

Families who send their children to private schools should not be required to pay taxes that support the state education system. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Some people believe that parents of children who attend private schools should not need to contribute to state schools through taxes. Personally, I completely disagree with this view.

For a variety of reasons, it would be wrong to reduce taxes for families who pay for private education. Firstly, it would be difficult to calculate the correct amount of tax reduction for these families, and staff would be required to manage this complex process. Secondly, we all pay a certain amount of tax for public services that we may not use. For example, most people are fortunate enough not to have to call the police or fire brigade at any time in their lives, but they would not expect a tax reduction for this. Finally, if wealthy families were given a tax discount for sending their children to private schools, we might have a situation where poorer people pay higher taxes than the rich.

In my opinion, we should all be happy to pay our share of the money that supports public schools. It is beneficial for all members of society to have a high quality education system with equal opportunities for all young people. This will result in a well-educated workforce, and in turn a more productive and prosperous nation. Parents of children in private schools may also see the advantages of this in their own lives. For example, a company owner will need well qualified and competent staff, and a well-funded education system can provide such employees.

In conclusion, I do not believe that any financial concessions should be made for people who choose private education.

(269 words, band 9)

We cannot help everyone in the world that needs help, so we should only be concerned with our own communities and countries. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Some people believe that we should not help people in other countries as long as there are problems in our own society. I disagree with this view because I believe that we should try to help as many people as possible.

On the one hand, I accept that it is important to help our neighbours and fellow citizens. In most communities there are people who are impoverished or disadvantaged in some way. It is possible to find homeless people, for example, in even the wealthiest of cities, and for those who are concerned about this problem, there are usually opportunities to volunteer time or give money to support these people. In the UK, people can help in a variety of ways, from donating clothing to serving free food in a soup kitchen. As the problems are on our doorstep, and there are obvious ways to help, I can understand why some people feel that we should prioritise local charity.

At the same time, I believe that we have an obligation to help those who live beyond our national borders. In some countries the problems that people face are much more serious than those in our own communities, and it is often even easier to help. For example, when children are dying from curable diseases in African countries, governments and individuals in richer countries can save lives simply by paying for vaccines that already exist. A small donation to an international charity might have a much greater impact than helping in our local area.

In conclusion, it is true that we cannot help everyone, but in my opinion national boundaries should not stop us from helping those who are in need.

(280 words, band 9)

Some people think that all teenagers should be required to do unpaid work in their free time to help the local community. They believe this would benefit both the individual teenager and society as a whole. Do you agree or disagree?

Many young people work on a volunteer basis, and this can only be beneficial for both the individual and society as a whole. However, I do not agree that we should therefore force all teenagers to do unpaid work.

Most young people are already under enough pressure with their studies, without being given the added responsibility of working in their spare time. School is just as demanding as a full-time job, and teachers expect their students to do homework and exam revision on top of attending lessons every day. When young people do have some free time, we should encourage them to enjoy it with their friends or to spend it doing sports and other leisure activities. They have many years of work ahead of them when they finish their studies.

At the same time, I do not believe that society has anything to gain from obliging young people to do unpaid work. In fact, I would argue that it goes against the values of a free and fair society to force a group of people to do something against their will. Doing this can only lead to resentment amongst young people, who would feel that they were being used, and parents, who would not want to be told how to raise their children. Currently, nobody is forced to volunteer, and this is surely the best system.

In conclusion, teenagers may choose to work for free and help others, but in my opinion we should not make this compulsory.

(250 words, band 9)

Some people believe that hobbies need to be difficult to be enjoyable.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Some hobbies are relatively easy, while others present more of a challenge. Personally, I believe that both types of hobby can be fun, and I therefore disagree with the statement that hobbies need to be difficult in order to be enjoyable.

On the one hand, many people enjoy easy hobbies. One example of an activity that is easy for most people is swimming. This hobby requires very little equipment, it is simple to learn, and it is inexpensive. I remember learning to swim at my local swimming pool when I was a child, and it never felt like a demanding or challenging experience. Another hobby that I find easy and fun is photography. In my opinion, anyone can take interesting pictures without knowing too much about the technicalities of operating a camera. Despite being straightforward, taking photos is a satisfying activity.

On the other hand, difficult hobbies can sometimes be more exciting. If an activity is more challenging, we might feel a greater sense of satisfaction when we manage to do it successfully. For example, film editing is a hobby that requires a high level of knowledge and expertise. In my case, it took me around two years before I became competent at this activity, but now I enjoy it much more than I did when I started. I believe that many hobbies give us more pleasure when we reach a higher level of performance because the results are better and the feeling of achievement is greater.

In conclusion, simple hobbies can be fun and relaxing, but difficult hobbies can be equally pleasurable for different reasons.

Note:

Notice that we used examples as the basis of both main paragraphs.

In the developed world, average life expectancy is increasing. What problems will this cause for individuals and society? Suggest some measures that could be taken to reduce the impact of ageing populations.

It is true that people in industrialised nations can expect to live longer than ever before. Although there will undoubtedly be some negative consequences of this trend, societies can take steps to mitigate these potential problems.

As people live longer and the populations of developed countries grow older, several related problems can be anticipated. The main issue is that there will obviously be more people of retirement age who will be eligible to receive a pension. The proportion of younger, working adults will be smaller, and governments will therefore receive less money in taxes in relation to the size of the population. In other words, an ageing population will mean a greater tax burden for working adults. Further pressures will include a rise in the demand for healthcare, and the fact young adults will increasingly have to look after their elderly relatives.

