GCSE
CHEMISTRY

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Report on the Examination

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General

This was the first year of the new specification. Students appear to have been well prepared, and coped well with the increased length of the paper and the larger number of questions requiring an extended response. Questions 8– 10 were common to the Higher Tier.

Levels of demand

Questions are set at two levels of demand for this paper:

- **Low demand** questions are designed to broadly target grades 1–3.
- **Standard demand** questions are designed to broadly target grades 4–5.

A student's final grade, however, is based on their attainment across the qualification as a whole, not just on questions that may have been targeted at the level at which they are working.

Question 1 (low demand)

01.1 74% of students achieved two or more marks, with 34% of students achieving all three. The vast majority of students knew that black ink would be separated by chromatography, but filtration was a popular incorrect answer for obtaining salt from seawater.

01.2 This question was not well answered. Many students did not know what to call a funnel, referring to it as a plastic cone. Other errors were to use more pieces of paper, or to suggest substituting a beaker for the conical flask. Answers which gave diagrams gained credit.

01.3 69% of students gained both marks, with about one in eight scoring neither.

01.4 51% of students scored both marks on this, the first calculation on the paper. Partial credit was given to those who calculated $2 \div 18$ as a percentage rather than $2 \div 20$, or who correctly calculated the percentage of metal A instead of metal B.

01.5 68% of students knew that a mixture of metals is an alloy. The most popular incorrect answer was 'a compound'.

01.6 48% of students realised that the correct answer is that the layers in the mixture are distorted. 25% of students thought that the correct answer is that 'the mixture has a giant structure'. Whilst true, this statement does not give the correct explanation for the extra hardness of the mixture.

01.7 74% of students could calculate the volume of the cube correctly. The most popular distractor was 400 nm^3, with 400 nm^2 being the surface area of one face.

Question 2 (low and standard demand)

02.1 42% of students did not realise that the number of outer shell electrons would be the same as the Group number.

02.2 19% of students were able to deduce that hydrogen bromide exists as small molecules. The majority of answers were fairly evenly split between giant covalent and ionic lattice.

02.3 59% of students were able to select F_2 as the correct formula for fluorine, with most of the others opting for F.

02.4 26% of students scored two or more marks, usually for giving the correct trend in reactivity and stating that iodine had no reactions or no changes.

Very few students could articulate their reasoning in terms of displacement. Several tried to answer in terms of reactivity of the potassium halides rather than the halogens, or were misusing the term 'halide' instead of 'halogen', making it difficult to gain any credit. Others thought that darkness of colour was an indication of reactivity, whilst some referred to melting or boiling points, which were not relevant.

Some students tried to answer in terms of ease of gaining an electron, rather than by using the information in the table as intended. Those who did so were given credit, with the most common mark being for a description of the iodine atom being larger than the chlorine atom.

02.5 74% of students were able to calculate the M_r of TiO_2 correctly. Of those who didn't gain credit, often they didn't recognise that there are two oxygen atoms, giving an answer of 64

02.6 This question discriminated well with 32% of students achieving both marks. Many students could convert 1.2 kg to 1200 g. However, many used the mass of reactant, 500 g, as either the numerator or denominator in the percentage yield expression. Others inverted the % yield expression or tried to subtract values.

Question 3 (low and standard demand)

03.1 This question was answered very well, with 60% of students achieving four or five marks. 11% of students achieved all five marks, the key difference being that they knew Chadwick proved the existence of the neutron, which is a new area of the specification.

03.2 78% of students were able to substitute in the values and calculate the relative atomic mass correctly. However, some calculator errors were seen which often led to an answer of 45.1 instead of 63.6. A few students, having looked at the periodic table, 'corrected' their answer to 63.5, thereby forfeiting a mark.

03.3 This question was answered well, with 76% of students able to identify the element as copper. Those who had calculated their relative atomic mass incorrectly were able to gain credit, for example, by giving the answer scandium after a value of 45.1.

Some looked at the mass numbers of the isotopes and were able to identify copper in that way. However, those who looked at the isotope of mass number 65 and gave the answer zinc did not gain credit.

03.4 Students found this calculation difficult, with 39% achieving both marks. Many multiplied by 10 000 or divided by 1×10^{-4}. A few introduced the relative atomic mass of copper.

Partial credit was given for a correct answer not expressed in standard form. 12% of students did not attempt the question.

Question 4 (low and standard demand)

04.1 72% of students could read off the volume correctly, although 4.4 cm^3 was a popular wrong answer. Some students seem unfamiliar with 'upside down' apparatus.

04.2 This question was answered well, with 70% of students recognising a straight line through the origin as showing proportionality. The idea that neither line showed proportionality was more popular than that both showed proportionality.

04.3 77% of students recognised that both lines showed a positive correlation.

04.4 All four statements about graphite were true and 70% of students could pick out 'delocalised electrons' as the reason for graphite's electrical conductivity.

