

Examiners' report

GCSE

COMBINED SCIENCE B (TWENTY FIRST CENTURY SCIENCE)

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

J260

For first teaching in 2016

J260/05 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 5 series overview

J260/05 is the first of four papers taken for the GCSE Twenty First Century Combined Science B specification. The content covered by this paper is topics B1 to B6 along with ideas in science and practical skills, that candidates are required to be able to describe. Questions 1 and 2 are overlap, meaning they appear in the foundation tier paper.

Most questions were attempted with no evidence that candidates were short of time. Candidates generally performed well on this paper, demonstrating the full range of skills required. Candidates appeared to have been well prepared for the challenges of this paper and appeared to be more confident in their answers. The no response rate in this paper was low.

Candidates were not always able to maximise marks on the on the level of response questions, this is because the responses lacked specific science related to coronary heart disease.

Candidates were able to follow the instructions but should be reminded to always check the number of boxes they should tick and that the ticks should fit in boxes, however the incidences of mistake like this were much reduced this series.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• could identify the differences between mitosis and meiosis (Question 1 (a)) • were able to identify improvements in inventions that would lead to valid results. (Question 2 (c) (iii)) • could explain osmosis in terms of water movement and concentration gradients.(Question 2(d) (i) and (ii)) • could carry out multi-step calculations involving significant figures and standard form (Question 6 (a)) • could evaluate challenges to preserving the population of tigers in India (Question (4)) • produced logical and well-structured responses to the LOR question by linking coronary heart disease (and knew that coronary arteries supply the heart muscle with oxygen) and how to reduce the risk (Question 7 (c)) • could fully explain how vaccinations provide immunity in the human body (Question 3 (b))	• confused mitosis and meiosis (Question 1 (a)) • were unable to identify independent and dependant variables (Question 2 (c)) (iii)) • could not explain osmosis and referenced the movement of sugar rather than water. .(Question 2 (d) (i) and (ii))Could not describe the roll of coronary arteries and appeared to confuse coronary arteries with the chambers of the heart. (Question 7 (c)) • were unable to identify patterns in data throughout • did not seem to know the importance of homeostasis in controlling human body systems (Question 8 (b)) • could not convert answers into significant figures or standard form (Question 6 (a)) • could not identify limiting factors for the rate of photosynthesis (Question 9 (c)).

Question 1 (a)

1 There are two types of cell division, meiosis and mitosis.

(a) Complete the table to show which type of cell division is described by each statement.

Tick (✓) **one** box in each row.

Statement	Both types of cell division	Meiosis only	Mitosis only	Neither type of cell division
It involves two divisions to produce four new cells.				
It makes new cells for growth and repair of tissues in adults.				
It produces cells with half the number of chromosomes.				
It produces gametes.				

[4]

Many candidates knew the difference between mitosis and meiosis. The most common mark was 3.

Question 1 (b) (i)

(b) Cancer is the result of changes in cells.

(i) In which part of a cell do these changes occur?

Tick (✓) **one** box.

Cell membrane

☐

Cell wall

☐

Cytoplasm

☐

DNA

☐

[1]

Most candidates correctly identified DNA.

Question 1 (b) (ii)

(ii) Describe how the changes lead to a single cell forming a tumour.

.....

.....

.....

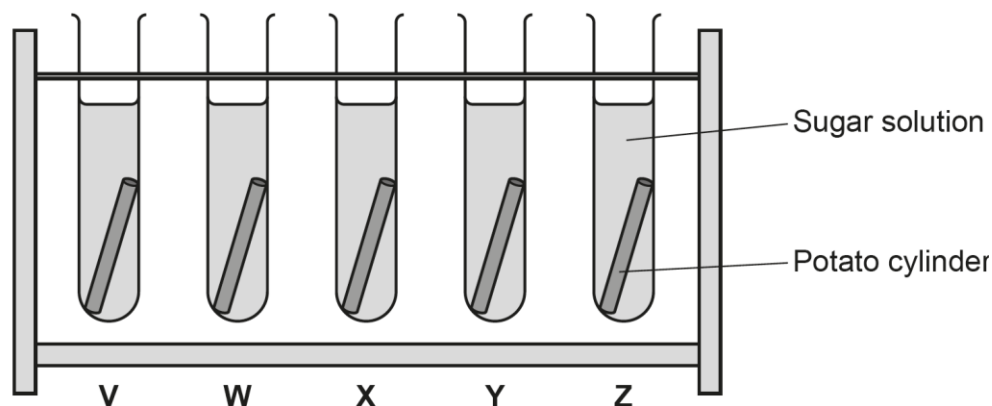
..... [2]

Candidates were aware that uncontrolled cell division would lead to a tumour but very few references made to mitosis. Where the marks were not given, it was usually due to incorrect use of scientific language for divide, e.g., grow or multiply

Candidates repeated the stem of the question regarding formation of a tumour.

Question 2 (a)

- 2 A student investigates the effect of sugar concentration on osmosis. They use potato cylinders placed in sugar solutions of different concentrations.



