

Past-paper walk-through

Electric Potential ■ 10.5

eXercise

Questions in this set

- 2023 Q4
- 2017 Q4
- 2016 Q3

Reading the mark scheme

- **B1** a mark that stands on its own – the point is either made or not.
- **M1** a *method* mark: the right approach, even if the number is wrong.
- **A1** an *answer* mark, and it usually needs its M mark first.
- **C1** a working mark on the way to the answer.
- **//** separates answers the examiner accepts equally.
- **ecf** = error carried forward: a later part is marked on your own earlier answer.
- **owtte** = “or words to that effect” – the wording need not match.

Question 4

2023 ■ Q4

(10 points, suggested time 20 minutes)

Particles A and B each have positive charge $+Q$ and are held fixed at two vertices of an equilateral triangle of side d , as shown. Point P is located equidistant from each vertex of the triangle.

[Figure: An equilateral triangle with vertices labeled; Particle A at one vertex and Particle B at another vertex, each carrying charge $+Q$, with side length d between them; Point P is located at the position equidistant from all three vertices (the centroid), including the unoccupied bottom-right vertex referenced in the discussion below.]

Students Y and Z discuss the electric field and the electric potential at Point P after a third charged particle is placed in the bottom-right vertex. The students make the following statements.

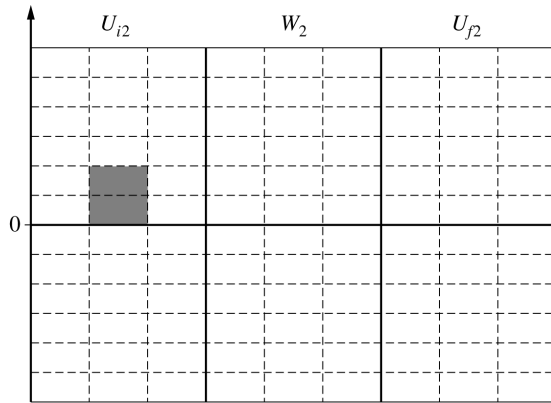
Question 4

Student Y: "If a particle with positive charge $+2Q$ is placed at the bottom-right vertex, the magnitude of the electric field will be zero at Point P."

Student Z: "To make the value of the electric potential zero at Point P, a particle with negative charge $-Q$ should be placed at the bottom-right vertex."

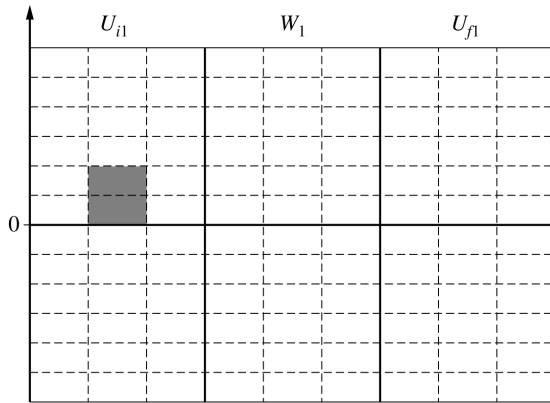
(a) In a coherent, paragraph-length response, evaluate the accuracy of each student's statement. If any aspect of either student's statement is inaccurate, explain how to correct the student's statement. Support your evaluations using appropriate physics principles.

Question 4



Scenario 2

Question 4



Scenario 1

Question 4

Question 4

2023 ■ Q4

(10 points, suggested time 20 minutes)

Particles A and B each have positive charge $+Q$ and are held fixed at two vertices of an equilateral triangle of side d , as shown. Point P is located equidistant from each vertex of the triangle.

[Figure: An equilateral triangle with vertices labeled; Particle A at one vertex and Particle B at another vertex, each carrying charge $+Q$, with side length d between them; Point P is located at the position equidistant from all three vertices (the centroid), including the unoccupied bottom-right vertex referenced in the discussion below.]

Students Y and Z discuss the electric field and the electric potential at Point P after a third charged particle is placed in the bottom-right vertex. The students make the following statements.

Student Y: "If a particle with positive charge $+2Q$ is placed at the bottom-right vertex, the magnitude of the electric field will be zero at Point P."

