

Examiners' report

GCSE

TWENTY FIRST CENTURY SCIENCE BIOLOGY B

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

J257

For first teaching in 2016

J257/04 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 4 series overview

There are four examination components for GCSE (9-1) Science Biology B (Twenty First Century). Paper 4 (Depth in Biology) provide candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate the depth of their knowledge and understanding in biology.

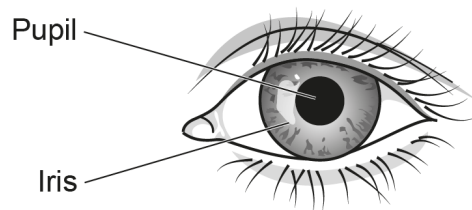
Paper 4 assesses knowledge from across the specification, including some synoptic questions. Therefore, to do well on Paper 4, candidates need to demonstrate their understanding of ideas from across the whole specification, including Ideas about Science.

All candidates appeared to finish the paper with very few questions marked as 'no response'.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- performed well on calculation Questions (Question 1 (c)), (Question 4 (c) (ii)) & (Question 5 (b)) - used information from graphs (Question 5) and charts (Question 9 (b) & 9 (c)) to describe and explain data - were able to use knowledge of genetics to successfully complete a Punnett square (Question 8 (b)) - explained how natural selection increases the number of individuals with favourable genetic variation (Question 6 (d)) - were able to explain what happens to cells when placed in solutions with a high concentration of solutes (Question 9 (c) (ii)).	- confused the processes of respiration, transpiration and photosynthesis (Question 2 (d), Question 4 (e) & Question 4 (f)) - could not identify parts on a light microscope (Question 4 (a)) - were unaware of what substances are transported in phloem & xylem (Question 6 (c)) - struggled to explain how an organism's phenotype is due to an interaction between genome and environment (Question 7 (c)) - found connecting genetic terms with their description challenging (Question 8 (a)).

Question 1 (a)

- 1 The pupil is part of the human eye.



A student investigates the effect of changing the light level on pupil diameter.

The student uses a lamp with adjustable brightness, measured in lumens.
The maximum brightness of the lamp is 1200 lumens (100%).

Table 1.1 shows the data the student records.

Table 1.1

Light level (%)	Light brightness (lumens)	Distance between lamp and eye (m)	Pupil diameter (mm)
80		1.5	4
40	480	1.5	6
20	240	1.5	8

- (a) Complete **Table 1.2** to identify the variables in the investigation.

Put **one** tick (✓) in each row to show whether the variable is the **dependent variable**, the **independent variable** or **neither**.

Table 1.2

	Dependent variable	Independent variable	Neither
Distance between lamp and eye (m)			
Light brightness (lumens)			
Pupil diameter (mm)			

[2]

Most candidates gained 2 marks. However, a number were unable to classify all 3 variables as dependent, independent or neither.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Suggest **one** other variable **not** included in **Table 1.2** that should be controlled.

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

Most were able to give a variable which should be controlled, although some just wrote “controlled variable”.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Calculate the number of lumens equivalent to a light level of 80%.

Use the data in **Table 1.1**.

Number of lumens equivalent to a light level of 80% = lumens [2]

Most candidates correctly calculated the number of lumens equivalent to 80% light.

Question 1 (d)

(d) The student measures the pupil diameter by holding a ruler against the person's eye.

Suggest a safer way to measure the pupil diameter.

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

Most candidates were able to suggest a suitable safer alternative method to measure the size of the pupil.

Question 1 (e)

- (e) The student predicts that if a light brightness of 1200 lumens is tested, the pupil diameter will be approximately 2 mm.

