

Examiners' report

GCSE

TWENTY FIRST CENTURY SCIENCE PHYSICS B

OCR Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in
Physics B (Twenty First Century Science)

J259

For first teaching in 2016

J259/02 Summer 2025 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate responses is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from [Teach Cambridge](#).

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Paper 2 series overview

J259/02 is one of the two Foundation Tier components of GCSE (9-1) Physics B (Twenty First Century Science). Candidates will have already sat the examination for the Breadth in Physics component, and this is the examination for the Depth in Physics component. Questions 9 and 10 are also on the Higher tier paper. The same mark scheme is used for these questions for Foundation and Higher Tier.

This component assesses content from across the specification. It includes two extended response questions giving candidates an opportunity to demonstrate their deeper understanding of specific aspects of the specification. To do well on this component, candidates need to be able to apply their understanding to new concepts. They also need to apply their practical and mathematical skills to experimental contexts. In calculation questions, they should write out the equations used and show the steps of their working clearly.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• used clearly comparative language where needed • showed clear and full working on calculations • were able to identify variables and use them to select and/or substitute into equations • communicated their ideas clearly, using correct terminology • were able to apply their understanding of concepts to new contexts • were able to identify improvements to experimental procedures.	• gave responses using terminology incorrectly • showed partial workings • were able to substitute some, but not all, quantities correctly in calculation questions • found rearranging equations challenging • recalled some key definitions but couldn't apply these to new contexts.

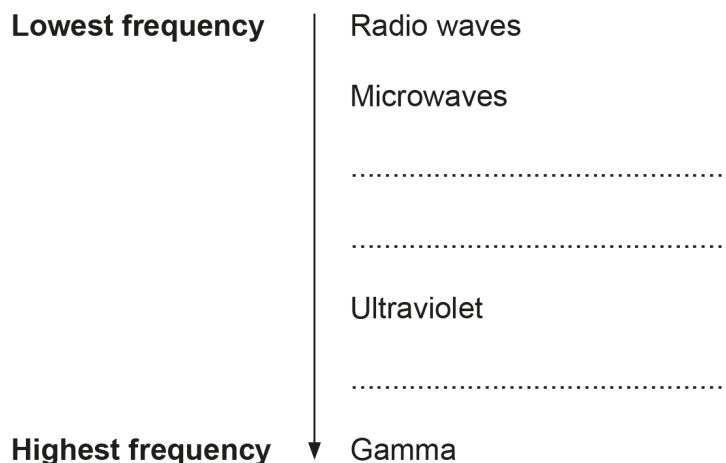
Question 1 (a)

1 Electromagnetic spectrum radiation ranges from a low to a high frequency.

(a) Complete the list to show all parts of the electromagnetic spectrum in order from lowest frequency to highest frequency.

Use these words.

Infrared	Visible light	X-rays
----------	---------------	--------



[2]

Most candidates identified at least one correct position. The most common error was putting infrared and visible light the wrong way around.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Which statements about the electromagnetic spectrum are **true** and which are **false**?

Tick (✓) **one** box in each row.

	True	False
All parts of the electromagnetic spectrum travel at the speed of light.		
Gamma radiation has the longest wavelength.		
Radio waves carry the greatest energy.		
Visible light is a transverse wave.		

[3]

Candidates typically matched at least the 3rd and 4th statements correctly.

Question 1 (c)

(c) When electromagnetic radiation hits a material, it can be **absorbed**, **reflected**, or **transmitted**.

What happens to the electromagnetic radiation in these situations?

Tick (✓) **one** box in each row.

	Absorbed	Reflected	Transmitted
Infrared radiation heats up a plastic block.			
Microwaves bounce off a metal sheet.			
Visible light passes through glass.			

[2]

This was generally well answered. Candidates were able to apply their understanding of these key terms to the contexts provided.

Question 2 (a)

2 A scientist has two pieces of equipment to send to the Moon.

They want to find the weight of both pieces of equipment.

(a) Which statement about mass and weight is **true**?

Tick (✓) **one** box.

Mass is a force.

☐

The weight is equal to the mass.

☐

Weight is the force on a mass due to gravity.

☐

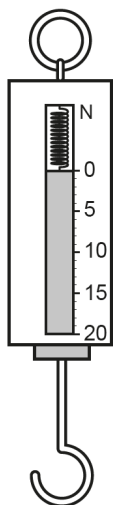
[1]

This question was generally well answered.

Question 2 (b)

(b) The diagram shows a spring balance.

A spring balance uses a spring to measure weight.



The scientist hangs a small piece of equipment on the spring balance. The spring extends. They then replace the equipment with a heavier piece of equipment.

Describe what happens to the extension of the spring when the small piece of equipment is replaced with the heavier piece.

.....
..... [1]

This was generally well answered, although some candidates did not use comparative language here, stating that 'the spring extends'.