There are several actions that governments could take to solve the problems described above. Firstly, a simple solution would be to increase the retirement age for working adults, perhaps from 65 to 70. Nowadays, people of this age tend to be healthy enough to continue a productive working life. A second measure would be for governments to encourage immigration in order to increase the number of working adults who pay taxes. Finally, money from national budgets will need to be taken from other areas and spent on vital healthcare, accommodation and transport facilities for the rising numbers of older citizens.

In conclusion, various measures can be taken to tackle the problems that are certain to arise as the populations of countries grow older.

(265 words, band 9)

Some people regard video games as harmless fun, or even as a useful educational tool. Others, however, believe that video games are having an adverse effect on the people who play them. In your opinion, do the drawbacks of video games outweigh the benefits?

Many people, and children in particular, enjoy playing computer games. While I accept that these games can sometimes have a positive effect on the user, I believe that they are more likely to have a harmful impact.

On the one hand, video games can be both entertaining and educational. Users, or gamers, are transported into virtual worlds which are often more exciting and engaging than real-life pastimes. From an educational perspective, these games encourage imagination and creativity, as well as concentration, logical thinking and problem solving, all of which are useful skills outside the gaming context. Furthermore, it has been shown that computer simulation games can improve users' motor skills and help to prepare them for real-world tasks, such as flying a plane.

However, I would argue that these benefits are outweighed by the drawbacks. Gaming can be highly addictive because users are constantly given scores, new targets and frequent rewards to keep them playing. Many children now spend hours each day trying to progress through the levels of a game or to get a higher score than their friends. This type of addiction can have effects ranging from lack of sleep to problems at school, when homework is sacrificed for a few more hours on the computer or console. The rise in obesity in recent years has also been linked in part to the sedentary lifestyle and lack of exercise that often accompany gaming addiction.

In conclusion, it seems to me that the potential dangers of video games are more significant than the possible benefits.

(258 words, band 9)

Foreign visitors should pay more than local visitors for cultural and historical attractions. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?

It is sometimes argued that tourists from overseas should be charged more than local residents to visit important sites and monuments. I completely disagree with this idea.

The argument in favour of higher prices for foreign tourists would be that cultural or historical attractions often depend on state subsidies to keep them going, which means that the resident population already pays money to these sites through the tax system. However, I believe this to be a very shortsighted view. Foreign tourists contribute to the economy of the host country with the money they spend on a wide range of goods and services, including food, souvenirs, accommodation and travel. The governments and inhabitants of every country should be happy to subsidise important tourist sites and encourage people from the rest of the world to visit them.

If travellers realised that they would have to pay more to visit historical and cultural attractions in a particular nation, they would perhaps decide not to go to that country on holiday. To take the UK as an example, the tourism industry and many related jobs rely on visitors coming to the country to see places like Windsor Castle or Saint Paul's Cathedral. These two sites charge the same price regardless of nationality, and this helps to promote the nation's cultural heritage. If overseas tourists stopped coming due to higher prices, there would be a risk of insufficient funding for the maintenance of these important buildings.

In conclusion, I believe that every effort should be made to attract tourists from overseas, and it would be counterproductive to make them pay more than local residents.

(269 words, band 9)

Some people think that governments should give financial support to creative artists such as painters and musicians. Others believe that creative artists should be funded by alternative sources. Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

People have different views about the funding of creative artists. While some people disagree with the idea of government support for artists, I believe that money for art projects should come from both governments and other sources.

Some art projects definitely require help from the state. In the UK, there are many works of art in public spaces, such as streets or squares in city centres. In Liverpool, for example, there are several new statues and sculptures in the docks area of the city, which has been redeveloped recently. These artworks represent culture, heritage and history. They serve to educate people about the city, and act as landmarks or talking points for visitors and tourists. Governments and local councils should pay creative artists to produce this kind of art, because without their funding our cities would be much less interesting and attractive.

On the other hand, I can understand the arguments against government funding for art. The main reason for this view is that governments have more important concerns. For example, state budgets need to be spent on education, healthcare, infrastructure and security, among other areas. These public services are vital for a country to function properly, whereas the work of creative artists, even in public places, is a luxury. Another reason for this opinion is that artists do a job like any other professional, and they should therefore earn their own money by selling their work.

In conclusion, there are good reasons why artists should rely on alternative sources of financial support, but in my opinion government help is sometimes necessary.

Nowadays animal experiments are widely used to develop new medicines and to test the safety of other products. Some people argue that these experiments should be banned because it is morally wrong to cause animals to suffer, while others are in favour of them because of their benefits to humanity. Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

It is true that medicines and other products are routinely tested on animals before they are cleared for human use. While I tend towards the viewpoint that animal testing is morally wrong, I would have to support a limited amount of animal experimentation for the development of medicines.

On the one hand, there are clear ethical arguments against animal experimentation. To use a common example of this practice, laboratory mice may be given an illness so that the effectiveness of a new drug can be measured. Opponents of such research argue that humans have no right to subject animals to this kind of trauma, and that the lives of all creatures should be respected. They believe that the benefits to humans do not justify the suffering caused, and that scientists should use alternative methods of research.

On the other hand, reliable alternatives to animal experimentation may not always be available. Supporters of the use of animals in medical research believe that a certain amount of suffering on the part of mice or rats can be justified if human lives are saved. They argue that opponents of such research might feel differently if a member of their own families needed a medical treatment that had been developed through the use of animal experimentation. Personally, I agree with the banning of animal testing for non-medical products, but I feel that it may be a necessary evil where new drugs and medical procedures are concerned.

In conclusion, it seems to me that it would be wrong to ban testing on animals for vital medical research until equally effective alternatives have been developed.

(270 words, band 9)

Explain some of the ways in which humans are damaging the environment. What can governments do to address these problems? What can individual people do?