Explain why the student is **correct**.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

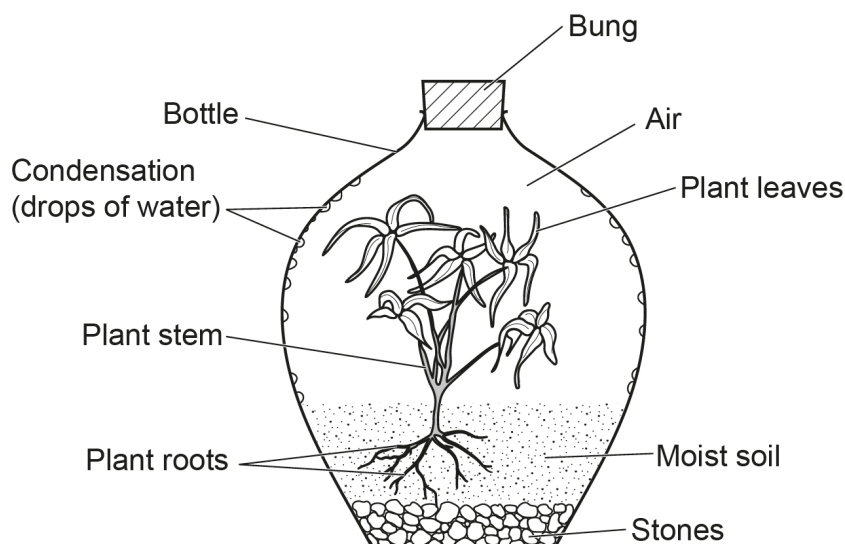
..... [3]

Few candidates were credited 3 marks. Most were able to recognise the trend but did not mention that the pupil response serves to protect the retina or that, in brighter light, a smaller pupil is needed to see.

Question 2 (a)

2 The diagram shows a living plant growing in a bottle garden.

The bottle garden is a small but complete ecosystem.



(a) Which part of the bottle garden ecosystem is **biotic**?

Tick (✓) **one** box.

Condensation

☐

Plant

☐

Soil water

☐

Stones

☐

[1]

Most candidates knew which part of the ecosystem was the biotic part.

Question 2 (b)

(b) Explain why the air in the bottle is an **abiotic** part of the ecosystem.

.....
 [1]

Candidates responded well to this question, however approximately one-fifth of the cohort were unaware of the meaning of the term abiotic.

Question 2 (c)

(c) The bottle allows light to pass through it.

Explain why this is essential for the plant to survive.

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

The majority of candidates recognised the link between light and photosynthesis.

Question 2 (d)*

(d)* A bung is used to seal the bottle closed.

The plant stays alive even though the bottle is kept sealed for years and no extra water is added.

Explain:

- why the plant needs water
- how the plant gets enough water even though the bottle is kept sealed.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
..... [6]

Misconception



Many candidates thought that water is required for respiration, others that water is absorbed through the stomata

This question was well answered by many candidates, over half achieving Level 3.

Question 3 (a)

3

(a) Complete the table to explain how the human heart and blood vessels are adapted to their functions.

Use words from the list.

One has been done for you.

Artery	Capillary	Heart	Vein
--------	-----------	-------	------

	Adaptation
.....	Has valves and chambers.
.....	Has valves but not chambers.
Artery	Thick muscular wall.
.....	Wall is just one cell thick.

[1]

All three responses had to be correct for 1-mark, a significant number of candidates were credited the mark.

Question 3 (b)

- (b) Draw lines to connect each **part** of the blood to the **adaptation** that allows that part to carry out its function.

Part	Adaptation
Plasma	Large surface area for rapid absorption of oxygen.
Platelets	Receptors that recognise antigens.
Red blood cells	Acts as a solvent.
White blood cells	Stick together to seal wounds.

[2]

Most of the candidates correctly linked the body part to its adaptation although a few candidates confused plasma and platelets.

Question 3 (c)

- (c) Suggest what could happen to a person with a low number of white blood cells.