Assessment for learning



In questions including a comparison, e.g. 'the small piece of equipment is replaced with the heavier piece' – candidates should use comparative language in their responses.

Question 2 (c)

- (c) One piece of equipment is hung from the spring balance.

The spring extends by 0.08 m.

The spring has a spring constant of 250 N/m.

Calculate the force exerted by the spring.

Use the Equation Sheet.

Force exerted by the spring = N [3]

While mostly well answered, a small number of candidates made transcription errors, particularly with the value 0.08, giving as 0.8 instead. ECF (error carried forward) was allowed where the equation had been correctly applied.

Successful candidates commonly wrote out the equation they had selected and substituted next to, or underneath, the equation.

Few candidates selected the elastic potential energy equation.

Question 2 (d)

- (d) The other piece of equipment has a mass of 12 kg.
The gravitational field strength on the Moon is 1.6 N/kg.

Calculate the weight of this piece of equipment on the Moon.

Use the equation: weight = mass $\times$ gravitational field strength

Weight = N [2]

This question was very well answered. Most candidates were able to substitute the values and calculate the weight.

Question 3 (a) (i)

3 This question is about waves.

(a) Sound waves are longitudinal waves.

(i) Which statements about sound waves are **true**?

Tick (✓) **two** boxes.

Sound waves can only travel in air.

☐

Sound waves transfer energy.

☐

Sound waves travel at the same speed as the speed of light in air.

☐

The number of sound waves every second is the frequency.

☐

[2]

This was well answered. Most candidates were able to apply their understanding of waves to this sound waves context.

Question 3 (a) (ii)

(ii) Which statements about longitudinal waves are **true**?

Tick (✓) **two** boxes.

Longitudinal waves are a series of compressions.

☐

Longitudinal waves can travel in space.

☐

The disturbance of particles is parallel to the direction of motion.

☐

The disturbance of particles is at right angles to the direction of motion.

☐

[2]

This was well answered, although typically less well than part (a) (i). Less successful candidates were unclear on the features and definitions of longitudinal versus transverse waves.

Question 3 (b)

(b) A student does an experiment to calculate the speed of a water wave.

They fill a tray with water and take measurements of a wave travelling across the water.

The time for 1 wave to travel to the end of the tray and back is 18 seconds.

The length of the tray is 45 cm.

Calculate the speed of the wave.

Use the equation: $\text{speed} = \frac{\text{distance}}{\text{time}}$

Give your answer in **m/s**.

Speed of water wave =m/s **[4]**

This was one of the more challenging calculation questions on this paper.

There were several steps required to be fully successful in this question. Many candidates correctly substituted values. Fewer candidates successfully converted the distance from cm to m. Fewer again realised that they needed to either double the distance or halve the time to correctly calculate the speed of the wave.

Question 3 (c)*

(c)* Describe a method for finding the speed of sound in **air**.

Include in your answer:

- the apparatus used
- possible sources of error.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [6]

Candidates found this question challenging. Many described methods for finding wave speed (e.g. ripple tank) but needed to be able to measure the speed of **sound** to access Level 2. The most common error identified was linked to human reaction time with starting and stopping the stopwatch, closely followed by a consideration of how the volume of a sound could lead to inaccuracies.

Exemplar 1

~~The~~ To find the speed of sound in air you could use a stopwatch and two people or a speaker. Enter a large area such as a hall, field or large room. One person can stand at the other end and; speak, make a noise, yell or play the speaker. As they make the noise they press the stopwatch and time how long it takes until you hear it ~~if you can signal to them or shout once you hear then they stop the timer.~~ closely. Measure the distance between yourselves and then do $\text{distance} \div \text{time}$ to find the speed. Possible errors such as outliers on your time, not starting the stopwatch soon enough and incorrect ^{measurements} of the distance may occur. ^{this} To prevent ^{this}, repeat the experiment 3 times and create a table. Once repeated calculate the total mean. Before calculating the mean remove any outliers. Once completed, add up your ~~total~~ ^{average} speeds and divide by how many times you repeated the experiment (not including outliers). [6]

This response achieved 6 out of 6 marks. They have described a valid method (echo method) for finding the speed of sound in air, including the need for a large distance, and have considered possible sources of error making this a good Level 3 response.

Exemplar 2

To find the speed of sound, you need a
 stop clock, a ~~metre~~ meter ruler. There will be
 2 people involved. These two will stand at a distance
 of around 50 metres apart. One will be holding
 a stop clock. The other person will create a noise,
 like screaming, singing, anything. The person with
 the stop clock will start the timer for when the
 other person makes noise and will end the timer
 when they can hear the noise. They will repeat
 this and find an average. do the calculation of
 $s = D/t$ and then find the average speed.

