and Westernisation, undercurrent of fear ('kiasuism' – fear of losing out) and insecurity in increasingly educated parents, tendency to compare against others within the meritocratic system, delayed marriage and childbearing leading to the reduced birth rate, making each and every child even more precious in the parents' sight, guilt of parents being too busy for their children given how busy and competitive work is.

Recommended/ possible approaches:

- Students should identify a spectrum of the relevant trends manifesting today which have an impact on the task of raising children.
- Students should address the keyword 'overwhelming', by going beyond how it is tough to raise children, and delve into how and why it is more than what they can manage.
- Students should include contexts and traits of their chosen society when raising their arguments.
- Students may consider the viewpoints of multiple stakeholders and other causal factors, such as government policies and restrictions, as well as other considerations involved like that of the children's age and family background.

Pitfalls:

- Students fail to address the keyword 'overwhelming' and merely discuss whether it is difficult to raise children or not.
- Students fail to discuss recent trends and linking them to the raising of children.
- Students neglect to mention Singapore or their society's traits.

Possible Stand 1: Recent trends have made the raising of children an overwhelming task in my society.

- A. With the trends of delayed marriage and parenthood, many Singaporean couples usually focus first on their education and careers, thus having children at a later stage in life when they are considerably older. This results in them having less energy and strength, especially since they are likely to be higher up along their career ladders. This makes it more difficult than what they can manage to properly care for their children, resulting in excessive exhaustion and burnout.

E.g. According to the Singapore Department of Statistics, the median age for a first-time marriage is 31.1 years old for men and 29.6 years old for women. Over the past decade, people have been waiting longer to tie the knot, with women showing a slightly faster increase in marriage age. Meanwhile, the median age for Singaporean women having their first child is currently 32.1 years old (based on recent resident birth data). This has risen from about 29.3 years old two decades ago as more couples prioritise financial readiness before starting a family. With the actual average total paid hours worked per employee in Singapore being 42.9 hours per week, this leaves the typical dual career parents little time and energy left over to care for the ever increasing need to assist their children in preparations for examinations such as the all-important Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), and to ferry them for other extra-curricular, enrichment lessons outside of school.

- B. The ever-increasing proliferation of disinformation, deepfakes, and scams has made it too hard for parents to protect their children from scammers and predators. Many young Singaporeans encounter these threats in private spaces — personal devices, closed group chats, gaming platforms — where a parent's warnings cannot easily follow them, and increasingly at the hands of peers rather than strangers. This compounds how hard it is for even the most informed and attentive parents to safeguard their children from such harm. Parents cannot guarantee their children's safety no matter how hard they try.

E.g. Scammers have begun deploying AI voice cloning to impersonate parents, contacting children in a voice indistinguishable from their mother's and, under the pretext of urgency, instructing them to transfer funds via PayNow or disclose a verification code just received. A few seconds of audio taken from a family video posted online is sufficient to generate the imitation. Singaporean children are unusually exposed to this. Every secondary student is issued a Personal Learning Device, payment is cashless from the school canteen upwards, and in dual-income households many are unsupervised in the afternoons, with no adult present to suggest verifying the call.

- C. Social media has turned parenting into a public display and has intensified the pressure Singapore's meritocratic system already places on parents, making the resource threshold for a 'fair shot' not just steeper, but visibly and constantly rising.

E.g. On Xiaohongshu, Singaporean 'mummy influencer' accounts documenting their children's packed weekly schedules — Chinese enrichment, swimming, coding bootcamp, overseas school trips — regularly draw tens of thousands of views. What was once a private, gradual realisation that wealthier families could afford more has become an hourly, algorithmically-fed reminder: parents funding just one enrichment class are now confronted almost daily with a curated record of what a 'well-provided-for' childhood looks like. This constant comparison arguably does more damage than the cost gap itself — it leaves little room for a parent to feel they have done 'enough', regardless of genuine sacrifice.

**Possible Stand 2: Recent trends have not made the raising of children an overwhelming task in my society.
(It is tough but manageable, or it is easy)**

- A. While it is still not easily affordable to raise a child in a consumeristic Singapore where the cost of living is high, it is not exceedingly difficult with the provision of a lot of government subsidies in the form of handouts, or education bursaries and financial assistance schemes.

E.g. Under the newly announced SG Child Support Package, every eligible Singapore citizen child will receive nearly S\$70,000 in direct financial and developmental support from birth until age 17. This consists of the Baby Gift, a S\$10,000 cash gift for newborns, paid in two instalments during the first year of life; Child Credits, a cash allocation of S\$2,000 given every year from age 1 to 16, totalling S\$32,000; as well as Child Development Account (CDA) Grants, a S\$5,000 First Step Grant plus up to S\$5,000 in government co-matching for savings. All of these disbursements will go a long way in helping to cover medical bills, baby food, diapers, and other related financial expenditures needed to raise children.

- B. Now that technology has made it possible for many forms of work to be done from home, combined with greater willingness from companies to permit their employees to have flexible work arrangements, it is now more manageable for Singaporean parents to balance caregiving with their careers.

E.g. Prominent companies in Singapore offering robust flexible work arrangements (FWAs) include major tech firms like Microsoft and Google, technology-enabled enterprises like Cisco, government agencies like GovTech, and people-focused transport operators like Go-Ahead Singapore. Over 70% of firms in Singapore provide structured hybrid, flexi-time, or flexi-place options.

- C. Insightful parenting advice offered by educational experts and seasoned teachers are but just a click away, educating typically 'kiasu' Singaporean parents, updating them on how to detect and cope with any possible learning disabilities, behavioural issues or other learning needs at an early stage, so that the proper interventions can be carried out, or simply to offer useful advice to parents on how to better understand their children and raise them well.

E.g. In schools, the Ministry of Education engages trained Special Educational Needs (SEN) Officers who provide in-class help, small group teaching, and behavioural support for students with conditions like dyslexia, ADHD, or mild autism, working closely with parents to assist them in how to manage their needs at home too.

Examiners' comments:

This was the most popular question, and most responses addressed the question adequately. Weaker responses failed to capture the degree implied in 'overwhelming' and considered only whether raising children is difficult in Singapore. In addition, weaker responses neglected basing their arguments on specific recent trends, as required by the question.