.....
 [1]

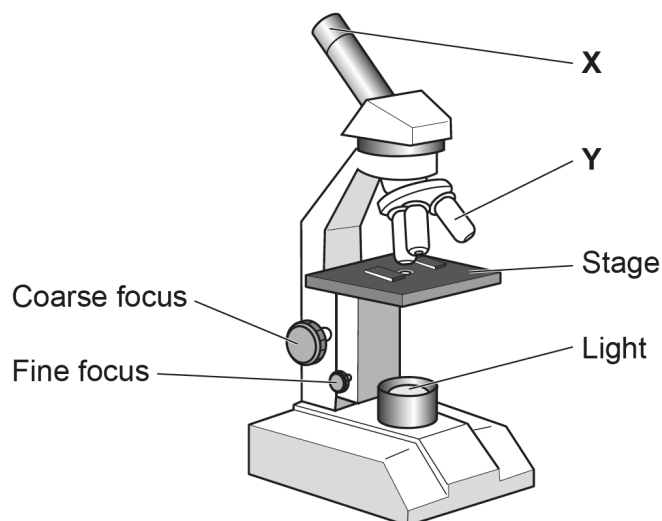
Only half the candidates were credited the mark. Most of those who were not gave references to getting sick or ill.

Question 4 (a)

4 A student uses a light microscope to observe stomata on the surface of a piece of plant leaf.

(a) Fig. 4.1 shows a light microscope.

Fig. 4.1



Identify parts **X** and **Y**.

Part **X**

Part **Y**

[2]

Only half of candidates scored both marks with part Y commonly labelled as the magnification lens.

Question 4 (b)

(b) Statements **A** to **D** describe steps for setting up the microscope to view a piece of leaf on a slide.

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

- A** Place the slide on the stage.
- B** Turn the coarse focus to bring the specimen of leaf into view.
- C** Turn the fine focus until the image is sharp and clear.
- D** Turn part **Y** to select the magnification.

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

The first step has been done for you.

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

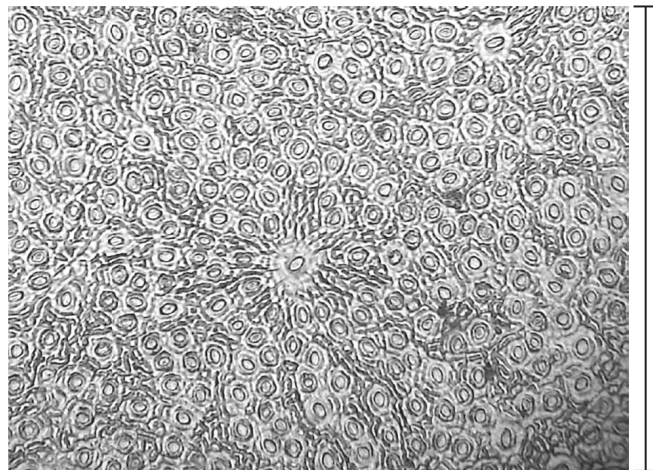
[2]

This question was answered well. Candidates were aware of how to view a slide on a light microscope.

Question 4 (c) (i)

(c) Fig. 4.2 shows what the student observes.

Fig. 4.2



Width of image: 60 mm

Actual width of the piece of leaf: 1.5 mm

Length of image: 80 mm

Actual length of the piece of leaf: 2 mm

(i) Calculate the magnification of the image shown in Fig. 4.2.

Use the equation: $\text{magnification} = \frac{\text{image length (mm)}}{\text{actual length (mm)}}$

Magnification = × [1]

Candidates were given the formula for calculating the magnification and were able to do that successfully.

Question 4 (c) (ii)

- (ii) The student counts 243 stomata in **Fig. 4.2**.

The stomatal density is the number of stomata per mm^2 of **leaf**.

Calculate the stomatal density of the piece of leaf in **Fig. 4.2**.

Stomatal density = stomata per mm^2 [3]

Candidates responded well, as with most of the mathematical questions.

Question 4 (c) (iii)

- (iii) Describe how the student could produce an **estimate** of the total number of stomata on one side of the leaf.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
..... [2]

A number of candidates were not given marks on this question. Many candidates were unaware of how small and numerous stomata are, despite calculating the number per mm^2 in 4cii. A common incorrect response was to calculate the total number of stomata by counting the number along the length and width of the leaf and multiplying these together.

Question 4 (c) (iv)

- (iv) Suggest **one** benefit of producing an estimate of the total number of stomata rather than counting all of them.