[6]

This response achieved 4 out of 6 marks. They gave a good method for finding the speed of sound using the flash-bang method. They identified a significant distance was required and named the other apparatus needed. They did not identify possible sources of error so this was a good Level 2 response.

Exemplar 3

- Use a stopwatch, 2 people and a long distance from one another.
- When both people are at a far enough distance, note it down and begin the practical.
- One person starts the stopwatch while the other ~~note~~ shouts / says something.
- Stop the stopwatch once the sound is heard.
- Note down the time then do D/T to find out the speed.
- This method may be invalid as the stopwatch may be started too soon or stopped too slow/fast. (human error) [6]

This response achieved 5 out of 6 marks. They have described a valid method (flash-bang method) for finding the speed of sound in air, including the need for a large distance, and have considered possible sources of error. The communication statement of 'information presented is relevant and substantiated' was not met so a lower Level 3 response.

Question 4 (a)

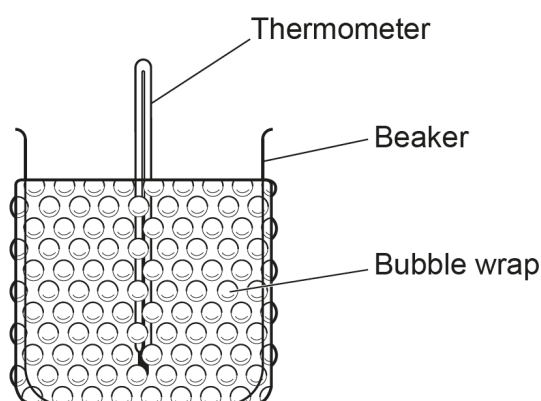
- 4 A student investigates how layers of bubble wrap can be used to insulate a beaker of hot water.

They cover the sides of two beakers in bubble wrap insulation.

- One beaker has **one** layer of bubble wrap.
- The other beaker has **two** layers of bubble wrap.

They also use a third beaker that has **no** bubble wrap.

The diagram shows how the beaker with one layer of bubble wrap is set up.



They follow this method:

- Fill each beaker with hot water.
- Record the initial temperature of the water in each beaker.
- Record the temperature of the water in each beaker every 5 minutes, as the water cools.

- (a) Suggest **two** variables that the student needs to control.

1

2

[2]

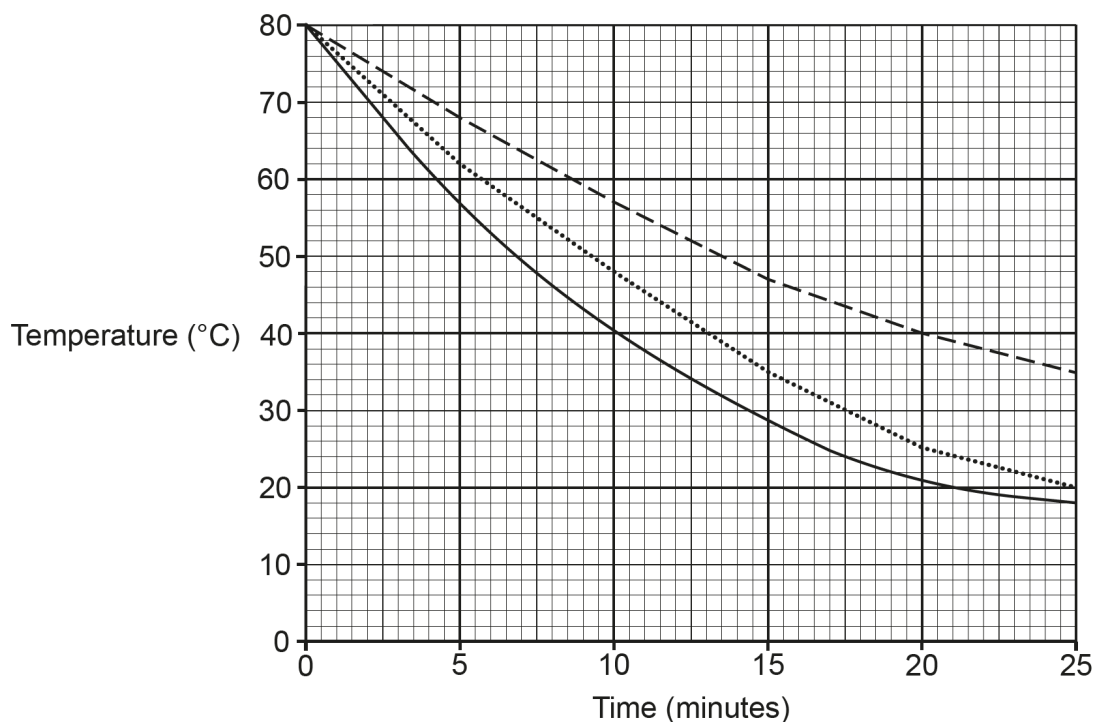
Less successful candidates found this question challenging. Most candidates were able to identify at least one variable which would need to be controlled. Some identified that temperature would need to be controlled, but as the change in temperature was the dependent variable here, candidates needed to control **initial** water temperature.