Humans are responsible for a variety of environmental problems, but we can also take steps to reduce the damage that we are causing to the planet. This essay will discuss environmental problems and the measures that governments and individuals can take to address these problems.

Two of the biggest threats to the environment are air pollution and waste. Gas emissions from factories and exhaust fumes from vehicles lead to global warming, which may have a devastating effect on the planet in the future. As the human population increases, we are also producing ever greater quantities of waste, which contaminates the earth and pollutes rivers and oceans.

Governments could certainly make more effort to reduce air pollution. They could introduce laws to limit emissions from factories or to force companies to use renewable energy from solar, wind or water power. They could also impose 'green taxes' on drivers and airline companies. In this way, people would be encouraged to use public transport and to take fewer flights abroad, therefore reducing emissions.

Individuals should also take responsibility for the impact they have on the environment. They can take public transport rather than driving, choose products with less packaging, and recycle as much as possible. Most supermarkets now provide reusable bags for shoppers as well as 'banks' for recycling glass, plastic and paper in their car parks. By reusing and recycling, we can help to reduce waste.

In conclusion, both national governments and individuals must play their part in looking after the environment.

Note:

This essay is exactly 250 words long. I've tried to make it as simple as possible, but it's still good enough to get a band 9.

Universities should accept equal numbers of male and female students in every subject. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

In my opinion, men and women should have the same educational opportunities. However, I do not agree with the idea of accepting equal proportions of each gender in every university subject.

Having the same number of men and women on all degree courses is simply unrealistic. Student numbers on any course depend on the applications that the institution receives. If a university decided to fill courses with equal numbers of males and females, it would need enough applicants of each gender. In reality, many courses are more popular with one gender than the other, and it would not be practical to aim for equal proportions. For example, nursing courses tend to attract more female applicants, and it would be difficult to fill these courses if fifty per cent of the places needed to go to males.

Apart from the practical concerns expressed above, I also believe that it would be unfair to base admission to university courses on gender. Universities should continue to select the best candidates for each course according to their qualifications. In this way, both men and women have the same opportunities, and applicants know that they will be successful if they work hard to achieve good grades at school. If a female student is the best candidate for a place on a course, it is surely wrong to reject her in favour of a male student with lower grades or fewer qualifications.

In conclusion, the selection of university students should be based on merit, and it would be both impractical and unfair to change to a selection procedure based on gender.

(265 words, band 9)

Some people think that museums should be enjoyable places to entertain people, while others believe that the purpose of museums is to educate. Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

People have different views about the role and function of museums. In my opinion, museums can and should be both entertaining and educational.

On the one hand, it can be argued that the main role of a museum is to entertain. Museums are tourist attractions, and their aim is to exhibit a collection of interesting objects that many people will want to see. The average visitor may become bored if he or she has to read or listen to too much educational content, so museums often put more of an emphasis on enjoyment rather than learning. This type of museum is designed to be visually spectacular, and may have interactive activities or even games as part of its exhibitions.

On the other hand, some people argue that museums should focus on education. The aim of any exhibition should be to teach visitors something that they did not previously know. Usually this means that the history behind the museum's exhibits needs to be explained, and this can be done in various ways. Some museums employ professional guides to talk to their visitors, while other museums offer headsets so that visitors can listen to detailed commentary about the exhibition. In this way, museums can play an important role in teaching people about history, culture, science and many other aspects of life.

In conclusion, it seems to me that a good museum should be able to offer an interesting, enjoyable and educational experience so that people can have fun and learn something at the same time.

(253 words, band 9)

Some people believe that studying at university or college is the best route to a successful career, while others believe that it is better to get a job straight after school.

Discuss both views and give your opinion.

When they finish school, teenagers face the dilemma of whether to get a job or continue their education. While there are some benefits to getting a job straight after school, I would argue that it is better to go to college or university.

The option to start work straight after school is attractive for several reasons. Many young people want to start earning money as soon as possible. In this way, they can become independent, and they will be able to afford their own house or start a family. In terms of their career, young people who decide to find work, rather than continue their studies, may progress more quickly. They will have the chance to gain real experience and learn practical skills related to their chosen profession. This may lead to promotions and a successful career.

On the other hand, I believe that it is more beneficial for students to continue their studies. Firstly, academic qualifications are required in many professions. For example, it is impossible to become a doctor, teacher or lawyer without having the relevant degree. As a result, university graduates have access to more and better job opportunities, and they tend to earn higher salaries than those with fewer qualifications. Secondly, the job market is becoming increasingly competitive, and sometimes there are hundreds of applicants for one position in a company. Young people who do not have qualifications from a university or college will not be able to compete.

For the reasons mentioned above, it seems to me that students are more likely to be successful in their careers if they continue their studies beyond school level.

(271 words, band 9)

Several languages are in danger of extinction because they are spoken by very small numbers of people. Some people say that governments should spend public money on saving these languages, while others believe that would be a waste of money. Discuss both these views and give your opinion.

It is true that some minority languages may disappear in the near future. Although it can be argued that governments could save money by allowing this to happen, I believe that these languages should be protected and preserved.

There are several reasons why saving minority languages could be seen as a waste of money. Firstly, if a language is only spoken by a small number of people, expensive education programmes will be needed to make sure that more people learn it, and the state will have to pay for facilities, teachers and marketing. This money might be better spent on other public services. Secondly, it would be much cheaper and more efficient for countries to have just one language. Governments could cut all kinds of costs related to communicating with each minority group.