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

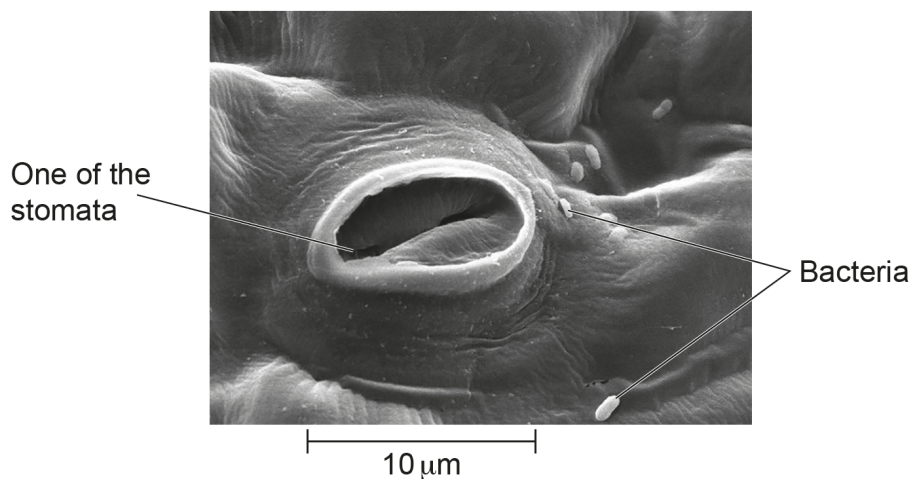
This question was well responded to by candidates.

Question 4 (d) (i)

(d) A light microscope is **not** powerful enough to observe the structure of stomata in detail.

Fig. 4.3 shows a detailed image of one of the stomata, produced using a different type of microscope.

Fig. 4.3



(i) Suggest which type of microscope was used to produce the image in **Fig. 4.3**.

..... [1]

Most candidates were able to give the correct response of electron microscope, although electric and light were incorrect responses often seen.

Question 4 (d) (ii)

(ii) Explain why this type of microscope can show the structure of stomata in great detail.

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

An incorrect response often seen referred to this type of microscope being more powerful. A number of candidates based their response on the use of electrons, responding 'how' instead of 'why'.

Question 4 (d) (iii)

(iii) The length of one of the stomata is $10\mu\text{m}$, which is $1 \times 10^{-2}\text{mm}$.

Which of these is the same as $1 \times 10^{-2}\text{mm}$?

Tick (✓) **one** box.

0.001 mm	☐
0.01 mm	☐
10.00 mm	☐
100 mm	☐

[1]

Most candidates were able to recognise that 0.01 mm was the correct response.

Question 4 (e)

(e) Light causes stomata to open.

Explain why it is an advantage for the plant that its stomata open in the light.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

Misconception

A number of candidates thought that stomata opened to allow light in for photosynthesis. Others referred to the role of stomata in transpiration or said that water enters the plant through the stomata.

Question 4 (f)

(f) Suggest **one** advantage to the plant that its stomata close when it gets dark, rather than staying open all night.

.....

..... [1]

Many candidates were credited here, either by saying that by closing the stomata water loss is reduced or the entry of pathogens is prevented. A common response was to say that it saves energy.