Question 4 (b)

(b) The graph shows how the temperature changes with time for the three beakers.

Key:

- Beaker with **two** layers of bubble wrap
- Beaker with **one** layer of bubble wrap
- Beaker with **no** layers of bubble wrap



Which **two** of these conclusions can be made from this graph?

Tick (✓) **two** boxes.

After 10 minutes the temperature of the water is the same in all the beakers.

The temperature in each beaker dropped more quickly when the water was hotter.

The water cools more quickly with more layers of insulation.

The water stays warmer for longer with more layers of insulation.

☐
☐
☐
☐

[2]

This was very well answered. Most candidates were able to identify the appropriate conclusions using the graph.

Question 4 (c)

(c) Suggest **one** improvement that the student can make to their investigation.

..... [1]

Candidates found this question challenging. Successful candidates identified ways to extend the investigation by taking more readings to calculate a mean or testing more layers of bubble wrap.

Question 5 (a)

5 A radioactive isotope decays by emitting an alpha particle.

(a) An alpha particle is a helium-4 nucleus and can be written as:



How many protons and neutrons are contained in the nucleus of helium-4?

Number of protons =

Number of neutrons =

[2]

This question was not well answered. The majority of candidates stated 4 protons and 2 neutrons.

Misconception



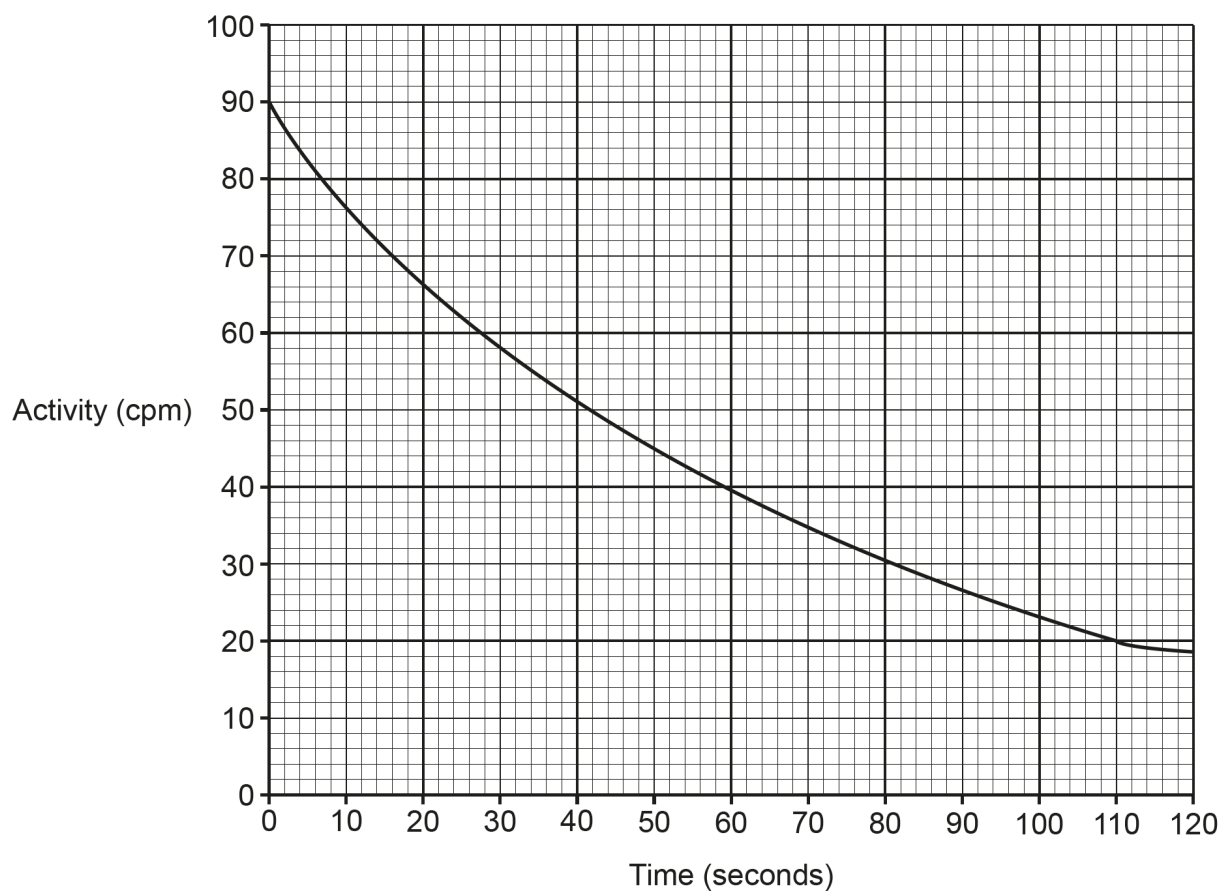
Successful candidates identified that we were looking for the numbers of subatomic particles here rather than the mass and atomic numbers.

