



SPhL 2026 Official Statement

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(Dated: September 28, 2026)

I. INTRODUCTION

The Singapore Physics League 2026 welcomed over 3500 participants from 126 schools across Singapore. Following the Online Round, 50 top teams from each category were selected to participate in the SPhL Grand Finals.

In this statement, we summarise the key events and statistics of SPhL 2026. Secs. II and III describe the Online Round and Grand Finals respectively. Sec. IV presents our decision-making process and investigation procedure after following the Online Round, while Sec. V explains our position on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the competition. We then review the changes made to SPhL 2026 in Sec. 1, before discussing our future plans in Sec. VII and concluding in Sec. VIII.

II. ONLINE ROUND

The preliminary Online Round was held on the Singapore Physics League website on 27 June, from 2:00pm to 5:00pm.

A few selected statistics of the Online Round are shown in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 on the following page. In general, teams that were eventually disqualified had substantially higher scores and solved a larger portion of problems than teams that remained on the final leaderboard. After disqualifications, the score distributions for both rounds are broadly similar to those from previous years; the corresponding distributions can be found in the 2025 AI Statement.

Initial Investigation		Number of teams
No interview offered	324 (249 confessed/accepted DQ)	
Offered appeal interview		146 (82 interviewed)
Interview results		Number of teams
Cleared		19
Partial disqualification		26
Full disqualification		37
Final Verdict		Number of teams
Participating teams	818 (3529 participants)	
Cleared teams		354
Partially disqualified teams		45
Fully disqualified teams		419

TABLE I. Summary of outcomes in SPhL 2026. Our rationale and methodology for the investigation procedure are outlined in Sec. IV.

III. GRAND FINALS

The SPhL 2026 Grand Finals were held at the Singapore University of Technology and Design on 18 July (for the Junior category) and 25 July (for the Senior category). 100 teams (comprising 431 participants) were invited across both categories.

The contest included both theoretical and experimental problems, on topics ranging from the dynamics of neurons to the properties of a capacitor shaded with pencil lead. The problems for both categories are available [here](#). Following the contest, Junior contestants were treated to a special lecture delivered by Prof. Dario Poletti from SUTD, while Senior contestants were engaged by Prof. Kwek Leong Chuan from CQT (NUS). Some pictures of the event can be found in Sec. V.

To wrap up this section, we would like to congratulate the Champions of SPhL 2026: team “jeggery penguin” in the Junior category and team “heisenberg” in the Senior category!

IV. INVESTIGATION PROCEDURE

Our investigation into suspected cases of academic misconduct was guided by three principles:

Fairness. Each team was treated in accordance with its activities during the competition, without consideration of prior competition results, school, or level. The same investigative procedure was used for all teams.

Clemency. We believed that incorrect presumptions of misconduct (false positives) were more damaging to the competition’s integrity than failing to detect a few cases of misconduct (false negatives). Thus, as far as possible, we sought to provide teams the benefit of the doubt when evidence permitted.

Individual responsibility. In a large number of cases, it was probable that not every member participated in academic misconduct. Therefore, for all disqualified teams, we asked for further clarification on the actions of each member and assigned individual responsibility whenever possible.

A brief sketch of our investigation procedure is provided below. A flowchart of this process is also provided in Fig. 3.

1. **Data collection.** Data on all teams’ activities (unlocks, submits, skips, and other actions) on the platform were logged throughout the competition and automatically processed to detect markers of

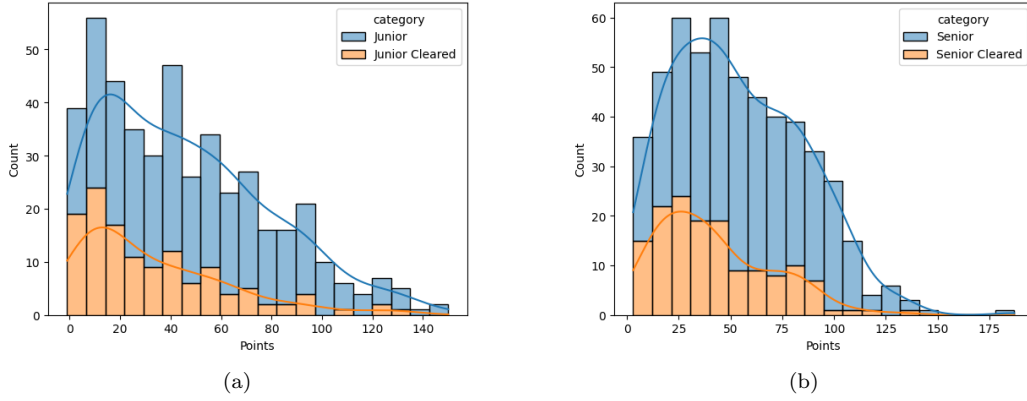


FIG. 1. Score distributions from the online round. (a) Junior score distributions before and after disqualification. (b) Senior score distributions before and after disqualification.