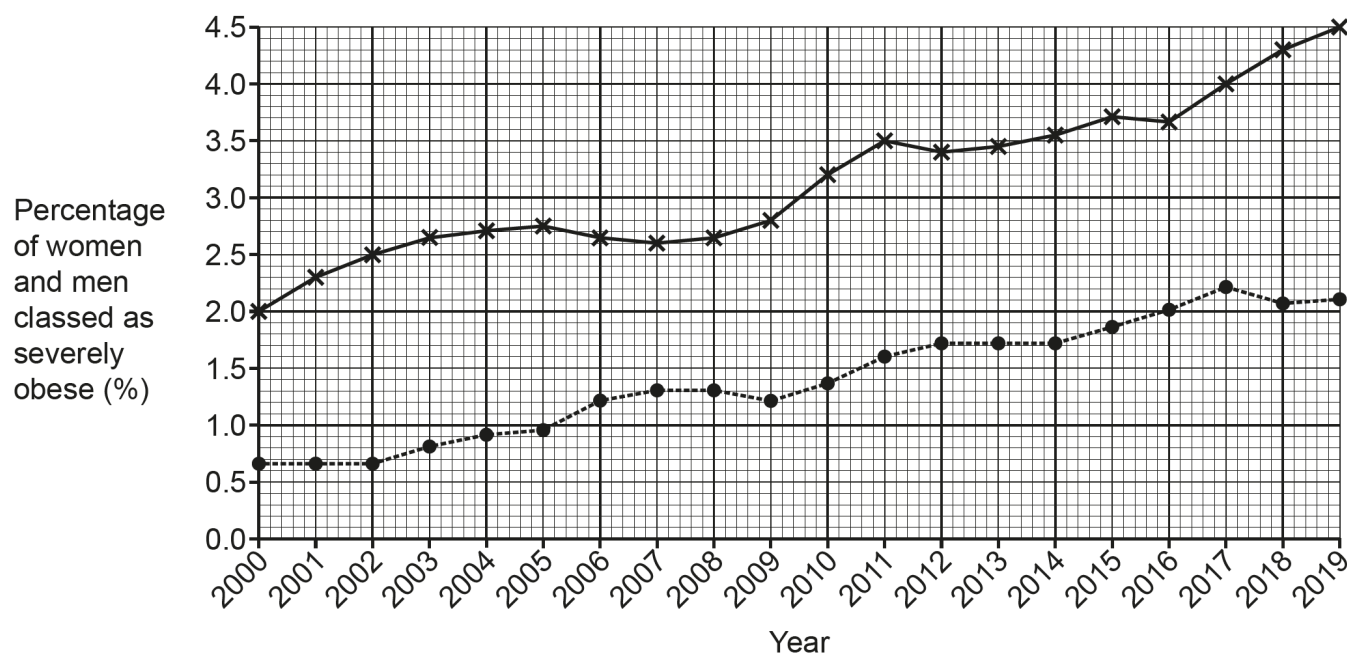
Question 5 (a)

- 5 The graph shows the percentages of women and men in the UK who were classed as severely obese each year between 2000 and 2019.

Key:

—×— Women

---●--- Men



- (a) What was the highest recorded percentage of **men** classed as severely obese between 2000 and 2019 **and** in which year did it occur?

Percentage = %

Year =

[1]

This question was well responded to by most candidates, who were able interpret information from graphs.

Question 5 (b)

- (b) Calculate the average annual increase in the percentage of **women** classed as severely obese between 2000 and 2019.

Give your answer to **2** significant figures.

Average annual increase in percentage = % per year **[2]**

Many candidates used the wrong calculation, but some were given one mark for correctly giving their response to 2 significant figures.

Question 5 (c)

- (c) One conclusion that can be made from the graph is that the general trend was an increase in severe obesity levels for both women and men.

State **one other** conclusion about a general trend that is shown in the graph.

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

Some candidates did not gain the mark here due to referring to 'more obese women' rather than 'a higher percentage of women', as indicated on the axis of the graph.

Question 5 (d)

- (d) Predict the general trend in the number of people in the UK with **cardiovascular disease** (CVD) between 2000 and 2019.

Explain how the graph supports your prediction.

Prediction

.....

Explanation

.....

.....

.....

[2]

Nearly all candidates correctly predicted that the trend in the number of people with CVD would increase but some could not then link that to an increase in obesity levels.

Question 5 (e)

- (e) It was **not** possible to collect data from every woman and man in the UK every year between 2000 and 2019.

The data shown in the graph are estimates.

Suggest how good estimates have been produced.

.....

.....

.....

.....

[2]

Approximately two-thirds of the candidates were given at least one mark in this question for recognising that sampling should be done or that the sample should be representative.

Question 6 (a)

6 Crown gall disease affects many species of plants in the UK.

(a) What type of pathogen causes crown gall disease?

..... [1]

The correct answer for the type of pathogen crown gall disease was not clearly known – virus and fungus were commonly seen. Half of candidates gained the mark.