Students may need to practice quantifying mass, atomic, proton, electron and neutron numbers across a range of elements regularly.

Question 5 (b) (i)

(b) The graph shows the activity-time graph for a radioactive isotope.

The activity is measured in counts per minute (cpm).



(i) What is the activity at 15 seconds?

Activity = cpm [1]

Most candidates identified the correct value of 71 from the graph. Successful candidates often showed their working on the graph.

Question 5 (b) (ii)

(ii) What is the change in the activity between 15 and 30 seconds?

Change in activity = cpm [1]

Although this question was generally well answered, less successful candidates found this challenging, often mis-reading the value for 30 seconds or not realising the need to subtract the second reading from part (b) (i).

Question 6 (a) (i)

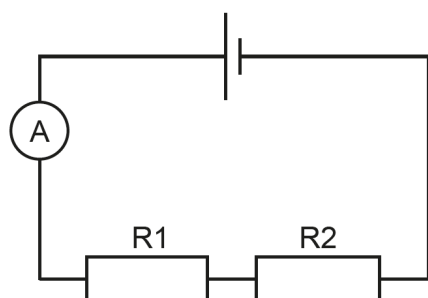
- 6** A student investigates how the current in series and parallel circuits changes with the number of cells.

- (a)** The student builds a circuit with two identical resistors, R1 and R2.

The resistors are connected in series with an ammeter.

Fig. 6.1 shows the circuit they build.

Fig. 6.1



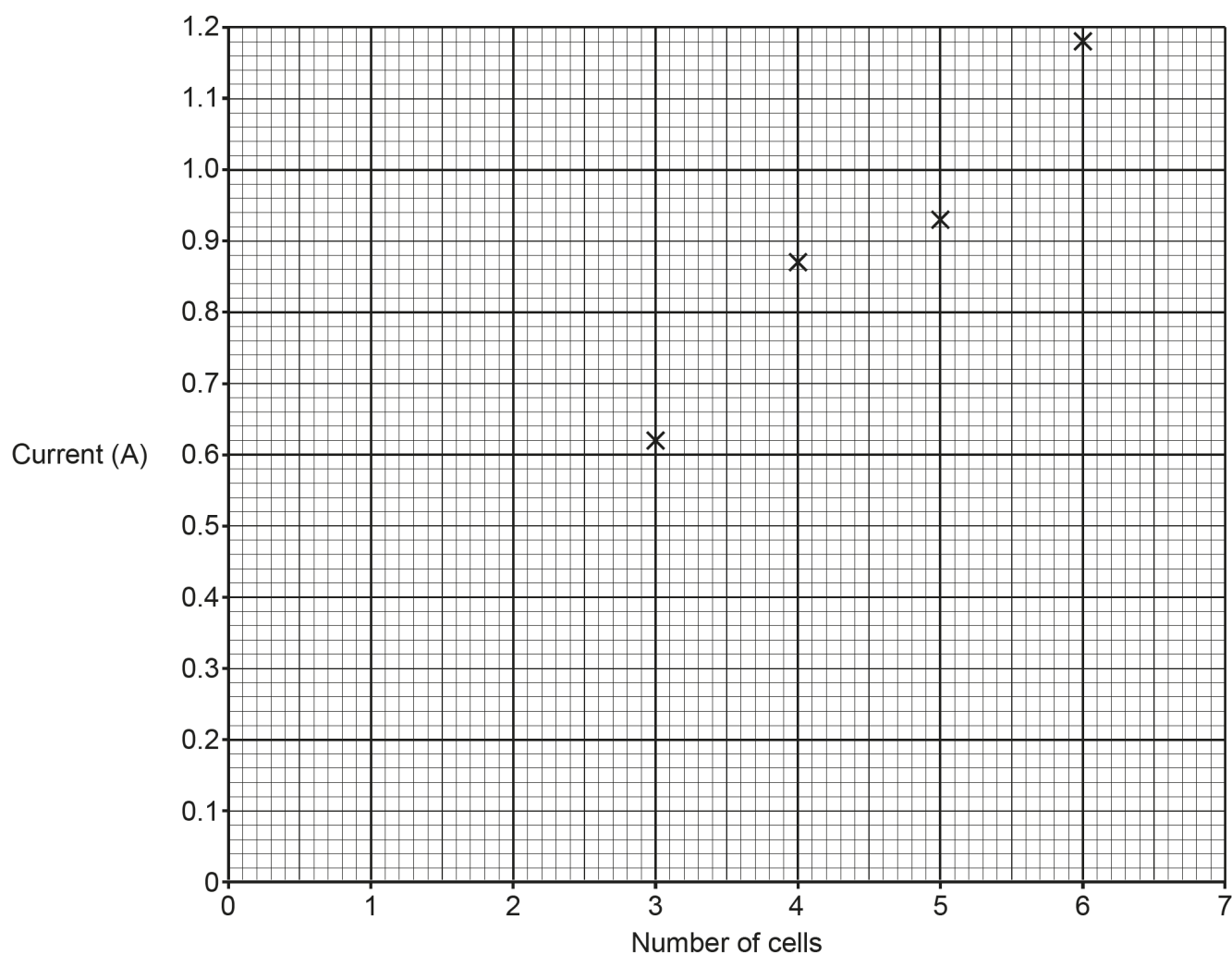
The student records the current in the circuit.