- (a) Statements **A** to **E** describe how the student does the investigation.

The statements are **not** in the correct order.

- A** Cut five potato cylinders.
- B** Calculate the change in mass.
- C** Measure the starting mass of the potato cylinders.
- D** Place the potato cylinders into each of the different sugar solutions for 24 hours.
- E** Remove and dry the potato cylinders, and measure their mass.

Write the letters in the boxes to show the correct order.

One has been done for you.

A				
----------	--	--	--	--

[3]

This question was well answered by candidates with the majority being given three marks.

Question 2 (b) (i)

(b)

- (i) State **one** variable that the student should control in this investigation.

..... [1]

Many candidates gave creditworthy answers to this question with a variety of valid responses given. More common responses were the same starting mass and volume of solution in the test tube. Where the mark was not given, it was usually because the candidate did not explain starting mass and just stated the mass should be the same.

Question 2 (b) (ii)

- (ii) Suggest why the student dries the potato cylinders before measuring their final mass.

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

Candidates were able to identify that the water on the outside of the potato would add to the final mass. Where the mark was not given, it was usually due to limited expression with confusion over where the water was at the end of the investigation.

Question 2 (c) (ii)

- (ii) The student uses the change in mass to conclude which sugar solution had the largest effect on the potato cylinders.

Suggest why the student **cannot** make a valid comparison between the potato cylinders using the change in mass.

Use the data in the table.

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

Most candidates were able to identify that the starting masses were different but frequently candidates did not reference 'starting' and just referred to mass, making many answers insufficient.

Question 2 (c) (iii)

(iii) Suggest **two** ways in which the student could improve their method so they can make a valid comparison between potato cylinders.

- 1
-
- 2
-

[2]

Candidates gave a range of creditworthy answers, most commonly stating that the starting mass should be the same.

Question 2 (d) (i)

(d)

(i) Explain why some of the potato cylinders decreased in mass.

Use ideas about osmosis.

-
-
-
- [2]

Many candidates found it difficult to link a decrease in mass caused by a lower water concentration in the potato. Candidates were able to give a generic description of osmosis but these related to water moving into the potato rather than out. Therefore, confusing the direction of movement along the concentration gradient. Candidates were not always clear about what was moving so used terms like particles and molecules. Candidates that did not perform well on this question generally referenced the movement of sugar.

Question 2 (d) (ii)

(ii) The potato cylinder placed in sugar solution **X** did **not** change in mass.

Suggest **one** reason why this might have happened.

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

Candidates generally knew that the concentrations were the same in the potato and the solution.

Question 3 (b)

(b) Explain how a vaccination provides protection against an infection.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
..... [3]

Candidates were able to explain how vaccination provides protection against infection. Most candidates knew the pathogen had antigens that white blood cells produced antibodies. Candidates were then able to explain the roll of memory cells.

Candidates that were less successful on this question generally confused antigens and antibodies and made vague references to memory cells (but did not know what they did or why important, merely that they existed.)

The least given marking point was mp4 where candidates were less able to explain that any immune response would be stronger and faster should the body be exposed to the pathogen again.

Exemplar 1

- vaccines contain a small amount of dead or weakened pathogen particles. The vaccine stimulates the white blood cells into producing ~~antigens~~ antibodies that are complementary to the antigen of the dead or weakened pathogen. White blood cells then engulf and digest the pathogen. Some white blood cells that make the correct shape antibodies turn into memory cells which produce antibodies at a much quicker pace. [3]

This candidate response received 3 marks. This response gives the idea of dead or weakened pathogens in the vaccine; the idea of white blood cells producing antibodies and then explains the role of memory cells. The candidate then references the antibodies being produced at a quicker rate which is also a marking point. This is unnecessary thought as the candidate already has been given full marks.

Question 3 (c) (i)

(c) AIDS is a condition caused by a pathogen that destroys white blood cells.

(i) State the type of pathogen that causes AIDS.

..... [1]

Most candidates correctly identified a virus. The most common incorrect answer was HIV; this was considered insufficient as it is not a type of pathogen.

Question 3 (c) (ii)

(ii) Explain why a common communicable disease such as influenza can be much more dangerous for a person who is living with AIDS.

..... [1]

Candidates were generally aware that AIDS weakens the immune system and were given the mark. Some candidates thought that AIDS left no white blood cells in the blood stream. For future series candidates could be encouraged to avoid bold sweeping statements.

Question 4 (a) (i)

4 The botanist Carl Linnaeus classified many organisms in the 1700s.

(a)

(i) Describe how scientists such as Linnaeus classified organisms into groups.

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

Many candidates were unable to give credit worthy answers to this and tended to give the hierarchical classifications rather than ideas of observations of physical characteristics.

Question 4 (a) (ii)

(ii) Describe **one** additional piece of evidence from cells that modern scientists use to classify organisms.

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

Candidates were generally awarding this marking point for recognising that DNA used to classify organisms.