Question 4

Student Z: "To make the value of the electric potential zero at Point P, a particle with negative charge $-Q$ should be placed at the bottom-right vertex."

(b)(i) Particles A and B are once again held in place at two vertices of the equilateral triangle. The students want to represent the electric potential energy of a system of particles that is brought very far away to the bottom-right vertex. Scenarios 1 and 2 are considered.

In Scenario 1, a third particle with positive charge $+Q$ is moved from very far away to the bottom-right vertex and then held in place. A bar is shown on the following chart that represents the electric potential energy U_{i1} of the system consisting of all three particles when the third particle with positive charge is very far away from the other particles.

In the grid provided, complete the bar chart.

Question 4

- Draw a bar to represent the work W_1 required to move the third particle with positive charge from very far away to the bottom-right vertex.
- Draw another bar to represent the electric potential energy U_{f1} of the system consisting of all three particles when the third particle with positive charge is held in place at the bottom-right vertex.

The height of each bar should be proportional to the energy represented. If the quantity is zero, write a “0” in that column.

[Chart: A bar chart grid with three labeled columns: U_{i1} , W_1 , U_{f1} , and a horizontal “0” baseline. A bar is already shown under column U_{i1} (a small positive bar above the 0 line), representing the initial potential energy of the two-particle system when the third particle is very far away. Scenario 1 title below the chart.]

(b)(ii) In Scenario 2, a particle with negative charge $-Q$ is moved from very far away to the bottom-right vertex and then held in place. A bar is shown on the following

Question 4

chart that represents the electric potential energy U_{i2} of the system consisting of all three particles when the particle with negative charge is very far away from the other particles.

In the grid provided, complete the bar chart.

- Draw a bar to represent the work W_2 required to move the particle with negative charge from very far away to the bottom-right vertex.
- Draw another bar to represent the electric potential energy U_{f2} of the system consisting of all three particles when the particle with negative charge is held in place at the bottom-right vertex.

Question 4

The height of each bar should be proportional to the energy represented. If the quantity is zero, write a "0" in that column.

[Chart: A bar chart grid with three labeled columns: U_{i2} , W_2 , U_{f2} , and a horizontal "0" baseline. A bar is already shown under column U_{i2} (a small positive bar above the 0 line), representing the initial potential energy of the two-particle system when the negative particle is very far away. Scenario 2 title below the chart.]

Solution 4

(a) Mark scheme

- Student Y is incorrect: before the third particle is placed at the bottom-right vertex, the electric field from particles A and B at Point P points down and to the right. The electric field from a positively charged particle placed at the bottom-right vertex would point up and to the left. Evaluating Student Y correctly requires recognizing the VECTOR nature of electric field (Point 1: vector-nature evaluation). The third particle needs charge $+Q$, not $+2Q$, to have the correct magnitude to cancel the field to zero at Point P (Point 2: stating the third particle must be $+Q$ for zero field at P, OR stating what resultant field magnitude a $+2Q$ particle would actually produce at P). Student Z is incorrect: before the third particle is placed, the electric potential at Point P is positive;

Solution 4

because P is equidistant from all three particles, the potential at P is proportional to the TOTAL charge of the system (Point 3: scalar-nature evaluation of electric potential). Zero potential at P requires the third particle to have charge $-2Q$ (so the total system charge is zero), not $-Q$ (Point 4: correctly stating the required charge is $-2Q$). Point 5 (holistic): the paragraph response is logical, relevant, internally consistent, and follows the paragraph-response requirements (addresses both students' claims with physics-based justification).

Solution 4

(b)(i) Mark scheme

- Bar chart for Scenario 1 (third particle $+Q$ brought from infinity to the bottom-right vertex): draw U_{i1} as a small POSITIVE bar (the electric PE of the A–B pair only, since the third particle is infinitely far away and does not yet interact — take this as the baseline unit, e.g. $+1$ unit) (this bar is given/shaded on the chart). Draw W_1 (work done bringing the $+Q$ particle in) as a positive bar equal to twice U_{i1} (Point 1: W_1 positive). Draw U_{f1} as a positive bar equal to $3U_{i1}$ (Point 2: $U_{f1} = 3U_{i1}$), consistent with energy conservation $U_{i1} + W_1 = U_{f1}$ (Point 3: bars satisfy $U_{i1} + W_1 = U_{f1}$, i.e. U_{f1} is the tallest bar, W_1 is the middle bar at twice U_{i1} 's height, all three bars positive).