They add more cells in series, one at a time, and repeat the measurement of current.

The table shows their results.

Number of cells	Current (A)
1	0.20
2	0.42
3	0.62
4	0.87
5	0.93
6	1.18

The student plots their results on the graph.



(i) Complete the graph.

You need to plot the first **two** points.

[1]

This was a well answered question. Less successful responses typically had not identified that the y-axis scale had intervals of 0.02.

Question 6 (a) (ii)

(ii) Draw a line of best fit on the graph.

[1]

This was generally well answered. Most candidates drew a single, straight line of best fit between the points. Few joined the plotted points.

Question 6 (a) (iii)

(iii) Describe how the current changes as the number of cells increases.

Use the graph.

.....

.....

..... [2]

Most candidates correctly identified that as the number of cells increased, the current increased. Many did not identify the pattern of the relationship as linear/proportional, instead they stated values from the graph to illustrate the increase.

Question 6 (a) (iv)

(iv) Suggest why **not every** point lies on the line of best fit.

.....

..... [1]

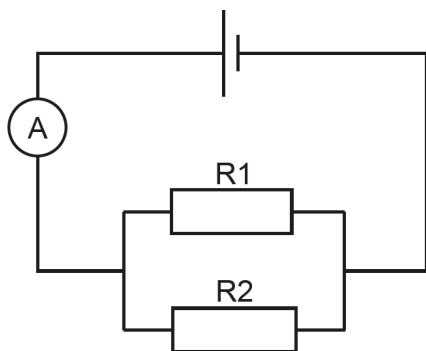
One of the most challenging questions on the paper. Many candidates identified that there were outliers/anomalous results but did not give a **cause** for these.

Question 6 (b) (i)

(b) Fig. 6.2 shows a parallel circuit using the same components as the circuit in Fig. 6.1.

The resistors, R1 and R2, are identical to each other.

Fig. 6.2



(i) Which **two** statements about the parallel circuit in Fig. 6.2 are **true**?

Tick (✓) **two** boxes.

The current in R1 is bigger than R2.

☐

The potential difference across R1 is greater than across R2.

☐

The total current equals the sum of the currents in R1 and R2.

☐

The total resistance is less than in the series circuit in Fig. 6.1.

☐

[2]

This was generally well answered. Most candidates were able to link their understanding of circuits to this question.

Question 6 (b) (ii)

(ii) Calculate the total current in the circuit in Fig. 6.2.

- The potential difference across the cell is 3 V.
- The total resistance in the circuit is $1.5\ \Omega$.

Use the Equation Sheet.

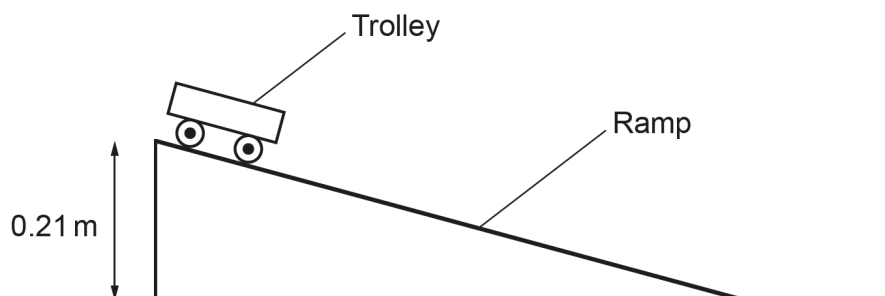
Current = A [3]

Most candidates selected the correct equation. Many then substituted and rearranged correctly to find the value of 2 A. The most common error was to multiply the values, finding 4.5 A.

Question 7 (a)

7 Fig. 7.1 shows a trolley at the top of a ramp.

Fig. 7.1



When the trolley is released it accelerates down the ramp.

- (a) Complete the table to show whether the gravitational potential energy and kinetic energy stores of the trolley **increase**, **decrease** or **stay the same** as the trolley accelerates down the ramp.