Despite the above arguments, I believe that governments should try to preserve languages that are less widely spoken. A language is much more than simply a means of communication; it has a vital connection with the cultural identity of the people who speak it. If a language disappears, a whole way of life will disappear with it, and we will lose the rich cultural diversity that makes societies more interesting. By spending money to protect minority languages, governments can also preserve traditions, customs and behaviours that are part of a country's history.

In conclusion, it may save money in the short term if we allow minority languages to disappear, but in the long term this would have an extremely negative impact on our cultural heritage.

(258 words)

Nowadays the way many people interact with each other has changed because of technology.

In what ways has technology affected the types of relationships that people make? Has this been a positive or negative development?

It is true that new technologies have had an influence on communication between people. Technology has affected relationships in various ways, and in my opinion there are both positive and negative effects.

Technology has had an impact on relationships in business, education and social life. Firstly, telephones and the Internet allow business people in different countries to interact without ever meeting each other. Secondly, services like Skype create new possibilities for relationships between students and teachers. For example, a student can now take video lessons with a teacher in a different city or country. Finally, many people use social networks, like Facebook, to make new friends and find people who share common interests, and they interact through their computers rather than face to face.

On the one hand, these developments can be extremely positive.

Cooperation between people in different countries was much more difficult when communication was limited to written letters or telegrams. Nowadays, interactions by email, phone or video are almost as good as face-to-face meetings, and many of us benefit from these interactions, either in work or social contexts. On the other hand, the availability of new communication technologies can also have the result of isolating people and discouraging real interaction. For example, many young people choose to make friends online rather than mixing with their peers in the real world, and these 'virtual' relationships are a poor substitute for real friendships.

In conclusion, technology has certainly revolutionised communication between people, but not all of the outcomes of this revolution have been positive.

(257 words, band 9)

Nowadays celebrities are more famous for their glamour and wealth than for their achievements, and this sets a bad example to young people.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

It is true that some celebrities are known for their glamorous lifestyles rather than for the work they do. While I agree that these celebrities set a bad example for children, I believe that other famous people act as positive role models.

On the one hand, many people do achieve fame without really working for it. They may have inherited money from parents, married a famous or wealthy person, or they may have appeared in gossip magazines or on a reality TV programme. A good example would be Paris Hilton, who is rich and famous for the wrong reasons. She spends her time attending parties and nightclubs, and her behaviour promotes the idea that appearance, glamour and media profile are more important than hard work and good character. The message to young people is that success can be achieved easily, and that school work is not necessary.

On the other hand, there are at least as many celebrities whose accomplishments make them excellent role models for young people. Actors, musicians and sports stars become famous idols because they have worked hard and applied themselves to develop real skills and abilities. They demonstrate great effort, determination and ambition, which is required for someone who wants to be truly successful in their chosen field. An example is the actor and martial artist Jackie Chan, who has become world famous through years of practice and hard work. This kind of self-made celebrity can inspire children to develop their talents through application and perseverance.

(Add your own conclusion)

When choosing a job, the salary is the most important consideration. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Many people choose their jobs based on the size of the salary offered. Personally, I disagree with the idea that money is the key consideration when deciding on a career, because I believe that other factors are equally important.

On the one hand, I agree that money is necessary in order for people to meet their basic needs. For example, we all need money to pay for housing, food, bills, health care, and education. Most people consider it a priority to at least earn a salary that allows them to cover these needs and have a reasonable quality of life. If people chose their jobs based on enjoyment or other non-financial factors, they might find it difficult to support themselves. Artists and musicians, for instance, are known for choosing a career path that they love, but that does not always provide them with enough money to live comfortably and raise a family.

Nevertheless, I believe that other considerations are just as important as what we earn in our jobs. Firstly, personal relationships and the atmosphere in a workplace are extremely important when choosing a job. Having a good manager or friendly colleagues, for example, can make a huge difference to workers' levels of happiness and general quality of life. Secondly, many people's feelings of job satisfaction come from their professional achievements, the skills they learn, and the position they reach, rather than the money they earn. Finally, some people choose a career because they want to help others and contribute something positive to society.

In conclusion, while salaries certainly affect people's choice of profession, I do not believe that money outweighs all other motivators.

(275 words, band 9)

Some people think that in the modern world we are more dependent on each other, while others think that people have become more independent. Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

People have different views about whether we are more or less dependent on others nowadays. In my view, modern life forces us to be more independent than people were in the past.

There are two main reasons why it could be argued that we are more dependent on each other now. Firstly, life is more complex and difficult, especially because the cost of living has increased so dramatically. For example, young adults tend to rely on their parents for help when buying a house. Property prices are higher than ever, and without help it would be impossible for many people to pay a deposit and a mortgage. Secondly, people seem to be more ambitious nowadays, and they want a better quality of life for their families. This means that both parents usually need to work full-time, and they depend on support from grandparents and babysitters for child care.

However, I would agree with those who believe that people are more independent these days. In most countries, families are becoming smaller and more dispersed, which means that people cannot count on relatives as much as they used to. We also have more freedom to travel and live far away from our home towns. For example, many students choose to study abroad instead of going to their local university, and this experience makes them more independent as they learn to live alone. Another factor in this growing independence is technology, which allows us to work alone and from any part of the world.

In conclusion, while there are some reasons to believe that people now depend on each other more, my own view is that we are more independent than ever.

Note:

As usual, try to analyse this essay in terms of task response (does it fully answer the question?), organisation, 'band 7-9' vocabulary, and grammar.

Wild animals have no place in the 21st century, so protecting them is a waste of resources. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Some people argue that it is pointless to spend money on the protection of wild animals because we humans have no need for them. I completely disagree with this point of view.