The specification, in section B2.1.5, clearly states this disease is caused by bacteria.

Question 6 (b)

(b) The cell walls of plant cells help defend the plant against pathogens.

State **one other** plant defence against pathogens.

..... [1]

The role of waxy cuticle and antimicrobial substances was only known by about half of the cohort. Knowledge of plant defence mechanisms are an area of the specification which candidate were challenged by.

Question 6 (c)

(c) Crown gall disease kills plants because it damages phloem and xylem tissue.

Complete the table to show what is transported in each type of tissue.

Put **one or more** ticks (✓) in each row.

	Nitrate ions	Sugars	Water
Phloem			
Xylem			

[2]

Only very few candidates were credited both marks. Ticks appeared to be randomly applied. Few candidates ticked water for phloem. A common response was to say that xylem was for water only and phloem was for anything else.

Question 6 (d)

(d) Conifer trees have a genetic variant that makes them resistant to crown gall disease.

Scientists hope to transfer this genetic variant from conifer trees into some apple trees.

Explain how natural selection would increase the number of apple trees with the genetic variant over time.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [3]

Many candidates did not demonstrate clear understanding in this question. Some thought that the conifers were somehow involved in the inheritance of the variant. There was confusion here between sexual and asexual reproduction. Others thought that the apple trees would be crossed with the conifer trees.

The specification refers to this situation in B6.1.9 with reference to an example of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Question 7 (a)

- 7 A famous sycamore tree grew in a gap between two hills in the North of England.



The tree was cut down without permission in 2023, leaving just the tree stump at the bottom.

The tree stump is still alive, and the tree is regrowing from cells in the stump.

- (a) Which cells in the tree stump can turn into all the other cells and tissues needed by the regrowing tree?

Tick (✓) **one** box.

Meristem cells

☐

Phloem cells

☐

Root hair cells

☐

Xylem cells

☐

[1]

This question was well responded to, with most candidates giving the correct response of 'Meristem cells'.

Question 7 (b)

(b) Explain how these cells can make all the other cells and tissues needed by the regrowing tree.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [3]

Most candidates were given marks for explaining the process by which meristem cells make other new cells by becoming differentiated / specialised. Few were credited all 3 marks because there was no mention of gene switching, the process of mitosis or that specific types of cells are formed.

Exemplar 1

Meristem cells are unspecialised cells, meaning all their genes are active (switched on). This means they can make any amino acid ~~protein~~ to make any ^{protein} amino acid to be any cell that the tree needs to grow back. These cells are found in the roots, shoots, and the stump of the tree. They can differentiate (turn off some genes) to eventually become specialised cells [3] (eg xylem vessel tissue) to fully regrow the plant, and act as special cells with functions that the tree requires.

This answer is credited with 3 marks for stating that the meristem cells can become specialised by switching off some genes and giving an example of a type of tissue formed.

Question 7 (c)*

(c)* A student learns that the tree is regrowing from the living stump and says:

‘I think the regrown tree will be identical to the original one.’

Explain why the student is only partly correct that the regrown tree will be identical to the original tree.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [6]

Some candidates talked about genes switching on and off as being an argument in favour of the regrown tree not being identical to the original, i.e. if different genes are switched on/off, they would therefore be non-identical. Some thought that the stump would be identical, but the other features would differ. There was some confusion between mitosis and meiosis. Some said that the trees will be genetically identical, without explanation in terms of cells, so credit could not be given. Others were not given credit when they did not refer to the cells having the same genome but just the tree.

Question 8 (a)

8 Pea plants produce peas that are round or wrinkled.

A pea plant's alleles control which type of peas it produces.

A pea plant with one or two **R** alleles produces **round** peas.



A pea plant with two **r** alleles produces **wrinkled** peas.



(a) Draw lines to connect each **example** to its correct **description**.

Example	Description
	Dominant allele
	Dominant phenotype
R	Heterozygous genotype
Rr	Homozygous dominant genotype
rr	Homozygous recessive genotype
Wrinkled peas	Recessive allele
	Recessive phenotype

[4]

This question was well responded to; genetic terminology was well known by most candidates.

