Admissions Testing Service

BIOMEDICAL ADMISSIONS TEST

BMAT 2014

Section 3 sample responses with examiner comments

Question 1

The statement here is arguing from an extremely liberal viewpoint – they believe that people should be completely free to say what they want to and that when they do, other individuals or groups do not have the right to be offended or react harshly. Essentially they are saying that free speech is acceptable, even if it comes at the expense of others in society.

However, I strongly believe that while in theory, free speech and saying what you believe is to be condoned, that there are multitude of occassions and instances where it is inappropriate or unresponsible. For example, if a doctor has promised to provide a confidential service to their patient but goes on to release the information publicly, this is ethically unjustifiable and the patient has it within their rights to react negatively. Furthermore, where text or speech is used to promote violence, hate or prejudice, I feel that society should do more to stand up to it as it is known that incitement of violence and hate almost inevitably leads to negative consequences. Free speech used in this way can not only provoke individuals but can have large scale devastating effects on the security and welfare of different communities and groups.

Therefore, as there is a myriad of ways in which speech used carelessly and thoughtlessly can be threatening and provoke negativity, there should, to some extent, be controls on how far free speech can go. The main aim here is not to silence groups or communities, but to promote equality and empathy for others opinions and views. The main example here would be with groups inciting hate or prejudice against other groups, be that for their culture, gender, political beliefs, etc. Here, careful considered measures should be taken to ensure that speech and text are not used in a derogatory way which undoubtedly would provoke a negative response, but that it is used to promote equality, dialogue and reasoned debate. Therefore, it is not honesty that should be limited, but inappropriate and out of date agenda which should be reduced. While it is difficult to control, in an equal society promoting values such as respect for one another and placing value on reasonable discussion, people should be careful what they say and consider the long-term effect it could have.

Examiner comments

This response follows a clear plan; it is obviously structured by the components of the question. It begins with a clear definition and also explains the reasoning behind the statement (rather than just stating what it means), which shows that the writer has carefully read the question.

It uses a simple but relevant example to make its point and comes to a definite conclusion that society should monitor speech but not directly control it.

All aspects of the question are addressed effectively, providing a good counter-proposition. The argument is expressed in a clear and rational form, drawing things together into a balanced consideration of both sides.

Marks: 4.5A

Question 1

"There is no such thing as dangerous speech; It is up to people to choose how they react."

Firstly, the definition of 'dangerous speech' is any form of communication, verbal or written, which is harmful to the receiver or receivers of this communication. The writer of the statement therefore states that no form of communication can cause harm to an individual, if they choose to react positively to whatever communication they have received.

The statement is fundamentally flawed because people cannot choose how they react. By definition, a reaction is a result of a certain trigger. For example, if someone is told that they have awful teeth and look fat in what they are wearing, it is not in their power to choose to be unoffended or uninsulted. Whether they choose to shine a positive light onto the comment is irrelevant as their initial reaction was hurtful, and the comment therefore classifies as dangerous speech.

There is a lot of evidence to suggest that there is such a thing as dangerous speech. For example, there have been cases of cyber-bullying where victims have committed suicide, and therefore the statement is incorrect by saying 'there is no such thing as dangerous speech'.

Having said this, in many countries including the UK, the 'Freedom of speech' human rights act allows people the ability to speak freely, and therefore society cannot regulate what is said by everyone. Limitations of speech would be a breech of this human rights act, however people can be strongly discouraged from saying things which may harm others. For example, the politician who called someone 'a pleb' was ridiculed and torn apart by the media for his actions, and therefore people realise that it is, in fact, not okay to say certain things as they can be extremely offensive, without society directly intervening with what people say.

Examiner comments

There is no need for students to write out the question statement. It should always be clear exactly which question is being answered. This starts off by defining dangerous speech but does not then explain the reasoning behind the statement.

It uses an example to create a good counter-argument and makes a clear conclusion that limiting speech is an infringement on human rights so that it could be harmful. The observation that there are more indirect ways to influence people than by controlling their speech is a good one.

While it is a well-argued response that does engage with all aspects of the question, the first paragraph is weak in that it focuses on defining, rather than explaining, the statement.

Good examples are used to clarify points, though the conclusion assumes that limiting speech is a breach of human rights without presenting any argument for such a view. If those weaknesses had been addressed, this could have received a score of 4.

Marks: 3A

Question 2

The statement emphasises that science and our understanding of diseases is continually changing. With the knowledge we gain from experiments, trials and studies we can try and understand the whole picture and get closer to the smaller details, the truth of science.

Science is a continuous advancement because there is always new research into different diseases to try and cure them or to understand how they work in order to control them, for example cancer research. There have also been drug trials for alzeimers which shows great improvement in some patients. This shows we are continually advancing in the depth of our knowledge and positive outcomes. There have been experiments and studies to show that animals like tigers can get skin grafts and not reject them; whereas humans need a lot of immuno-suppresants to be able to control their reactions to the skin. With this knowledge we can identify why there are differences in the reactions of the two mammals and understand their nature.

On the other hand, science may not be a continuous advancement because many trials and experiments fail time and time again until something is achieved. It may take weeks or even months to gain any information which may help in gaining the knowledge you desire. Sometimes, there are random experiments which take you nowhere new and this may not seem as an advancement into the science, rather a disadvantage. We also use animals in many of our trials to gain information, which may harm the creatures so in doing so we are not advancing in science as we are harming other creatures in order to possibly benefit. There is no definite outcome, only a possibility. In conclusion, I agree with the statement because even if drug trials fail for example, we can learn from it and understand why, which would lead us closer to a positive outcome. New technology, new ideas and more money is being invested into research which will help the advancement of science by allowing more experiments to be conducted and new technology to be developed and overall lead to a positive outcome, the objective truth.