In my opinion, it is absurd to argue that wild animals have no place in the 21st century. I do not believe that planet Earth exists only for the benefit of humans, and there is nothing special about this particular century that means that we suddenly have the right to allow or encourage the extinction of any species.

Furthermore, there is no compelling reason why we should let animals die out. We do not need to exploit or destroy every last square metre of land in order to feed or accommodate the world's population. There is plenty of room for us to exist side by side with wild animals, and this should be our aim.

I also disagree with the idea that protecting animals is a waste of resources. It is usually the protection of natural habitats that ensures the survival of wild animals, and most scientists agree that these habitats are also crucial for human survival. For example, rainforests produce oxygen, absorb carbon dioxide and stabilise the Earth's climate. If we destroyed these areas, the costs of managing the resulting changes to our planet would far outweigh the costs of conservation. By protecting wild animals and their habitats, we maintain the natural balance of all life on Earth.

In conclusion, we have no right to decide whether or not wild animals should exist, and I believe that we should do everything we can to protect them.

(269 words, band 9)

Happiness is considered very important in life. Why is it difficult to define?

What factors are important in achieving happiness?

It is no doubt true that the majority of people would like to be happy in their lives. While the personal nature of happiness makes it difficult to describe, there do seem to be some common needs that we all share with regard to experiencing or achieving happiness.

Happiness is difficult to define because it means something different to each individual person. Nobody can fully understand or experience another person's feelings, and we all have our own particular passions from which we take pleasure. Some people, for example, derive a sense of satisfaction from earning money or achieving success, whereas for others, health and family are much more important. At the same time, a range of other feelings, from excitement to peacefulness, may be associated with the idea of happiness, and the same person may therefore feel happy in a variety of different ways.

Although it seems almost impossible to give a precise definition of happiness, most people would agree that there are some basic preconditions to achieving it. Firstly, it is hard for a person to be happy if he or she does not have a safe place to live and enough food to eat. Our basic survival needs must surely be met before we can lead a pleasant life. Secondly, the greatest joy in life is usually found in shared experiences with family and friends, and it is rare to find a person who is content to live in complete isolation. Other key factors could be individual freedom and a sense of purpose in life.

In conclusion, happiness is difficult to define because it is particular to each individual, but I believe that our basic needs for shelter, food and company need to be fulfilled before we can experience it.

(292 words, band 9)

The older generations tend to have very traditional ideas about how people should live, think and behave. However, some people believe that these ideas are not helpful in preparing younger generations for modern life.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this view?

It is true that many older people believe in traditional values that often seem incompatible with the needs of younger people. While I agree that some traditional ideas are outdated, I believe that others are still useful and should not be forgotten.

On the one hand, many of the ideas that elderly people have about life are becoming less relevant for younger people. In the past, for example, people were advised to learn a profession and find a secure job for life, but today's workers expect much more variety and diversity from their careers. At the same time, the 'rules' around relationships are being eroded as young adults make their own choices about who and when to marry. But perhaps the greatest disparity between the generations can be seen in their attitudes towards gender roles. The traditional roles of men and women, as breadwinners and housewives, are no longer accepted as necessary or appropriate by most younger people.

On the other hand, some traditional views and values are certainly applicable to the modern world. For example, older generations attach great importance to working hard, doing one's best, and taking pride in one's work, and these behaviours can surely benefit young people as they enter today's competitive job market. Other characteristics that are perhaps seen as traditional are politeness and good manners. In our globalised world, young adults can expect to come into contact with people from a huge variety of backgrounds, and it is more important than ever to treat others with respect. Finally, I believe that young people would lead happier lives if they had a more 'old-fashioned' sense of community and neighbourliness.

In conclusion, although the views of older people may sometimes seem unhelpful in today's world, we should not dismiss all traditional ideas as irrelevant.

(299 words, band 9)

Many people prefer to watch foreign films rather than locally produced films. Why could this be?

Should governments give more financial support to local film industries?

It is true that foreign films are more popular in many countries than domestically produced films. There could be several reasons why this is the case, and I believe that governments should promote local film-making by subsidising the industry.

There are various reasons why many people find foreign films more enjoyable than the films produced in their own countries. Firstly, the established film industries in certain countries have huge budgets for action, special effects and to shoot scenes in spectacular locations. Hollywood blockbusters like 'Avatar' or the James Bond films are examples of such productions, and their global appeal is undeniable. Another reason why these big-budget films are so successful is that they often star the most famous actors and actresses, and they are made by the most accomplished producers and directors. The poor quality, low-budget filmmaking in many countries suffers in comparison.

In my view, governments should support local film industries financially. In every country, there may be talented amateur film-makers who just need to be given the opportunity to prove themselves. To compete with big-budget productions from overseas, these people need money to pay for film crews, actors and a host of other costs related to producing high-quality films. If governments did help with these costs, they would see an increase in employment in the film industry, income from film sales, and perhaps even a rise in tourist numbers. New Zealand, for example, has seen an increase in tourism related to the 'Lord of the Rings' films, which were partly funded by government subsidies.

In conclusion, I believe that increased financial support could help to raise the quality of locally made films and allow them to compete with the foreign productions that currently dominate the market.

(294 words, band 9)

Note:

I'm not really sure whether the New Zealand example is true, but it's fine to invent this kind of thing in the test!

Some people think that strict punishments for driving offences are the key to reducing traffic accidents. Others, however, believe that other measures would be more effective in improving road safety. Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.

People have differing views with regard to the question of how to make our roads safer. In my view, both punishments and a range of other measures can be used together to promote better driving habits.