Solution 4

(b)(ii) Mark scheme

- Bar chart for Scenario 2 (third particle $-Q$ brought from infinity to the bottom-right vertex): U_{i2} is the same given/shaded positive bar as U_{i1} (PE of the A-B pair only, unchanged by which charge is later brought in). Draw U_{f2} as a NEGATIVE bar equal in magnitude to U_{i2} , i.e. $U_{f2} = -U_{i2}$ (Point 1). Draw W_2 (work done bringing the $-Q$ particle in) as a NEGATIVE bar equal to $-2U_{i2}$, so that energy conservation $U_{i2} + W_2 = U_{f2}$ holds (Point 2: W_2 negative and consistent with $U_{i2} + W_2 = U_{f2}$, i.e. U_{f2} is a shallow negative bar of the same magnitude as U_{i2} , and W_2 is a deeper negative bar of twice that magnitude).

Question 4

2017 ■ Q4

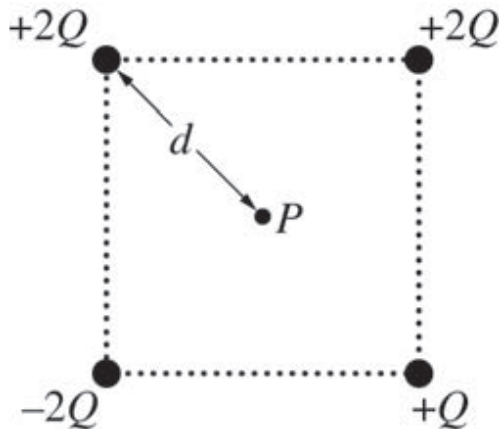
[Figure: A square with a charged object at each corner: top-left corner $+2Q$, top-right corner $+Q$, bottom-left corner $-2Q$, bottom-right corner $+2Q$. Point P is at the center of the square, with a dotted line segment of length d drawn from the top-left corner ($+2Q$) to point P .]

The figure above represents four objects, with charges as shown, that are held in place at the corners of a square. Point P is at the center of the square, a distance d from each of the objects. Express all algebraic answers to the following in terms of Q , d , and physical constants.

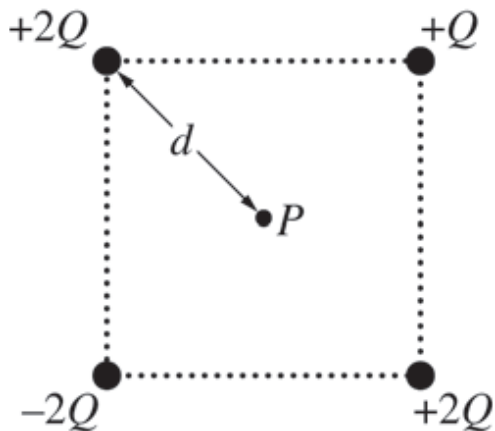
(a) On the dot below, draw an arrow that represents the direction of the net electric force exerted on the object with charge $+Q$ by the other three objects.

[Figure: A dot labeled $+Q$ at the intersection of a horizontal dashed line and a vertical dashed line, for the student to draw a force-direction arrow from the dot.]

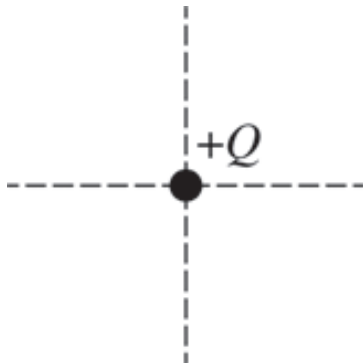
Question 4



Question 4



Question 4



Question 4

2017 ■ Q4

[Figure: A square with a charged object at each corner: top-left corner $+2Q$, top-right corner $+Q$, bottom-left corner $-2Q$, bottom-right corner $+2Q$. Point P is at the center of the square, with a dotted line segment of length d drawn from the top-left corner ($+2Q$) to point P .]