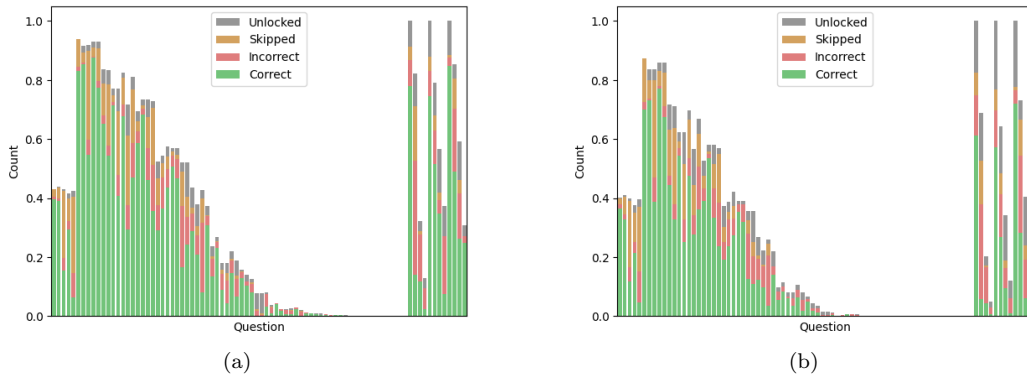


FIG. 2. Relative counts of the final state of each problem, aggregated over all participating teams, from the online round. (a) Relative counts before disqualification. (b) Relative counts after disqualification.

academic misconduct. All teams were also asked to submit rough workings produced during the competition, which were also analysed. The investigation then proceeded in two stages:

2. **Manual review.** Each automatically flagged case was independently reviewed by at least three members of the Organising Team. Initial cases were categorised as follows:

- (a) **Disqualification of the entire team.** Where the extent and/or severity of misconduct detected did not warrant further review.
- (b) **Partial disqualification.** Where the available evidence suggested that misconduct was likely confined to only a single member. The team was then asked to clarify each member's activities during the contest.
- (c) **Appeal interview.** Where the irregularities detected could plausibly have arisen incidentally. The team was offered an appeal interview with the OT and provided the opportunity to clarify any issues.
- (d) **Pending further investigation / cleared.**

These teams were sent an Academic Integrity Declaration form for further assessment.

3. **Appeal interview.** During appeal interviews, teams were invited to present their case and any supplemental evidence. A few problems for which suspicious activity was flagged were highlighted and participants were tasked to explain their solutions, thought processes, and web search activities while solving these problems. The interview recording and evidence were then presented to a panel, which determined the final verdict.

4. **Final verdict.** After interviews and further investigation concluded, the following decisions were made via a panel vote:

- (a) **Disqualification of the entire team.** If the individual(s) responsible for anomalies could not be reliably identified.
- (b) **Disqualification of select members.** If a confession was made or all indicators consistently pointed to a specific individual.
- (c) **Cleared of academic misconduct.**

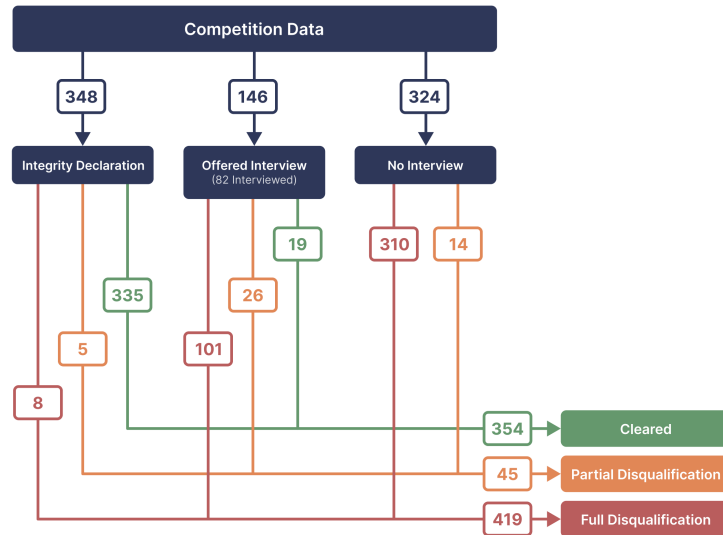


FIG. 3. A flowchart detailing the disqualification process. Numbers on lines in the flowchart represent the number of teams which were given the corresponding verdict.