Question 4 (b) (i)

(b) Tigers live in forests around Asia, China and Russia.



(i) Tigers are an endangered species.

Describe **two** human activities that could have caused tigers to become endangered.

1

2

[1]

Most candidates could correctly identify two human activities. A large range of correct answers was seen with the most numerous being deforestation and hunting.

Question 4 (b) (ii)

(ii) It is estimated that:

- in 1900, there were 100 000 tigers in India
- by 1972, there were only 1827 tigers in India.

Calculate the percentage decrease in the number of tigers in India from 1900 to 1972.

Percentage decrease = % [2]

This question performed well with the majority of candidates being given both marks. Occasionally candidates had reversed the numbers (writing 1872 rather than 1827) when calculating the change in numbers. When candidates had shown relevant working out they were given ECF.

Question 4 (b) (iii)

(iii) Scientists estimate the tiger population size in India each year.

Suggest **one** reason why scientists can only **estimate** the tiger population size.

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

A wide variety of valid responses were seen here with candidates being able to correctly identify why it would be difficult to count all the tigers in India.

Question 4 (c)

- (c) Scientists are trying to conserve tigers in India. This has the benefit of protecting them from extinction.

Explain **one other** benefit and **one** challenge of conserving tigers in India.

Benefit

.....

.....

.....

Challenge

.....

.....

.....

[4]

Candidates struggled to give four relevant marking points for this question. Candidates could give benefits and challenges but could not explain why they presented benefits or challenges. Common answers for benefits described maintaining biodiversity but could not explicitly explain the effect of disrupting food chains. Many candidates said that the tigers' predators would be affected, this identified some confusion in food chains and webs.

Question 5 (a) (i)

5

(a) Tay-Sachs disease is inherited.

It is caused by a recessive allele of a single gene.

(i) Explain the term recessive.

.....

..... [1]

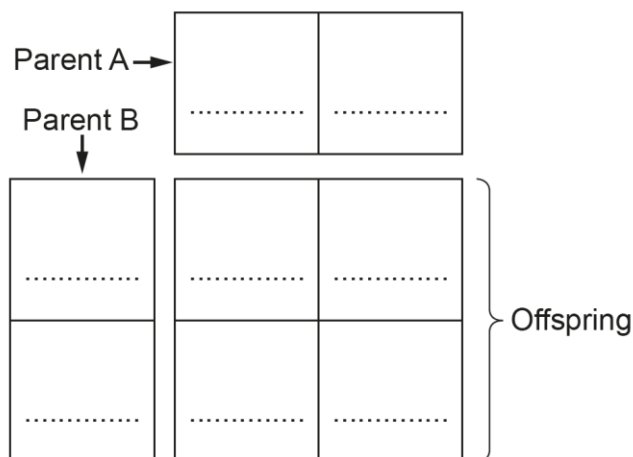
Candidates generally appeared to know what recessive meant but were not always able to express it in writing. Many answers given were insufficient. Responses were seen when the explanation was that the alleles were written in lower case letters.

Question 5 (a) (ii)

(ii) Complete the Punnett square to show how Tay-Sachs disease may be inherited when both parents are heterozygous.

Use:

- **T** to represent a normal allele
- **t** to represent a Tay-Sachs disease allele.



[2]

This question was answered well both marks frequently given.

Question 5 (a) (iii)

(iii) Which offspring would have Tay-Sachs disease?

Put a ring around the correct option in the Punnett square.

[1]

This question was answered well with most candidates correctly circling the correct answer. There were a number of candidates that gave no response to this question even though they gave the correct Punnett square. It is assumed here that the candidates did not read the question properly and therefore missed out on this marking point.

Question 5 (c) (i)

(c) Stem cells could be a potential treatment for Tay-Sachs disease.

(i) There are adult and embryonic stem cells.

Describe the different functions of these stem cells.

Adult

.....

Embryonic

.....

[2]

Candidates' performance on this question was variable. Many candidates appeared to know what embryonic cells came from, even if they did not seem to understand they could differentiate into all cells. Many candidates stated that adult stem cells came from adults and did not reference bone marrow, etc.

Question 5 (c) (ii)

(ii) Which statement is an ethical implication of using stem cells?

Tick (✓) **one** box.

It is possible for viruses to be transferred with the stem cells leading to infection.

☐

Stem cells are taken from an embryo which is a potential future life.

☐

Stem cells could potentially become cancerous.

☐

The treatment may be rejected by the immune system.

☐

[1]

Most candidates correctly answered this question.

Question 5 (c) (iii)

(iii) Explain your answer to (c)(ii).

.....

..... [1]

Although candidates had selected the correct box, candidates could not explain the moral argument behind taking a potential future life. Most candidates rewrote the answer they had selected in the question above.

Question 5 (c) (iv)

(iv) All new treatments must be tested before they are made widely available.

Clinical drug trials can be classed as blind or double blind.

Describe what is meant by a **blind** and a **double-blind** trial.