The figure above represents four objects, with charges as shown, that are held in place at the corners of a square. Point P is at the center of the square, a distance d from each of the objects. Express all algebraic answers to the following in terms of Q , d , and physical constants.

(b)(i) Calculate the magnitude of the electric field at point P due to all four objects.

On the dot below, draw an arrow to indicate the direction of the net field at point P .

[Figure, left "Draw Arrow": A dot labeled P at the intersection of a horizontal dashed line and a vertical dashed line, for the student to draw a field-direction arrow from the dot. Right "Calculate Electric Field": blank space for the calculation.]

(b)(ii) Calculate the electric potential at point P due to all four objects.

Question 4

2017 ■ Q4

[Figure: A square with a charged object at each corner: top-left corner $+2Q$, top-right corner $+Q$, bottom-left corner $-2Q$, bottom-right corner $+2Q$. Point P is at the center of the square, with a dotted line segment of length d drawn from the top-left corner ($+2Q$) to point P .]

The figure above represents four objects, with charges as shown, that are held in place at the corners of a square. Point P is at the center of the square, a distance d from each of the objects. Express all algebraic answers to the following in terms of Q , d , and physical constants.

(c) In a coherent, paragraph-length response, briefly describe the meaning of electric potential energy and explain qualitatively how electric potential energy can be related to work. Also explain qualitatively how the electric potential energy of the four-object system would change if the $+Q$ and $+2Q$ objects on the right side of the square now switch positions as shown in the figure below. Support your explanation using appropriate physics principles.

Question 4

[Figure: A square with a charged object at each corner, showing the swapped configuration: top-left corner $+2Q$, top-right corner $+2Q$, bottom-left corner $-2Q$, bottom-right corner $+Q$. Point P is at the center of the square, with a dotted line segment of length d drawn from the top-left corner ($+2Q$) to point P .]

Solution 4

(a)

Mark scheme

- Draw an arrow from the $+Q$ object pointing outward, along a diagonal of the square, directed away from the object with charge $-2Q$, with no other arrows drawn. 1 pt total.

Solution 4

(b)(i) Mark scheme

- Find the net electric field at point P (center of the square) due to all four charges. 3 points:
- 1 pt for correctly determining the magnitudes of the field from the individual objects: the fields from the two $+2Q$ objects cancel (may be implicit or explicit in the calculation); for the $-2Q$ object, $E = 2kQ/d^2$; for the $+Q$ object, $E = kQ/d^2$ (where d is the distance from each charge to P).
- 1 pt for correctly adding the individual fields: $E = 3kQ/d^2$.
- 1 pt for showing the correct direction on the diagram: along a diagonal of the square, toward the object with charge $-2Q$.

Solution 4

(b)(ii)**Mark scheme**

- Show a correct scalar potential summation at point P :
- $V = (k/d)(+2Q + Q + 2Q - 2Q) = 3kQ/d$.
- 1 pt for showing this correct scalar summation. A final numeric answer is not required, but no credit is given if an incorrect final answer is included.

Solution 4

(c) Mark scheme

- Paragraph-length response on electric potential energy and how it changes when the $+Q$ and $+2Q$ objects on the right side of the square swap positions. 5 points, 1 each for:
 - 1) Indicating that electric potential energy is the energy stored in a configuration of charged objects.
 - 2) Indicating that the change in potential energy equals the work done by an external force to create a particular configuration.

Solution 4

- **1** Indicating that moving the $+2Q$ object results in an increase in energy, and moving the $+Q$ object results in a decrease in energy — i.e., showing understanding that moving charges of the same sign closer together increases the energy and/or moving charges of opposite sign closer together decreases the energy, with some support such as $U = kqQ/r$ or a description of doing work against/with the forces.
- 4) Indicating that the net result is an increase in energy, with some explanation.
- 5) Giving a logical, relevant, and internally consistent response that addresses the required argument/question and follows the published paragraph-length-response guidelines.

Question 3

2016 ■ Q3

[Figure: two identical spheres X and Y shown as dots inside a large outer circle, with concentric-style closed curves (isolines of electric potential) drawn around each sphere, the two families of isolines merging into a single outer boundary. Sphere X is on the left, sphere Y is on the right (labeled $\bullet Y$). Around Y there are three nested circles; three labeled points lie on these circles moving outward from Y : point C (innermost, closest to Y), point B (middle), and point A (outermost, on the outer boundary). Around X there are also nested closed curves. The outermost curve encloses both X and Y and is the single outermost isoline shown.]