Tick (✓) **one** box in each row.

	Increases	Decreases	Stays the same
Gravitational potential energy store of the trolley			
Kinetic energy store of the trolley			

[2]

Most candidates achieved at least 1 mark on this question. Most candidates realised that gravitational potential energy and kinetic energy stores would not stay the same.

Question 7 (b) (i)

- (b) The mass of the trolley is 0.6 kg.

- (i) Calculate the gravitational potential energy store of the trolley when it is at a height of 0.21 m.

Use the Equation Sheet.

Gravitational field strength = 10 N/kg.

Gravitational potential energy store = J [3]

This was very well answered with candidates showing full working in the majority of cases.

Question 7 (b) (ii)

- (ii) The trolley reaches a maximum velocity of 1.7 m/s when it travels down the ramp.

Calculate the maximum kinetic energy store of the trolley.

Use the Equation Sheet.

Give your answer to 1 decimal place.

Maximum kinetic energy store = J [4]

This was generally well answered with many candidates showing full working. Many correctly rounded their calculated value to 0.9 (J) so achieved full credit. The most common error was the 1 decimal place mark. Some candidates wrote out the correct kinetic energy equation but omitted the square on the velocity when substituting.

Question 7 (c)

- (c) A force of 0.8 N acts on the trolley in the same direction that the trolley is accelerating.

The trolley travels 1.5 m down the ramp.

Calculate the work done on the trolley by the force of 0.8 N.

Use the Equation Sheet.

State the units.

Work done = Unit [4]

The calculation was well answered by most candidates. The most common incorrect unit given was N/m. A number of candidates incorrectly interpreted units as a space for a decimal place ('Work done = 1 Unit 2').

Question 7 (d)

- (d) Explain why energy is transferred to the surroundings as the trolley travels down the ramp.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

A good number of candidates correctly identified that friction/air resistance would cause the energy transfer. Descriptions of the energy transfers involved often lacked clarity.

Question 7 (e)

- (e) A student releases the trolley from rest at the top of the ramp and the trolley travels down the ramp with a constant acceleration.

Describe a method to find the average speed of the trolley as it travels down the ramp.

The student has this equipment:

- The trolley and the ramp shown in **Fig. 7.1**.
- A stopwatch.
- A tape measure.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [3]

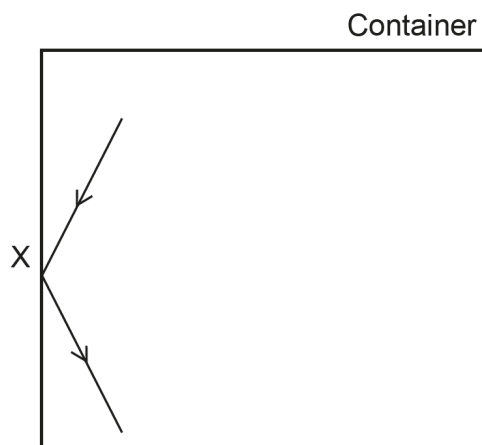
Most candidates correctly identified the need to use the equipment to measure time and distance respectively and identified the correct equation ($\text{speed} = \text{distance} \div \text{time}$). However, many descriptions lacked clarity on where/when the time and distance should be measured.

Question 8 (a)

8 A sealed container is filled with air.

(a) The diagram below shows the path of a particle of air in the container.

When the particle of air hits the wall of the container at X, a force acts on the wall.



Draw **one** arrow on the diagram at X to show this force.

[1]

Only the most able candidates achieved this mark. Successful candidates applied their understanding of pressure and forces here. Many omitted this question.

Assessment for learning



Encourage students to look for the **[X]** to identify where marks are available, particularly around diagrams.

Candidates should be encouraged to use rulers to draw lines/arrows on diagrams.

Question 8 (b)

- (b) The volume of the container is decreased.

The temperature and amount of air remain the same.

The table shows information for three different volumes.

Volume (m^3)	Pressure (N/m^2)	Pressure $\times$ Volume
0.8	100 000	80 000
0.4	200 000	
0.2		80 000

Complete the table.

You can use the space below to show any calculations you use.

[4]

Most candidates correctly identified that pressure $\times$ volume remains constant at 80,000. Many correctly calculated the new pressure. The most common incorrect answer was 300,000 using patterns in the table rather than calculating constant $\div$ volume.