Blind

.....

Double-blind

.....

[2]

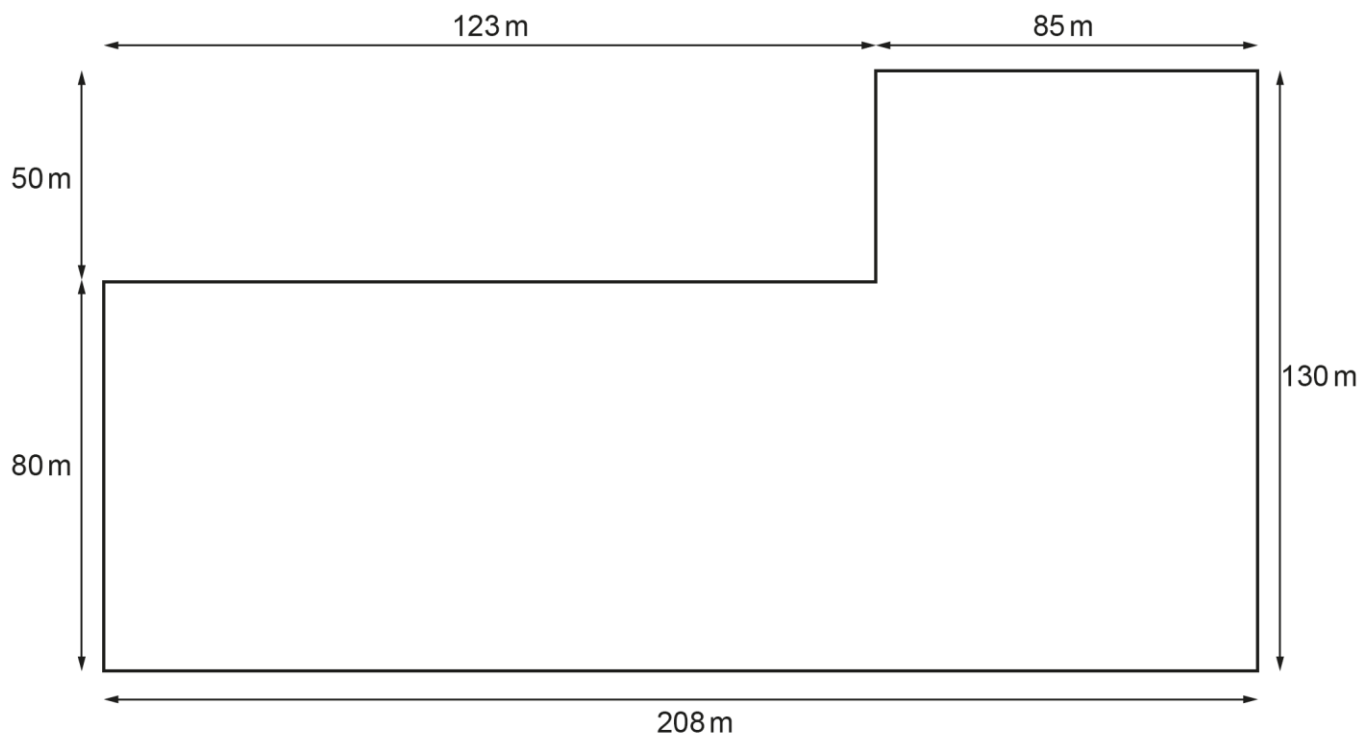
This question was very well answered by candidates. Many candidates were given two marks for correctly describing the differences.

Question 6 (a)

6 A student estimates the number of daisies growing in a park.

- The student places a quadrat at different positions in the park.
- The quadrat measures $0.5\text{ m} \times 0.5\text{ m}$.
- The student counts the number of daisies in each quadrat.

The diagram shows the shape and dimensions of the park.



(a) The mean number of daisies in each quadrat is 8.

Calculate the estimated population of daisies in the park.

Give your answer in **standard form** and to **two significant figures**.

Use the equation: estimated population = $\frac{\text{area of park}}{\text{area of quadrat}} \times \text{mean number of daisies per quadrat}$

Estimated population = [5]

Many candidates were given 5 marks for this question.

Where candidates did not score 5 marks, 3 marks was the next common. This is because the candidates had not been able to convert to two significant figures then convert their number in standard form.

Question 6 (b)

(b) Suggest **two** ways in which the student could improve the investigation so that the estimate is **not** biased.

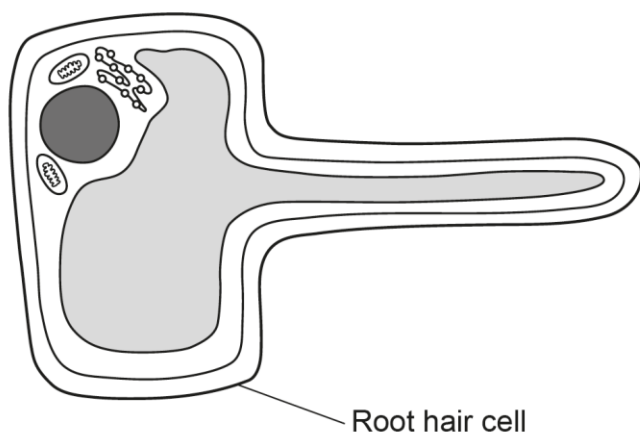
- 1
- 2

[2]

A range of appropriate suggestion were given by candidates. The most common suggestion was that the investigation should select areas randomly.