The dots in the figure above represent two identical spheres, X and Y , that are fixed in place with their centers in the plane of the page. Both spheres are charged, and the charge on sphere Y is positive. The lines are isolines of electric potential, also in the

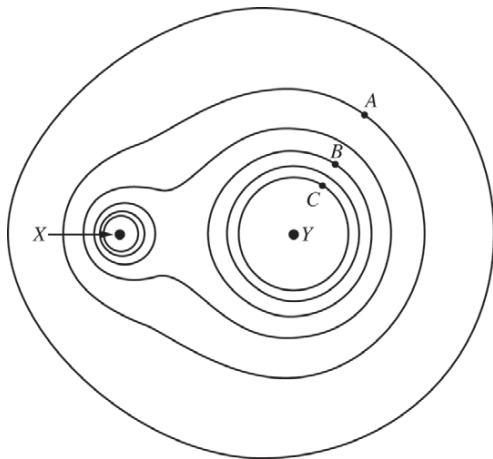
Question 3

plane of the page, with a potential difference of 10 V between each set of adjacent lines. The absolute value of the electric potential of the outermost line is 50 V.

(a) Indicate the values of the potentials, including the signs, at the labeled points *A* and *B*.

Potential at point *A* _____ Potential at point *B* _____

Question 3



Question 3

2016 ■ Q3

[Figure: two identical spheres X and Y shown as dots inside a large outer circle, with concentric-style closed curves (isolines of electric potential) drawn around each sphere, the two families of isolines merging into a single outer boundary. Sphere X is on the left, sphere Y is on the right (labeled $\bullet Y$). Around Y there are three nested circles; three labeled points lie on these circles moving outward from Y : point C (innermost, closest to Y), point B (middle), and point A (outermost, on the outer boundary). Around X there are also nested closed curves. The outermost curve encloses both X and Y and is the single outermost isoline shown.]

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Question 3

(b)(i) How do the magnitudes and the signs of the charges of the spheres compare?

Explain your answer in terms of the isolines of electric potential shown.

(b)(ii) The spheres at points X and Y have masses in the same ratio as the magnitudes of their charges. The isolines of gravitational potential for the spheres have shapes similar to those of the isolines shown. Explain why the two sets of isolines have similar shapes.

Question 3

2016 ■ Q3

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Question 3

(c) Let the potentials at the three labeled points be V_A , V_B , and V_C . A proton with charge $+q$ and mass m is released from rest at point B .

Based on your answer to part (b)(ii), briefly describe one similarity and one difference between the electric and gravitational forces exerted on the proton by the system of the two spheres. The similarity and difference you describe must not be ones that generally apply to all forces.

Question 3

2016 ■ Q3

[Figure: two identical spheres X and Y shown as dots inside a large outer circle, with concentric-style closed curves (isolines of electric potential) drawn around each sphere, the two families of isolines merging into a single outer boundary. Sphere X is on the left, sphere Y is on the right (labeled $\bullet Y$). Around Y there are three nested circles; three labeled points lie on these circles moving outward from Y : point C (innermost, closest to Y), point B (middle), and point A (outermost, on the outer boundary). Around X there are also nested closed curves. The outermost curve encloses both X and Y and is the single outermost isoline shown.]

The dots in the figure above represent two identical spheres, X and Y , that are fixed in place with their centers in the plane of the page. Both spheres are charged, and the charge on sphere Y is positive. The lines are isolines of electric potential, also in the plane of the page, with a potential difference of 10 V between each set of adjacent lines. The absolute value of the electric potential of the outermost line is 50 V .

Question 3

(d)(i) At some time after being released from rest at point B , the proton has moved through a potential difference of magnitude 20 V .

Determine the change in electric potential energy of the proton-spheres system when the proton has moved through the 20 V potential difference. Express your answer symbolically in terms of q , V_A , V_B , V_C , and physical constants, as appropriate.