Question 8 (c)

- (c) Explain why the particles in the air hit the wall of the container more often when the volume of the container decreases.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

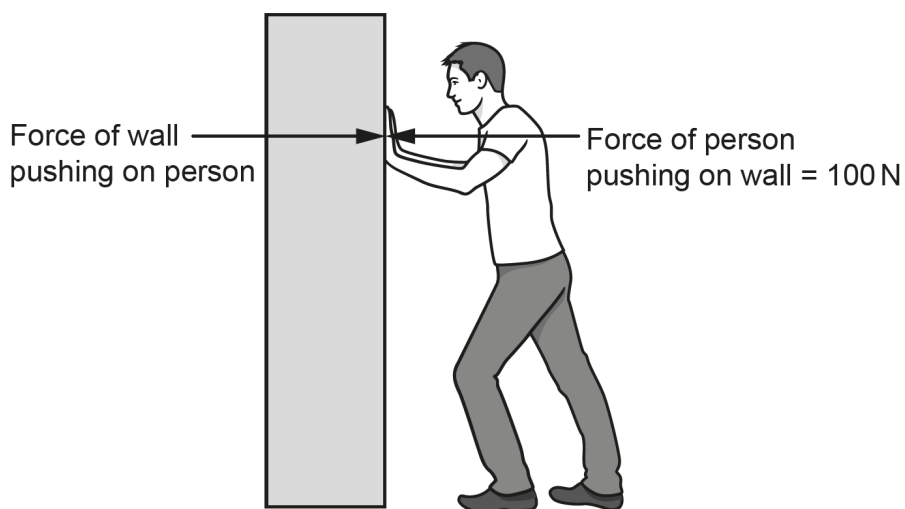
Most candidates identified that with a decreased volume, there would be less space for the particles to move. A number of candidates incorrectly concluded that a decreased volume meant more space for the particles.

Question 9 (a)

9 According to Newton's third law, when two objects interact, they apply forces on each other.

(a) A person pushes on a wall with a force of 100 N.

The diagram shows two forces that form an interaction pair between the person and the wall.



Which statements about this pair of forces are **true** and which are **false**?

Tick (✓) **one** box in each row.

	True	False
Both forces are acting on the person.		
The forces are the same kind of force.		
The forces are opposite in direction.		
The force of the wall on the person equals 100 N.		

[3]

Most candidates achieved at least 2 marks on this question with most selecting True for the 3rd and 4th statements. Candidates were less clear on statements 1 and 2.

Question 9 (b)

(b) Which of these forces is a **contact** force?Tick (✓) **one** box.

Electrostatic

☐

Friction

☐

Gravitational

☐

Magnetic

☐

[1]

Most candidates answered this correctly.

Question 9 (c)

(c) Complete the sentences in the table to describe each interaction pair of forces.

Use words from the list.

attracting	Earth	Moon	negatively
positively	repelling	Sun	

A magnet attracting an iron bar.	The iron bar the magnet.
A positively charged rod attracting a piece of paper.	The piece of paper attracting the charged rod.
The gravitational force of the Earth on the Moon.	The gravitational force of the on the

[4]

Candidates typically correctly identified the first two **or** the last two gaps.

Question 10 (a)*

10 Scientists advise people to use sunscreen when they are outside on a sunny day.

Sunscreen absorbs the UV radiation from the Sun.

(a)* Explain:

- how exposure to UV radiation can cause damage to human tissue
- why it is important to use sunscreen when outside on a sunny day.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [6]

Most candidates were able to identify an impact of UV radiation on the skin. Many described that sunscreen provides a layer of protection.

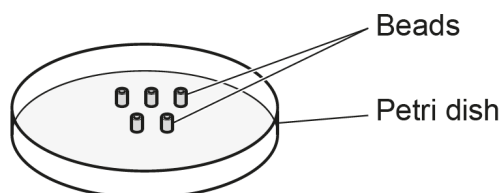
The most successful candidates linked the absorption of UV by the sunscreen to reduction of exposure by the skin. Very few candidates described the ionising properties of UV radiation.

Question 10 (b) (i)

(b) The sun protection factor (SPF) is a measure of the strength of sunscreen.

A student investigates the SPF of different sunscreens.

They use beads that change colour when they are exposed to UV radiation.



They use this method:

- Dip five beads in sunscreen with a SPF of 10.
- Spread the beads out in a petri dish and place them outside in the sun.
- Record the time taken for all the beads to change colour.
- Repeat the steps using different sunscreens with SPF of 20, 30 and 40.

(i) Describe **two** improvements the student can make to their method.

1

.....

2

.....

[2]

Candidates found this overlap question challenging. Some suggested repeating the investigation but did not include the reason of finding a mean or identifying anomalous results. Successful candidates commonly identified testing more SPF or a way to keep UV exposure consistent between tests.

Question 10 (b) (ii)

(ii) The table shows the student's results.

SPF	Time taken for all beads to change colour
10	3.25
20	6
30	10
40	14

The table of results contains mistakes.

State **two** mistakes made by the student.

- 1
-
- 2
-

[2]

Most candidates identified the lack of units for time. Fewer candidates identified that an inconsistent number of decimal places had been recorded.

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