Question 6 (c) (i)

(c) Daisies take up water and minerals from the soil through their root hair cells.



(i) State the names of the processes that move water and mineral ions into root hair cells.

Water

Mineral ions

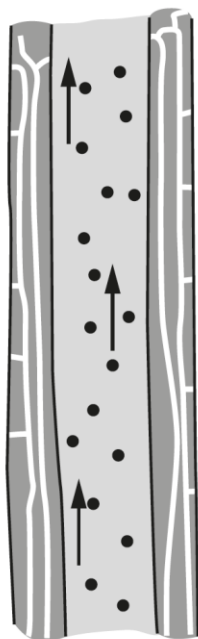
[2]

Many candidates were given two marks for this question. Where candidates were not credited it was usually because they had put osmosis and active transport the wrong way round,

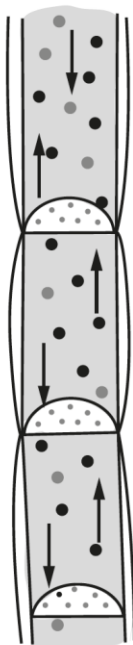
Question 6 (c) (ii).

(ii) Plants have transport vessels called xylem and phloem.

Xylem vessels are involved in transpiration. Phloem vessels are used for the translocation of sugars.



Xylem vessel



Phloem vessel

Explain **one** way in which xylem and **one** way in which phloem are adapted to carry out their functions.

Xylem

.....

Phloem

.....

[2]

The most common response for xylem was that the cells were dead, which was given one mark.

Question 7 (a)

7 The heart is an organ in the circulatory system.

(a) Describe how the human circulatory system works together with the gaseous exchange and digestive systems.

Gaseous exchange system

.....

Digestive system

.....

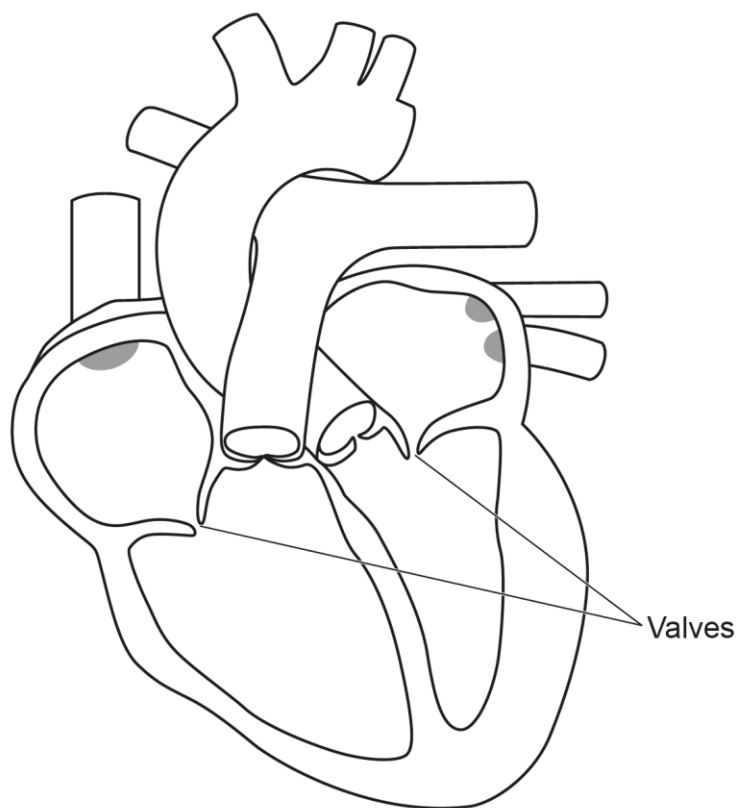
[2]

Most candidates attempted to answer this question; however, they struggled to explain how the systems worked together even though they could describe the systems and what they did. Many candidates did not mention blood in their responses which made the response not worth credit. Candidates were aware that gaseous exchange involved exchanging oxygen and carbon dioxide (frequently given the wrong way) but tended not to link to blood or circulation.

Question 7 (b)

(b) Fig. 7.1 shows the inside of the human heart.

Fig. 7.1



The heart is adapted to pump blood around the body.

Describe the function of the valves in the heart.

.....