Question 8 (b)

(b) Gregor Mendel investigated the inheritance of round and wrinkled peas in the 1860s.

Here are the steps Mendel took in one experiment:

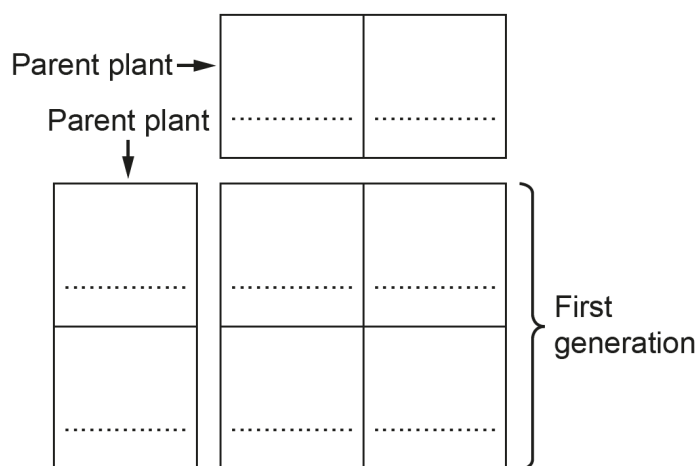
Step 1: Mendel bred one **RR** parent plant with one **rr** parent plant.
This produced the 'first generation' of offspring plants.

Step 2: Mendel then bred two of the first-generation plants.
This produced the 'second generation' of offspring plants.

Complete the **two** Punnett squares **and** find:

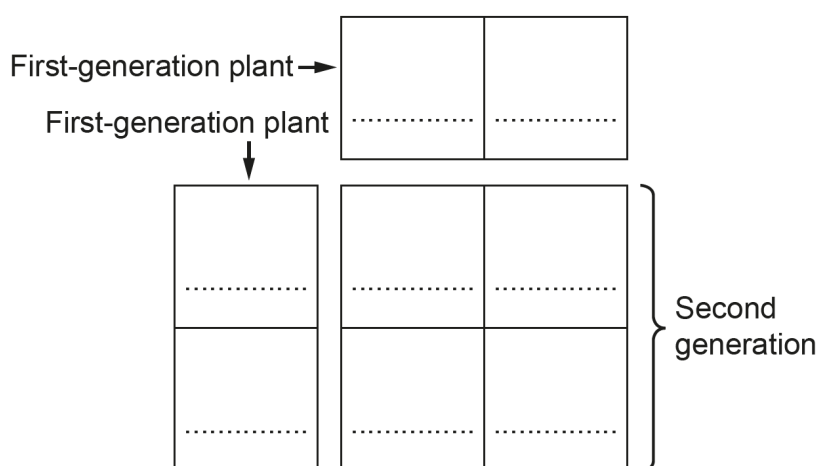
- the **probability** of a first-generation plant producing wrinkled peas
- the **ratio** of round pea plants to wrinkled pea plants in the second generation.

Step 1



Probability of a first-generation plant producing wrinkled peas =

Step 2



Ratio of round pea plants to wrinkled pea plants in second generation = :

[4]

Generally, this question was very well responded to. Most of candidates were credited all 4 marks. However, some could not give the correct phenotype ratio for the second generation, even though the Punnett square was correct.

Question 8 (c) (i)

(c) Almost 130 years later, scientists Alison Smith and Cathie Martin discovered where the alleles for round and wrinkled peas are located in pea plant DNA.

(i) They discovered that the **R** allele is used to make an enzyme called SBE1.

Complete the sentences to explain how this happens.

Use words from the list.

amino acids	chloroplasts	DNA
mRNA	plasmids	ribosomes

Copies of the allele are made from

The copies travel to structures called in the cytoplasm.

The sequence of bases tells these structures how to join together to make the enzyme.

[3]

Common wrong response for “copies of the allele made from ..” was DNA rather mRNA. Interesting to see how often candidates refer to plants have 23 pairs of chromosomes!