04.5 Students found this question tough. Full marks were very rare, although 27% of students did achieve three marks.

Most suggested potassium, rather than hydrogen, would be a product from the electrolysis of potassium bromide solution. Partial credit was given for the correct products at the opposite electrodes. As a result many students achieved a mark for having zinc and chlorine the wrong way round.

Question 5 (low and standard demand)

05.1 This was well answered, with 73% of students knowing the state symbol for a gas.

05.2 This question was difficult to answer with 81% of students not achieving a mark. The idea of a gas leaving the test tube was required. Many referred incorrectly to evaporation. Some students correctly said that a gas was produced, but did not say that it escaped, so did not gain the mark. Many thought the loss in mass was due to energy being lost.

05.3 This was very well answered, with 83% of students achieving the mark.

05.4 74% of students could correctly identify the anomalous result. The most popular incorrect answer was Trial 3 for 8 g of copper carbonate, which is exactly midway between the other two values.

05.5 This was not answered very well with 0.6% of students achieving both marks here. 12% of students achieved a single mark, usually for eating for longer'. 10% of students did not attempt an answer at all.

A lack of precision of expression proved costly, for example, 'leave it for longer' does not mean the same thing as 'heat it for longer'. Some students suggested putting in a bung to prevent any gas escaping, missing the entire reason for the investigation.

Some students suggested heating until no more gas was given off, with no indication as to how they would know when that was the case. Credit was given to those who could do so, for example by testing with lime water until it no longer turned cloudy or no more bubbles were seen. No credit was given for stating the test for carbon dioxide.

05.6 77% of students could draw a straight line touching five of the points. Errors occurred where a student had bent the line to touch the point at (12.0, 5.6), or where there was a discontinuity in the line. Some students used a pen and were then unable to correct their first attempt. Graphs should always be plotted and drawn with a sharp pencil and a long enough ruler.

05.7 50% of students achieved the mark here. Of the incorrect responses, many misread the scale on the *x*-axis and reading the value at 8.8 g instead of 8.4 g.

05.8 There were some very good answers, with 48% of students achieving both marks. An incorrect answer to the previous question did not prevent access to both marks. However, a significant number of students did not use their answer from question **05.7** as instructed (which would have entailed scaling up by multiplying by 20). Instead, they used a different point on the graph, which almost always led to an incorrect answer.

Question 6 (low and standard demand)

06.1 25% of students could identify both variables, with 41% identifying one. This was usually the independent variable.

Many thought that the concentration of the solution was the dependent variable. A compensatory mark was awarded to those who identified the two correct variables but had them the wrong way round.

06.2 86% of students understood the reason for using a polystyrene cup in this required practical activity.

06.3 This question was very well done, with 83% of students able to draw a bar chart correctly. Of those who achieved a single mark, forgetting to label the bars was more common than mis-use of the scale.

06.4 50% of students answered correctly. Of the unsuccessful attempts, many failed to express their ideas coherently. Some confused endothermic with exothermic, eg saying the temperature decreased, ignoring the evidence in front of them.

There was confusion between heat and temperature: heat is not increasing, and temperature is not given out. Some students thought ‘taking in heat’ means the temperature would rise. This shows a common misunderstanding of endothermic reactions: students think that heat energy is moving, rather than being converted from heat energy to chemical energy.

06.5 81% of students were able to give the correct order of reactivity.

06.6 Students found this question difficult to answer. 19% of students achieved all three marks, although47% achieved at least one mark. 14% of students did not attempt the question.

Students answer in terms of repeating the experiment using the unknown metal, and reorder the four elements according to the temperature change. However, many decided to use a different method, with varying degrees of success.

Alternative approaches that were accepted were:

- reacting all four metals with an acid and assessing the rate of reaction or temperature change
- carrying out a series of displacement reactions, either by adding the unknown metal to salt solutions of the other three metals, or by heating the unknown metal with oxides of the others
- using the unknown as the test electrode in a series of electrochemical cells and measuring the voltage.

Approaches that were not accepted included:

- trying to react the metal with the other metals
- measuring melting or boiling point
- looking at the periodic table.

06.7 53% of students could identify line D as the correct answer. A decent number of students confused products with reactants.

06.8 This was well done, with 75% of students able to identify the activation energy on the reaction profile.

Question 7 (low and standard demand)

07.1 This question was answered well with 80% of students giving the correct name of the product. Some students tried to add in other products such as water or hydrogen.

07.2 85% of students knew this was an oxidation reaction.

07.3 68% of students could relate the colour of the universal indicator to the correct pH. The most common distractor was ‘pH 7’.

07.4 73% of students could name sodium hydroxide correctly.

07.5 This question assessed recall directly from the specification. 43% of students could identify the OH^- ion as being present in all alkalis.

More than a 25% thought that the Na^+ ion was responsible, with nearly as many opting for the H^+ ion.