V. STANCE ON AI

We previously laid out several arguments regarding the role of Generative Artificial Intelligence in physics education and assessment in the [2025 AI Statement](#). Briefly, while we were generally supportive of the use of AI in formative assessment and pedagogy, we did not believe it had a place in SPhL. Our concerns were that AI could encourage offloading of cognition without insight, inflate the required difficulty of competition problems beyond common sensibility, and create a performance gap between teams using state-of-the-art (paid) models and those using lower-context web models.

While the consensus of the current OT has not shifted significantly from that of our predecessors, there are a few points specific to this year’s contest that we shall cover in this section.

A. Team responsibility

Based on our investigations, we believe that only a minority of participants actively used AI during the competition. Indeed, for many teams, it was apparent that only one or two members had been involved in extensive academic misconduct. We recognise that the majority of contestants did adhere to the rules of the competition. However, in many cases, we were unable to pinpoint the members responsible and were compelled to remove the entire team. It is an unfortunate corollary of team-based competitions such as this; one bad apple can spoil the bunch.

The OT does not wish to (and, practically, cannot) monitor each participant individually for the duration of the competition. We therefore urge contestants of future

editions to exercise vigilance towards the conduct of their teammates and report any violations to the OT immediately. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of each team to ensure that all of its members abide by the rules of the competition.

B. Google AI Overview

A large number of disqualified teams reported the use of AI Overview as a solving aid. A common perception was that it was merely an extended search tool, an aggregator of useful links rather than a model capable of answering problems independently. We understand the prevalence of this assumption, particularly given how integrated AI Overview is to the modern search engine experience. However, we cannot treat this assumption as grounds for permitting its use.

Ignorantia juris non excusat. Ignorance of the rules does not excuse. The AI Overview ban was written down (in no uncertain terms) in both the FAQ of the SPhL website and pre-event communications. We also do not believe that “*ignorantia facti excusat*” — ignorance of facts excuses — can be reasonably invoked. Even without knowledge of the tool’s inner workings, its name alone should have prompted one to exercise caution. Moreover, simple testing of AI Overview (by, say, pasting in contest problems) would reveal that it can (and often does) generate the entire solution to given problems.

Nevertheless, we recognise that there is a distinction between using AI Overview as a search interface and using it as a Generative AI tool. Therefore, for SPhL 2026, we elected to offer leniency to teams using AI Overview purely as a search aid for unfamiliar concepts or equations. We could not extend the same leniency to those

who used AI output – including ultimate answers or penultimate equations – wholesale.

VI. REVIEW OF CHANGES TO SPHL 2026

As part of our ongoing transition away from a purely online competition, we made several changes to the format of SPHL 2026.

1. **Casual Track.** This year, we rolled out SPHL Casual – an alternative to the typical competitive system that opened its doors to all and allowed for any form of assistance. From foreign teams to individual contestants, and even a full team of physics teachers, this track brought together participants from a wide range of backgrounds.

As expected, several teams in this track performed extremely well, clearing almost the entire paper.

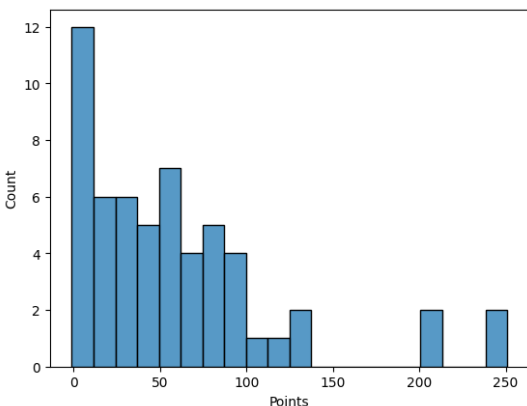


FIG. 4. Score distribution from the casual round.

From both Casual Track feedback and internal testing, the gulf between AI models has only widened over the last year; cheaper, web-based models perform significantly worse than paid models, and even open-weight models still require a large amount of compute to perform at a competitive level.