Most of the candidates were credited 2 or 3 marks here. The most common mistake occurred in the first sentence where the response of DNA was given instead of mRNA.

Question 8 (c) (ii)

(ii) The **R** and **r** alleles have different sequences of bases.

Describe how the scientists could have worked out where the **R** allele is located in the genome of pea plants.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

This question was challenging for candidates. Most just referred vaguely to genetic testing. Many candidates seemed to think that scientists would be able to recognise the **R** allele just by looking at the base sequence.

Question 8 (c) (iii)

(iii) The scientists also discovered that:

- the **r** allele has an extra section of DNA inserted into it
- the version of the SBE1 enzyme made from the **r** allele does **not** work.

Suggest how the extra section of DNA in the **r** allele could lead to the SBE1 enzyme **not** working.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [3]

This question proved very challenging for most candidates. Many candidates confused amino acids with bases talking about triplet codes of amino acids, as well as enzymes 'fitting' with the active site on the substrate.

OCR support



OCR has [Teaching and delivery guides](#) on Teach Cambridge that will assist not only with this section of the specification but in many other areas.

Exemplar 2

The extra section of DNA would have changed the sequence of codons in the gene. This would have caused a different polypeptide to be made from sequence of amino acids. A result could be that the enzyme's active site changed shape, so it could not form enzyme-substrate complexes. [3]

All 3 marks were credited for this response - altering the sequence of bases, causing a change to the amino acids produced, resulting in a change to the active site of the enzyme.

Question 9 (a)

- 9 Over recent years there has been increased rainfall in Kenya's Rift Valley. This is affecting biodiversity in the valley.

Increased rainfall can be caused by climate change.

- (a) Suggest how climate change can **reduce** biodiversity.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

Some candidates just used the word "affecting" (e.g. affecting the habitat) rather than say how the feature was affected.

Question 9 (b)

(b) **Table 9.1** shows data about two lakes in Kenya's Rift Valley.

Table 9.1

Item removed due to third party copyright restrictions

Local environmental workers claim the two lakes may soon join.

Evaluate this claim.

Use the data in **Table 9.1**.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

Most candidates used the data to recognise that the two lakes are getting larger and closer together.

Question 9 (c) (i)

(c) **Table 9.2** shows additional data about the same two lakes in Kenya's Rift Valley.

Table 9.2

Item removed due to third party copyright restrictions

(i) Explain why the crocodiles in Lake A would become endangered if the microalgae died out.

Use information from **Table 9.2**.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

Most candidates were credited 1 mark for using a food chain explanation for the threat to the crocodiles. Few stated that the microalgae are producers and even fewer referred to them making biomass.

Question 9 (c) (ii)

(ii) Microalgae are single-cellular organisms.

Scientists predict the microalgae will die out if the two lakes join.

Explain why the scientists have made this prediction.

Use information from **Table 9.2**.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [4]

Few candidates were able to explain what happens to cells when placed in solutions with a high concentration of solutes. A significant number did not appreciate the osmotic effects of high salt concentrations on the microalgae. Most just said that the microalgae would die or be eaten/competed with by the cyanobacteria or would be killed by the high salt concentration.

Misconception



A common misconception was that pH was related to salt concentration, and it was this then caused the reduction in microalgae.

Exemplar 3

When the 2 lakes join, the salt concentration in lake A will massively increase. This means that the ~~lake~~ lake water is ~~at~~ a higher salt concentration than inside the microalgae. This means that osmosis will make the ^{lake} water travel from a higher to lower concentration ^{of water} salt will travel out of the algae making them crenulate (shivel up) and die as they don't have enough water. The algae live in fresh water so this transition will kill them. The salt water has low water [4] concentration. The microalgae live in ~~8~~ 8mg/L salt concentration, where osmosis will be at a steady rate, but with 100,000mg/L of salt will kill the organism.

Higher salt concentration = lower water conc.

This response is credited with all 4 marks. There is a large increase in salt concentration in lake A. Due to the difference in concentration between the inside and outside of the algae osmosis takes place resulting in the cells 'shrivel up'.

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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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