On the one hand, strict punishments can certainly help to encourage people to drive more safely. Penalties for dangerous drivers can act as a deterrent, meaning that people avoid repeating the same offence. There are various types of driving penalty, such as small fines, licence suspension, driver awareness courses, and even prison sentences. The aim of these punishments is to show dangerous drivers that their actions have negative consequences. As a result, we would hope that drivers become more disciplined and alert, and that they follow the rules more carefully.

On the other hand, I believe that safe driving can be promoted in several different ways that do not punish drivers. Firstly, it is vitally important to educate people properly before they start to drive, and this could be done in schools or even as part of an extended or more difficult driving test. Secondly, more attention could be paid to safe road design. For example, signs can be used to warn people, speed bumps and road bends can be added to calm traffic, and speed cameras can help to deter people from driving too quickly. Finally, governments or local councils could reduce road accidents by investing in better public transport, which would mean that fewer people would need to travel by car.

In conclusion, while punishments can help to prevent bad driving, I believe that other road safety measures should also be introduced.

(269 words, band 9)

These days more fathers stay a home and take care of their children while mothers go out to work. What could be the reasons for this? Do you think it is a positive or a negative development?

It is true that men are increasingly likely to take on the role of househusband, while more women than ever are the breadwinners in their families. There could be several reasons for this, and I consider it to be a very positive trend.

In recent years, parents have had to adapt to various changes in our societies. Equal rights movements have made great progress, and it has become normal for women to gain qualifications and pursue a career. It has also become socially acceptable for men to stay at home and look after their children. At the same time, the rising cost of living has meant that both marriage partners usually need to work and save money before starting a family. Therefore, when couples have children, they may decide who works and who stays at home depending on the personal preference of each partner, or based on which partner earns the most money.

In my view, the changes described above should be seen as progress. We should be happy to live in a society in which men and women have equal opportunities, and in which women are not put under pressure to sacrifice their careers. Equally, it seems only fair that men should be free to leave their jobs in order to assume childcare responsibilities if this is what they wish to do. Couples should be left to make their own decisions about which parental role each partner takes, according to their particular circumstances and needs.

In conclusion, the changing roles of men and women in the family are a result of wider changes in society, and I believe that these developments are desirable.

(274 words, band 9)

More and more people are migrating to cities in search of a better life, but city life can be extremely difficult. Explain some of the difficulties of living in a city. How can governments make urban life better for everyone?

Cities are often seen as places of opportunity, but there are also some major drawbacks of living in a large metropolis. In my opinion, governments could do much more to improve city life for the average inhabitant.

The main problem for anyone who hopes to migrate to a large city is that the cost of living is likely to be much higher than it is in a small town or village. Inhabitants of cities have to pay higher prices for housing, transport, and even food. Another issue is that urban areas tend to suffer from social problems such as high crime and poverty rates in comparison with rural areas. Furthermore, the air quality in cities is often poor, due to pollution from traffic, and the streets and public transport systems are usually overcrowded. As a result, city life can be unhealthy and stressful.

However, there are various steps that governments could take to tackle these problems. Firstly, they could invest money in the building of affordable or social housing to reduce the cost of living. Secondly, politicians have the power to ban vehicles from city centres and promote the use of cleaner public transport, which would help to reduce both air pollution and traffic congestion. In London, for example, the introduction of a congestion charge for drivers has helped to curb the traffic problem. A third option would be to develop provincial towns and rural areas, by moving industry and jobs to those regions, in order to reduce the pressure on major cities.

In conclusion, governments could certainly implement a range of measures to enhance the quality of life for all city residents.

(273 words, band 9)

In some countries, many more people are choosing to live alone nowadays than in the past. Do you think this is a positive or negative development?

In recent years it has become far more normal for people to live alone, particularly in large cities in the developed world. In my opinion, this trend could have both positive and negative consequences in equal measure.

The rise in one-person households can be seen as positive for both personal and broader economic reasons. On an individual level, people who choose to live alone may become more independent and self-reliant than those who live with family members. A young adult who lives alone, for example, will need to learn to cook, clean, pay bills and manage his or her budget, all of which are valuable life skills; an increase in the number of such individuals can certainly be seen as a positive development. From an economic perspective, the trend towards living alone will result in greater demand for housing. This is likely to benefit the construction industry, estate agents and a whole host of other companies that rely on homeowners to buy their products or services.

However, the personal and economic arguments given above can be considered from the opposite angle. Firstly, rather than the positive feeling of increased independence, people who live alone may experience feelings of loneliness, isolation and worry. They miss out on the emotional support and daily conversation that family or flatmates can provide, and they must bear the weight of all household bills and responsibilities; in this sense, perhaps the trend towards living alone is a negative one. Secondly, from the financial point of view, a rise in demand for housing is likely to push up property prices and rents. While this may benefit some businesses, the general population, including those who live alone, will be faced with rising living costs.

In conclusion, the increase in one-person households will have both beneficial and detrimental effects on individuals and on the economy.

(band 9)

Some people think that all university students should study whatever they like. Others believe that they should only be allowed to study subjects that will be useful in the future, such as those related to science and technology.

Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.

People have different views about how much choice students should have with regard to what they can study at university. While some argue that it would be better for students to be forced into certain key subject areas, I believe that everyone should be able to study the course of their choice.

There are various reasons why people believe that universities should only offer subjects that will be useful in the future. They may assert that university courses like medicine, engineering and information technology are more likely to be beneficial than certain art degrees. From a personal perspective, it can be argued that these courses provide more job opportunities, career progression, better salaries, and therefore an improved quality of life for students who take them. On the societal level, by forcing people to choose particular university subjects, governments can ensure that any knowledge and skill gaps in the economy are covered. Finally, a focus on technology in higher education could lead to new inventions, economic growth, and greater future prosperity.