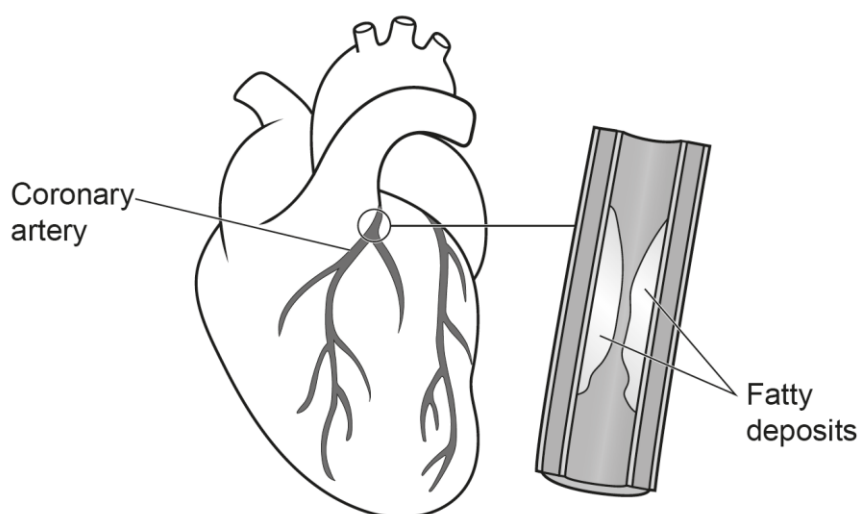
..... [1]

Candidates were generally aware of the function of heart valves with most candidates correctly identifying prevent backflow of blood.

Question 7 (c)*

(c)* Fig. 7.2 shows the coronary artery on the outside of a patient's heart.

Fig. 7.2



The patient has also been diagnosed with high blood pressure.

Explain why this patient is at high risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD) **and** evaluate ways in which they could reduce their risk.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [6]

Most candidates scored on this question; the most common level given was Level 2.

Candidates were generally able to use the diagram to identify blockages in the coronary artery and explain that blood pressure could be increased. The next part of the question required candidates to evaluate ways to reduce the risk. Most candidates could suggest sensible suggestions to lifestyle choices that would reduce the risk. Many candidates did mention the use of medication or surgical procedures but did not evaluate any potential risks associated with this type of intervention. Candidates that were given lower marks generally had not explained answers, e.g., have a healthy diet with no explanation of what this means. There was also some confusion with the levels of sugar in the diet as when this was referenced it was frequently linked to diabetes rather than reduction in CVD.

Candidates that were unable to access Level 3 were usually unable to link reduced oxygen supply to the heart muscle or evaluate the use of medications or surgical interventions.

Many candidates confused the coronary artery with the aorta as they stated that the blood would not be able to leave the heart efficiently.

Exemplar 2

This patient is at high risk of cardiovascular disease because the ~~coronary artery~~ inside the coronary artery fatty deposits are building up which is blocking the arteries so ~~transferring~~ blood transporting blood could get blocked eventually leading to cardiovascular disease because of the lack of blood flow. A way to prevent this is to eat a healthy diet; the patient clearly eats a bad diet because of the fatty build up. Another ways to reduce this risk is exercise, the patient shows he doesn't exercise because instead of burning fat he is putting on fat.

This is a good example of a Level 2 response that scored 4 marks. The candidate fully explains why the patient is at higher risk by identifying the build-up in the coronary arteries, then goes on to explain that blood flow would be reduced as a result of the build-up. The candidate then goes on to give ways in which the risk could be reduced including lifestyle changes. To elevate this response into Level 3 the candidate could have explained that the lack of blood flow was related to lower oxygen levels and possibly to respiration.

Misconception



Many candidates appeared to confuse the coronary artery with the aorta as they stated that the blood would not be able to leave the heart efficiently.

Candidates did not always appear to know that the heart is a muscle that needs its own supply of oxygen to carry out respiration.

Question 8 (a) (ii)

(ii) Reflexes are involuntary responses.

An example of a voluntary response is deciding to pick up a book.

State the **additional** structure that is involved in a **voluntary** response.

..... [1]

Most candidates correctly identified the brain.

Question 8 (b)

(b) The nervous system and endocrine system respond to internal and external change.

Explain the importance of homeostasis.

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

Candidates could generally give examples of areas in the body that were controlled by negative feedback. They seemed to struggle to explain why homeostasis was important. Common creditworthy answers included that homeostasis-controlled temperature and blood sugar.

Question 8 (c)

(c) Hormones control many processes in the human body.

Complete the table to explain the role of the hormone **adrenaline** in the human body.