Examiner comments

This starts off referring to science as continually changing rather than continuously advancing. Researching different diseases does not really constitute advancement of science – they could all be researched in the same way and use the same techniques to develop cures.

The conclusion does not express the idea of learning from mistakes, and objective truth is seen as an outcome rather than as the goal of science.

While the response addresses all aspects of the question in a reasonably logical way, it does not make good use of the examples provided and fails to really engage with the concept of continuous advancement.

Marks: 2.5A

Question 2

The statement argues that science is a way of finding out things that, until that point, were unknown. It also dictates that science has always been moving forward, and stops once a 'truth' is found. I disagree with science being a 'process of continuous advancement'. 'Science' may be split up into 3 main catagories, chemistry, physics and biology. Within chemistry most of the early models of the atom were found to be incorrect, despite being given the status of 'truth'. This was mainly because the models were theorised, and it was only when technology caught up that they could be proved wrong. The same is true of physics as most of Einsteins models were theorised and many equations on which physics is based are only theories. However once they are proved wrong the advancement does continue in order to find the 'truth'. Biology is a study of the physical world, and is used to help humans gain a better understanding of it. There are periods of stagnation in biology where nothing more can be 'discovered' down a certain route as we do not possess the means to work it out. For instance, the light microscope allowed the discovery of cells and simple features, such as nuclei. It was then assumed that nothing more was in the cells than the features that were then visible. However, the electron microscope allowed other organelles such as RER to be discovered. Science has been used in other ways as well, for instance in ancient times medicine was originally used only to cure simple problems, such as infection, and although truths were discovered, by figures such as Marie Antoinette, the aim was only to cure the patient, not to find out about the human anatomy, as it was not relevant what the 'doctor' wanted to do. In conclusion I agree to the statement to an extent in that the aim is to find out 'objective truths', however much of what is believed then discovered is then proved wrong.

Examiner comments

The response opens with a straightforward explanation of the statement. It uses clear examples, but the writer focuses too much on explaining them and doesn't make enough use of them to make multiple points – two of the examples make the same point. The reference to Marie Antoinette is an obvious error.

The argument itself is reasonable and rational, but the conclusion is too brief and lacks force as it fails to elaborate to what extent the writer agrees with the statement.

Marks: 3A

Question 3

Curing a disease seems like the first priority, however, for pharmaceutical companies, it could be their demise, and I believe this is what the writer is suggesting. If a disease is cured, people are no longer having to take medication for that disease, which means in turn people are no longer paying for the medication which somewhat obviously suggests a lower income for the pharma industry. Medication makes money – it's as simple as that. Yet an opposing stance could be taken; money is saved by not having to treat people for their disease. It puts less financial strain on healthcare providers once a disease is cured as it means for the NHS more beds in hospitals are free, more doctors are available and less resources and equipment must be bought to cater for very specific, life threatening diseases if cures are found. This could however only be suggesting that there is money to be saved, not necessarily made from curing diseases.

It can be considered that disease is the biggest source of income in today's economy as it is a constant, large money gainer. For now, at least, there are always people who are ill, and always people who, in this country, must pay for prescriptions and even, in places such as the USA, those who must pay for all treatment of diseases. The income from disease also rarely fluctuates, due to the abundance and variation of diseases – some cures are seemingly impossible to cure at present so an income from them is guaranteed. Conversly, disease could be the area in which the most financial strain on the economy occurs. With a growing, and aging population, the rope around the neck of the NHS is being pulled, because so much money is having to be employed into the constitution to maintain it, money that is being spent to help to deal with people with diseases. I believe the money gained from disease is diminished by the money that has to be spent trying to deal with it.

Examiner comments

A good response. It picks up on the distinction between saving money and making money that many candidates did not make. The response is not explicitly structured according to the parts of the question but it clearly addresses all aspects, rationally argues and justifies ideas after a balanced consideration and discussion.

The response has a clear structure and is coherent even when the argument is spread out. Though this sometimes weakens the force of the points or distracts the writer from fully justifying some elements of their argument, it is still an effective response to the question.

Marks: 4A

Question 3

The writer is indicating that drug companies, in particular, would rather treat a disease than completely cure it. The research process costs a huge amount of money, money which has to be at least made back but at best profited upon. The main source of income are patened drugs that can be sold for extortionate amounts. If they, the drug companies, provide a cure for a disease they will only make a single profit on first time treatment. Beyond that they will only be selling the drugs to new cases and not repeat cases. I believe that this in turn will lead to the collapse of the pharmasutical industry unless significant government money is poured into it, to promote the development of full-on cures. As nearly everyone falls ill in their life, the disease industry is a huge part of making money in our economy as proven by huge pharmasutical companies.

However it could be argued there is not money to be made in not curing disease. Failed research into treatments of disease cost vast sums of money. As cures to diseases can be extremely complex mechanisms, they could easily fail in clinical trails. Since more drugs fail clinical trails than pass them it can cost pharmasutical companies hundreds of millions of pounds per year. In addition I would argue it is unethical to treat for money. The value of a human life should far exceed any price tags placed on its head. With that in mind I also furthermore believe that pharmasutical companies should base their drug development on the need of the drug rather than the overall profit or monetary gain they would achieve from it.

Examiner comments

This response has a very narrow focus on pharmaceutical companies and patented drugs, ignoring other elements. The counter-arguments are a bit weak (that failed research still costs lots of money and the failure rate is high, and an ethical argument that leads to claiming that all treatment should be free).

The final conclusion is reasonable, but lacks real force. The argument is rational and coherent – focusing on a single area helps this, but the conclusion itself tries to bring in multiple arguments at a late stage, which weakens the overall force and impact.

Marks: 3A