In spite of these arguments, I believe that university students should be free to choose their preferred areas of study. In my opinion, society will benefit more if our students are passionate about what they are learning. Besides, nobody can really predict which areas of knowledge will be most useful to society in the future, and it may be that employers begin to value creative thinking skills above practical or technical skills. If this were the case, perhaps we would need more students of art, history and philosophy than of science or technology.

In conclusion, although it might seem sensible for universities to focus only on the most useful subjects, I personally prefer the current system in which people have the right to study whatever they like.

(297 words, band 9)

Some people who have been in prison become good citizens later, and it is often argued that these are the best people to talk to teenagers about the dangers of committing a crime.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

It is true that ex-prisoners can become normal, productive members of society. I completely agree with the idea that allowing such people to speak to teenagers about their experiences is the best way to discourage them from breaking the law.

In my opinion, teenagers are more likely to accept advice from someone who can speak from experience. Reformed offenders can tell young people about how they became involved in crime, the dangers of a criminal lifestyle, and what life in prison is really like. They can also dispel any ideas that teenagers may have about criminals leading glamorous lives. While adolescents are often indifferent to the guidance given by older people, I imagine that most of them would be extremely keen to hear the stories of an ex-offender. The vivid and perhaps shocking nature of these stories is likely to have a powerful impact.

The alternatives to using reformed criminals to educate teenagers about crime would be much less effective. One option would be for police officers to visit schools and talk to young people. This could be useful in terms of informing teens about what happens to lawbreakers when they are caught, but young people are often reluctant to take advice from figures of authority. A second option would be for school teachers to speak to their students about crime, but I doubt that students would see teachers as credible sources of information about this topic. Finally, educational films might be informative, but there would be no opportunity for young people to interact and ask questions.

In conclusion, I fully support the view that people who have turned their lives around after serving a prison sentence could help to deter teenagers from committing crimes.

(287 words, band 9)

In many countries, a small number of people earn extremely high salaries. Some people believe that this is good for the country, but others think that governments should not allow salaries above a certain level.

Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.

People have different views about whether governments should introduce a maximum wage. While in some ways it may seem reasonable to allow people to earn as much as companies are willing to pay, I personally believe that employee remuneration should be capped at a certain level.

There are various reasons why it might be considered beneficial to allow people to be paid extremely high salaries. If companies offer excellent pay packages, they can attract the most talented people in their fields to work for them. For example, technology companies like Google are able to employ the best programmers because of the huge sums that they are willing to pay. Furthermore, these well-paid employees are likely to be highly motivated to work hard and therefore drive their businesses successfully. In theory, this should result in a thriving economy and increased tax revenues, which means that paying high salaries benefits everyone.

However, I agree with those who argue that there should be a maximum wage. By introducing a limit on earnings, the pay-gap between bosses and employees can be reduced. Currently, the difference between normal and top salaries is huge, and this can demotivate workers who feel that the situation is unfair. With lower executive salaries, it might become feasible to introduce higher minimum wages, and everybody would be better off. One possible consequence of greater equality could be that poverty and crime rates fall because the general population will experience an improved standard of living.

In conclusion, it seems to me that it would be better, on balance, for governments to set a limit on the wages of the highest earners in society.

(274 words, band 9)

Some people think that instead of preventing climate change, we need to find a way to live with it. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Climate change represents a major threat to life on Earth, but some people argue that we need to accept it rather than try to stop it. I completely disagree with this opinion, because I believe that we still have time to tackle this issue and reduce the human impact on the Earth's climate.

There are various measures that governments and individuals could take to prevent, or at least mitigate, climate change. Governments could introduce laws to limit the carbon dioxide emissions that lead to global warming. They could impose "green taxes" on drivers, airline companies and other polluters, and they could invest in renewable energy production from solar, wind or water power. As individuals, we should also try to limit our contribution to climate change, by becoming more energy efficient, by flying less, and by using bicycles and public transport. Furthermore, the public can affect the actions of governments by voting for politicians who propose to tackle climate change, rather than for those who would prefer to ignore it.

If instead of taking the above measures we simply try to live with climate change, I believe that the consequences will be disastrous. To give just one example, I am not optimistic that we would be able to cope with even a small rise in sea levels. Millions of people would be displaced by flooding, particularly in countries that do not have the means to safeguard low-lying areas. These people would lose their homes and their jobs, and they would be forced to migrate to nearby cities or perhaps to other countries. The potential for human suffering would be huge, and it is likely that we would see outbreaks of disease and famine, as well as increased homelessness and poverty.

In conclusion, it is clear to me that we must address the problem of climate change, and I disagree with those who argue that we can find ways to live with it.

(322 words, band 9)

Many governments think that economic progress is their most important goal. Some people, however, think that other types of progress are equally important for a country.

Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.

People have different views about how governments should measure their countries' progress. While economic progress is of course essential, I agree with those who believe that other measures of progress are just as important.

There are three key reasons why economic growth is seen as a fundamental goal for countries. Firstly, a healthy economy results in job creation, a high level of employment, and better salaries for all citizens. Secondly, economic progress ensures that more money is available for governments to spend on infrastructure and public services. For example, a government with higher revenues can invest in the country's transport network, its education system and its hospitals. Finally, a strong economy can help a country's standing on the global stage, in terms of its political influence and trading power.

However, I would argue that various other forms of progress are just as significant as the economic factors mentioned above. In particular, we should consider the area of social justice, human rights, equality and democracy itself. For example, the treatment of minority groups is often seen as a reflection of the moral standards and level of development of a society. Perhaps another key consideration when judging the progress of a modern country should be how well that country protects the natural environment, and whether it is moving towards environmental sustainability. Alternatively, the success of a nation could be measured by looking at the health, well-being and happiness of its residents.