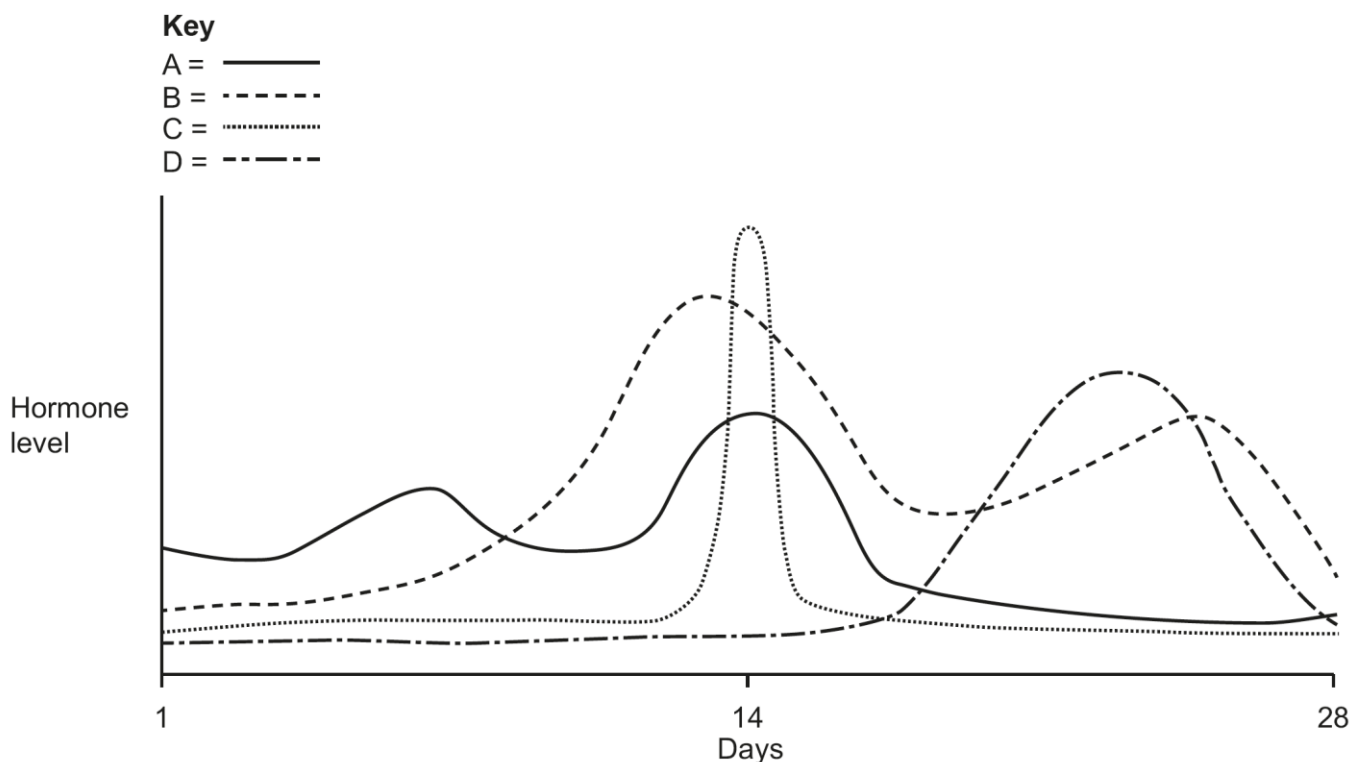
Adrenaline	
Secreted by	Adrenal gland
Stimulus	
Effect on liver	
Effect on muscles	

[3]

Most candidates could give an appropriate stimulus and could give the effect on muscles. Candidates struggled to achieve full marks on this question. The area that proved the most challenging was the effect on the liver with many candidates appearing not to know how the liver releases glucose.

Question 8 (d)

- (d) The graph shows changes in the levels of four hormones that control the menstrual cycle during one complete cycle.



Draw lines to connect each **hormone** to its correct **name** and **action** to explain how they interact to control the menstrual cycle.

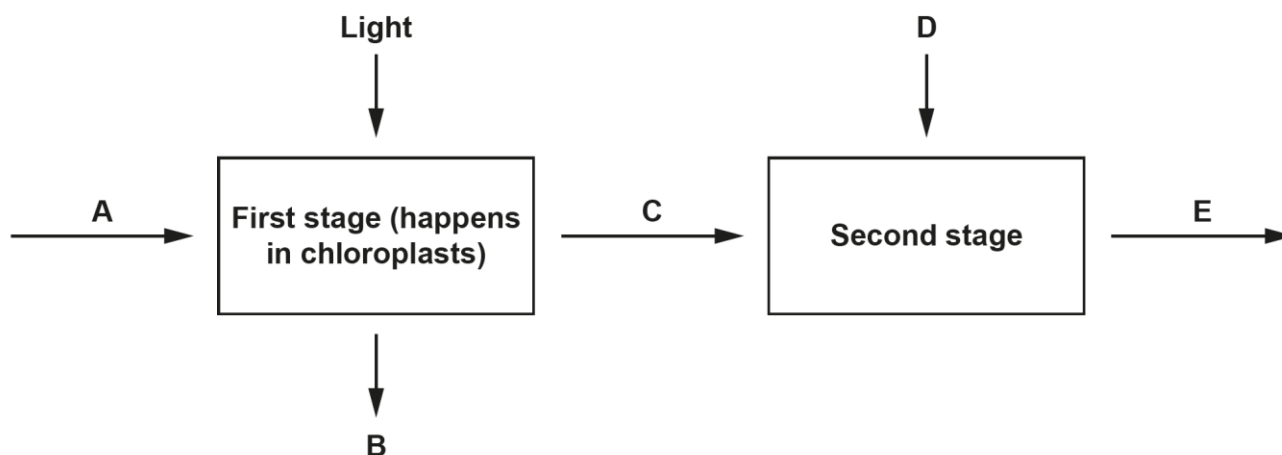
Hormone	Name	Action
A	FSH	Causes a follicle containing an egg to develop and produce oestrogen.
B	LH	Causes ovulation (the release of a mature egg).
C	Oestrogen	Causes uterus wall to thicken.
D	Progesterone	Prepares the lining of the uterus for implantation.