2. **Grand Finals Expansion** Along with extending Grand Finals to Junior teams, we greatly increased the number of teams invited to each Grand Finals (from 32 last year up to 50), allowing more than twice as many students to participate in the physical event. In addition, almost all medals were decided by teams’ performance in the Grand Finals, with the Online round accounting for only half of the Bronze medals.

In all, we believe that the Grand Finals were a success this year, and we look forward to continuing to expand and improve the event in future editions of the competition.

3. **Shortened Online Round.** In line with our goal of focusing the competition on the physical Grand Finals, we shortened the duration of the Online

Round from 4 to 3 hours this year. This reduced the problem load for the Online Round, allowing the OT to spend more time setting and refining Finals problems. We also aimed to lower the difficulty of the early Online problems in tandem, with mixed results. Based on data collected from previous editions of the competition, we do not believe that shortening the duration of the competition affected the final rankings and invitations to the Grand Finals significantly.

4. **Video/audio problems.** We introduced problems involving video or audio analysis in the Online round. These included Problem 9: Audio Cue, where participants were tasked to find the dimensions of a room from a recording of an echoing sound within it, and Problem 38: Spin-2, where participants analysed a video of light passing through two polarisers. These problems enabled participants to conduct (mock) data analysis of a phenomenon, effectively processing experimental data virtually. The general feedback we got for these problems was positive — and we intend to continue exploring the possibilities of this (and other) problem formats in the Online Round next year.

VII. MOVING FORWARD

It is clear that the Online Round is rapidly becoming outmoded, and a focus on the Grand Finals is the only way the competition can continue to succeed. Moving forward, we are considering the following options for next year’s competition format.

A. Online Round

Despite our repeated emphasis on the AI ban over the last two years, there were still a large number of participants who did not heed our warnings. As mentioned before the competition, we notified schools of our decisions regarding the participating students.

This investigation procedure has been mentally exhausting and unpleasant, both for the Organising Team and the participants. While we still hope to preserve the spirit of the Online round, we no longer believe that this process is sustainable.

We initially attributed the spate of cheating in 2025 to the fact that it was the first year the ban was introduced. However, its recurrence — and to an even greater extent — in 2026 cannot be dismissed as easily. Regrettably, we must conclude that relying solely on participants to self-regulate is not a viable approach.

In the coming year, the Organising Team will work on developing direct methods to deter AI usage and prevent students from utilising such prohibited tools during the competition itself. We have considered the following ways to continue the competition:



FIG. 5. Some photos of the Grand Finals. (a-b) Finale Photo. (c) Organising and Support Team. (d) Competition. (e-f) Award ceremony.

- (a) **Preserve the Online Round.** SPhL was created to be a fun competition with low barriers for all students to enjoy, and we hope to preserve the spirit of the competition by continuing to have a collaborative online round. As such, this remains our preferred approach.

However, as self-regulation by students has proven ineffective, we concluded that this approach is viable only if we are able to introduce more direct measures to prevent students from utilising Generative AI during the competition itself. The OT is currently looking into the implementation of such methods.

- (b) **Dual Intake.** Another interesting option that we considered was the possibility of multiple qualifying paths for the Grand Finals.

The first path would allow students to register individually through their respective schools. Each school would be given the opportunity to send students to the Grand Finals, subject to availability and event constraints.

The second path would constitute a small intake of teams through a reduced online qualifier. Generative Artificial Intelligence tools would still be prohibited for teams considered for entry to the Grand Finals through this path.

- (c) **Remove the Online Round entirely.** We considered this option as a last resort; the Online Round is, after all, the beating heart of SPhL. However, removing the Online Round would allow the

AI ban to be enforced via physical invigilation at the Grand Finals, and provide a more sustainable format as AI capabilities continue to progress.

On the flip side, it is likely that the current limitations on the number of teams we can support at the Grand Finals would force us to significantly downsize the competition. It would also place additional logistical demands on schools to select and send teams to the Finals.

B. Grand Finals

In 2027, we hope to further expand the Grand Finals — enabling more students to enjoy a physical round and shifting our focus towards the Finals. As the experimental problems were well received this year, we have elected to make them a permanent fixture in future editions of the Grand Finals (and thus unveil yet another bonus mechanic?).

VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This year marks the second in our slow phase transition from a primarily online competition to a physical one. While the road behind has not been void of potholes and pratfalls, we hope that we can continue to maintain the spirit of SPhL — free, fun, and open to all — as we continue down this path. We look forward to seeing you all next year at SPhL 2027!