In conclusion, the economy is obviously a key marker of a country's success, but social, environmental and health criteria are equally significant.

(262 words, band 9)

As well as making money, businesses also have social responsibilities. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Businesses have always sought to make a profit, but it is becoming increasingly common to hear people talk about the social obligations that companies have. I completely agree with the idea that businesses should do more for society than simply make money.

On the one hand, I accept that businesses must make money in order to survive in a competitive world. It seems logical that the priority of any company should be to cover its running costs, such as employees' wages and payments for buildings and utilities. On top of these costs, companies also need to invest in improvements and innovations if they wish to remain successful. If a company is unable to pay its bills or meet the changing needs of customers, any concerns about social responsibilities become irrelevant. In other words, a company can only make a positive contribution to society if it is in good financial health.

On the other hand, companies should not be run with the sole aim of maximising profit; they have a wider role to play in society. One social obligation that owners and managers have is to treat their employees well, rather than exploiting them. For example, they could pay a "living wage" to ensure that workers have a good quality of life. I also like the idea that businesses could use a proportion of their profits to support local charities, environmental projects or education initiatives. Finally, instead of trying to minimise their tax payments by using accounting loopholes, I believe that company bosses should be happy to contribute to society through the tax system.

In conclusion, I believe that companies should place as much importance on their social responsibilities as they do on their financial objectives.

(285 words, band 9)

It is inevitable that traditional cultures will be lost as technology develops. Technology and traditional cultures are incompatible. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this view?

Some people believe that technological developments lead to the loss of traditional cultures. I partly agree with this assertion; while it may be true in the case of some societies, others seem to be unaffected by technology and the modern world.

On the one hand, the advances in technology that have driven industrialisation in developed countries have certainly contributed to the disappearance of traditional ways of life. For example, in pre-industrial Britain, generations of families grew up in the same small village communities. These communities had a strong sense of identity, due to their shared customs and beliefs. However, developments in transport, communications and manufacturing led to the dispersal of families and village communities as people moved to the cities in search of work. Nowadays most British villages are inhabited by commuters, many of whom do not know their closest neighbours.

On the other hand, in some parts of the world traditional cultures still thrive. There are tribes in the Amazon Rainforest, for example, that have been completely untouched by the technological developments of the developed world. These tribal communities continue to hunt and gather food from the forest, and traditional skills are passed on to children by parents and elders. Other traditional cultures, such as farming communities in parts of Africa, are embracing communications technologies. Mobile phones give farmers access to information, from weather predictions to market prices, which helps them to prosper and therefore supports their culture.

In conclusion, many traditional ways of life have been lost as a result of advances in technology, but other traditional communities have survived and even flourished.

(266 words, band 9)

Most people have forgotten the meaning behind traditional or religious festivals; during festival periods, people nowadays only want to enjoy themselves. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?

Some people argue that we no longer remember the original meaning of festivals, and that most of us treat them as opportunities to have fun. While I agree that enjoyment seems to be the priority during festival times, I do not agree that people have forgotten what these festivals mean.

On the one hand, religious and traditional festivals have certainly become times for celebration. In the UK, Christmas is a good example of a festival period when people are most concerned with shopping, giving and receiving presents, decorating their homes and enjoying traditional meals with their families. Most people look forward to Christmas as a holiday period, rather than a time to practise religion. Similar behaviour can be seen during non-religious festivals, such as Bonfire Night. People associate this occasion with making fires, watching firework displays, and perhaps going to large events in local parks; in other words, enjoyment is people's primary goal.

However, I disagree with the idea that the underlying meaning of such festivals has been forgotten. In UK primary schools, children learn in detail about the religious reasons for celebrating Christmas, Easter and a variety of festivals in other religions. For example, in late December, children sing Christmas songs which have a religious content, and they may even perform nativity plays telling the story of Jesus' birth. Families also play a role in passing knowledge of religious festivals' deeper significance on to the next generation. The same is true for festivals that have a historical background, such as Bonfire Night or Halloween, in the sense that people generally learn the stories behind these occasions at an early age.

In conclusion, although people mainly want to enjoy themselves during festivals, I believe that they are still aware of the reasons for these celebrations.

(296 words, band 9)

Extreme sports such as sky diving and skiing are very dangerous and should be banned. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this view?

In recent years, extreme sports have become increasingly popular, and some people argue that governments should prohibit them. I completely disagree with the idea that these sports are too dangerous, and I therefore believe that they should not be banned.

In my opinion, so-called extreme sports are not as dangerous as many people think. All sports involve some element of risk, and there should always be clear regulations and safety procedures to reduce the possibility of accidents. People who take part in extreme sports are usually required to undergo appropriate training so that the dangers are minimised. For example, anyone who wants to try skydiving will need to sign up for lessons with a registered club, and beginners are not allowed to dive solo; they must be accompanied by an experienced professional. Finally, the protective equipment and technology used in sports from motor racing to mountain climbing is constantly improving safety.

While I support regulations and safety measures, I believe that it would be wrong, and almost impossible, to ban extreme sports. In the first place, we should all be free to decide how we spend our leisure time; as long as we understand the risks, I do not believe that politicians should stop us from enjoying ourselves. However, an even stronger argument against such a ban would be the difficulty of enforcing it. Many of the most risky sports, like base jumping or big wave surfing, are practised far away from the reach of any authorities. I cannot imagine the police being called to stop people from parachuting off a mountain face or surfing on an isolated beach.

In conclusion,...