[5]

Many candidates scored full marks on this question and were able to identify the role of the different hormones.

Question 9 (a)

9 Photosynthesis involves many chemical reactions but can be summarised into two main stages:



(a) Complete the table to describe the process of photosynthesis, including the inputs and outputs of the two stages.

Use words from the list.

carbon dioxide	glucose	hydrogen	oxygen	water
----------------	---------	----------	--------	-------

Input or output	Name of reactant or product
A	
B	
C	
D	
E	

[3]

Very few candidates scored full marks on this question. Candidates did not appear to be aware of the different stages of photosynthesis.

Question 9 (b) (i)

(b) A student investigates the effect of light on the rate of photosynthesis in pondweed.

The table shows the student's results.

Light intensity (arbitrary units)	Distance from the light source (cm)	Number of bubbles given off in 1 minute
0.0064		105
0.0016	25.0	105
0.0004	50.0	28
0.0001	100.0	8

(i) Calculate the distance from the light source at which the light intensity is 0.0064.

Use the equation: light intensity = $\frac{1}{d^2}$

Distance = cm [3]

Most candidates correctly identified 12.5 cm. Some candidates had clearly linked the pattern in the table to give answers.

Question 9 (b) (ii)

(ii) Use the table and the equation to explain why the rate of photosynthesis changes with distance from the light source.

.....
 [1]

Assessment for learning



Candidates were able to identify the overall trend did not seem use the table to identify the idea that as the distance doubles the light intensity is quartered. For future series candidates could be encouraged to look for numerical patterns in data.

Question 9 (b) (iii)

(iii) There are different methods that can be used to collect the gas produced by the pondweed.

Describe a different method that the student could use **and** explain why it is better than counting the number of bubbles in 1 minute.

.....

.....

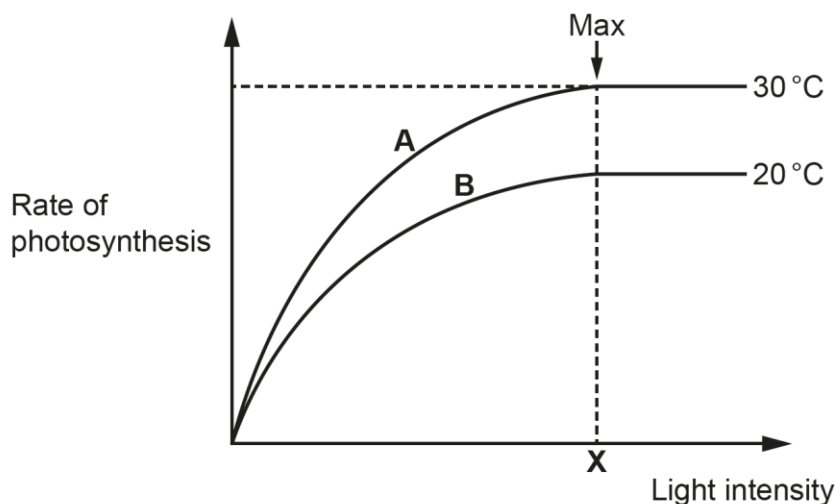
.....

..... [2]

Candidates could generally state that a gas syringe could be used but could not give a method. Most candidates were aware that counting bubbles could lead to human error or that the bubbles could be different sizes. In future series candidates could be encouraged when listing scientific equipment to write how it would be used and what measurements could be taken.

Question 9 (c)

(c) The graph shows the effects of light intensity and temperature on the rate of photosynthesis.



Explain the effect **and** interaction of light intensity and temperature in **limiting** the rate of photosynthesis.

Use evidence from the graph in your answer.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

Candidates were able to read the graph and could identify that photosynthesis had reached the maximum rate but could not state what the limiting factor was or the interaction therefore making responses insufficient.

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We've made it easier for Exams Officers to download copies of your candidates' completed papers or 'scripts'. Your centre can use these scripts to decide whether to request a review of marking and to support teaching and learning.

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If you do not have an Interchange account, please contact your centre administrator (usually the Exams Officer) to request a username.

Once you have an Interchange username, use the form on [this page](#) to sign up for ExamBuilder, or ask an existing user at your centre to create an ExamBuilder account for you.

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