07.6 Students found this calculation very difficult, with 7% achieving full marks. 13% of students made no attempt to answer.

It was necessary to convert either the volume to dm^3 or the concentration to mol/cm^3 to gain partial credit, but most students either failed to attempt a conversion or did not know how many cm^3 are in one dm^3.

07.7 58% of students achieved both marks. It was very common to see the scale on the *x*-axis misread so that the plots for sodium and potassium were incorrect. Some students were using a pen or a very thick pencil so were unable to correct their answer or were compromising accuracy.

07.8 This question was answered very well, with 82% of students answering correctly.

Question 8 (standard demand)

08.1 33% of students could give a different type of substance. Many suggested a base, but as metal oxides are themselves bases, this was not another type of substance and was ignored. Named examples of correct types of substance were accepted.

08.2 This was not answered well. 2% of students were able to work out that two nitrate ions were required for each calcium ion, or to use correct notation for the resulting formula.

08.3 This was a tough question that discriminated between students very well. 39% of students were able to achieve at least two marks, and 1% achieved all six.

Many students did not start with a metal oxide and an acid. Of those who did, many then added magnesium sulfate, the product, to their mixture, rendering the whole process nonsensical. Most did not name the metal oxide or the acid. Many conflated the reaction to produce the salt with the crystallisation phase, adding the metal oxide and acid together in an evaporating basin and then evaporating it to dryness.

The crystallisation phase was often described very well, and this was where most students scored their marks.

Question 9 (standard demand)

09.1 Because the question asked for the formula rather than the empirical formula, an answer of Fe_9S_{18} was accepted. Even so, 21% of students were able to answer this correctly.

Many students ignored the necessity for correct capital and lower case letters, with a lower case 'f' being seen quite frequently. Others did not count the atoms correctly, or used a large figure '2' in an inappropriate position.

09.2 This question worked very well. 84% of students managed to achieve at least one mark, with 51% achieving two or more. The most frequent error was in the number of neutrons.

09.3 Whilst 56% of students achieved at least one mark, 34% of these students achieved both.

- Many students repeated information in the stem of the question. And some appeared to ignore it as they declared sodium to be a non-metal.
- Many gave differences in the structure of the atoms instead of differences in properties of the substances.
- Some effectively gave the same difference twice, for example writing that sodium is soft on one line and iron is hard on the other.

09.4 26% of students achieved at least one mark on this question, although some very good answers were seen. As with some other questions, students were sometimes prone to imprecise use of language.

Many students thought that carbon is more reactive than oxygen rather than nickel, or said that carbon is reacting with oxygen (it is not, it is reacting with nickel oxide to remove the oxygen). Those who tried to answer in terms of electron transfer often struggled to gain all the marks.

09.5 Students struggled with this calculation; with 9% of students providing a fully correct answer. This question relies on knowledge of the expression for atom economy. Those who quoted the expression often did not know what was meant by 'reactants'.

It was also common to include the M_r of all the products instead of just the nickel, leading to an answer of 100%, which is clearly incorrect as there is more than one product.

There seemed to be trouble with the interpretation of some calculator displays. Many students lost the final mark because they gave an answer of $67.\dot{8}$. This answer is neither correct (it is not 67.8888888…) nor to three significant figures (it is to an infinite number of significant figures). Some even recognised this latter point and rounded, incorrectly, to 67.9.

Question 10 (standard demand)

10.1 54% of students recognised that there had to be two different metals, and that water alone would not be suitable as the electrolyte. The next most popular answer was ‘zinc, zinc, water’ which missed both of the essentials. A significant number of students ticked more than one box.

10.2 This is a new area of the specification and students found it difficult. 24% of students answered correctly. Many mixed up the answers to questions **10.2** and **10.3**, and many thought that charge, energy, or electrons run out.

10.3 11% of students achieved this mark. This question required students to demonstrate their knowledge of statements from the specification.

10.4 25% of students achieved both marks. Many realised that the missing reactant was oxygen, but were unable to write its formula correctly so lost both marks. A few achieved a single mark for writing the correct formula for oxygen without correctly balancing the equation.

10.5 This ‘extended response’ question discriminated well, with 51% of students scoring four or more marks. Many students limited themselves to level 2 as they just used the table, without bringing in any of their own knowledge, or failed to give a judgement on which method is better.

Many students wasted space quoting data from the table. A statement such as ‘you can go further with a hydrogen fuel cell before stopping to refuel’ is shorter, and gains more credit, than ‘you can go 415 miles between refuelling with a hydrogen fuel cell car but 240 miles between recharges of a lithium-ion battery car’.

A lot of repetition was seen; once you have said that one thing is **more** expensive, you do not need to say that the other is cheaper. There were many vague statements about something being ‘better for the environment’ without saying how or why.

There was also some misinterpretation of the data on distance travelled per unit of energy. Some students thought this referred to energy per mile or something similar, so though incorrectly that the fuel cell was better.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.