(d)(ii) As it moved through the 20 V potential difference, the proton was displaced a distance d by the electric force. Determine a symbolic expression for the total work done on the proton by the electric field in terms of the average magnitude E_{avg} of the electric field over that distance.

(d)(iii) Two students are discussing how and why the kinetic energy of the proton would change after it is released.

Question 3

- Student 1 says that if the system is defined as the proton and the spheres, the increase in the proton's kinetic energy is due to a change in the system's potential energy as the proton moves through the 20 V potential difference.
- Student 2 says that if the system is defined as only the proton, the kinetic energy of the proton increases because positive work is done on the proton by the electric field as the proton moves through the 20 V potential difference.

Discuss each student's claims, explaining why each is correct or incorrect.

Solution 3

(a) Mark scheme

- Potential at point A has magnitude 60 V; potential at point B has magnitude 80 V (units not required). Both potentials must carry the SAME sign as each other (either both positive or both negative, consistent with the actual isoline diagram) — this follows from part (b)(i)'s result that the two spheres carry same-sign charge, so no equipotential surface between them is ever at zero and the potential never changes sign across the region. A correct answer states $V_A = 60 \text{ V}$ and $V_B = 80 \text{ V}$ with matching (not opposite) signs on the two values — either both written as explicitly positive or both with no negative sign, or both explicitly negative, whichever matches the diagram's isoline pattern.

Solution 3

(b)(i) Mark scheme

- Sphere Y carries a greater magnitude of charge than sphere X: the nearest equipotential line of the same value is farther from Y than it is from X, which indicates Y produces a given potential value over a larger distance, i.e., Y has the larger charge magnitude. The two spheres X and Y must have the SAME sign of charge: the isolines show no zero-potential line anywhere between the spheres, meaning the potentials produced by the two charges never cancel between them — this is only possible if both charges are the same sign (equivalently: the electric field vectors, which are perpendicular to the equipotentials, show a pattern consistent with two same-sign sources). Full credit needs (1) correctly comparing

Solution 3

the charge magnitudes of X and Y with a valid isoline-based explanation and (2) correctly identifying that X and Y are the same sign with a valid explanation.

Solution 3

(b)(ii) Mark scheme

- Gravitational potential and electric potential both fall off with distance in the same mathematical ($1/r$) way, and both depend directly on the strength of their respective source (mass for gravity, charge for electricity). Since the masses of the two spheres are given to be in the same ratio as the magnitudes of their charges, the relative 'strength' of each sphere as a gravitational source matches its relative strength as an electric source. Because the sources have the same relative strengths and the same $1/r$ potential dependence on distance, the resulting isoline patterns (shapes) for gravitational potential match those for electric potential.

Solution 3

(c) Mark scheme

- Similarity (not true of all forces): both the electric force and the gravitational force between the proton and the sphere system have the same inverse-square ($1/r^2$) dependence on distance. Difference (not true of all forces): the proton has the same sign of charge as the two spheres (established in part (b)(i)), so the electric force on the proton is repulsive; gravity, however, is always attractive. Therefore the electric and gravitational forces on the proton point in opposite directions (an alternative acceptable difference: the two forces differ in magnitude for these objects). Full credit needs one valid non-generic similarity and one valid non-generic difference.

Solution 3

(d)(i)

Mark scheme

- $\Delta U_E = q\Delta V$. The proton moves from point B toward point A through the 20 V potential difference, so $\Delta V = V_A - V_B$ (given as 20 V in magnitude). Symbolically: $\Delta U = q(V_A - V_B)$. Full credit needs (1) an attempt to apply $\Delta U_E = q\Delta V$ using the given symbolic variables and (2) arriving at the correct symbolic result $\Delta U = q(V_A - V_B)$ — using numeric values for the potentials instead of symbols earns no credit for this part.

Solution 3

(d)(ii)

Mark scheme

- Work done by the electric field: $W = F_{\text{avg}} \cdot d$, where the average force on the proton is $F_{\text{avg}} = qE_{\text{avg}}$. So $W = qE_{\text{avg}} \cdot d$. (Equivalently, using energy: $W = -\Delta U_E = q\Delta V$, and since $\Delta V = E_{\text{avg}} \cdot d$ over the displacement, this again gives $W = qE_{\text{avg}} \cdot d$.) Full credit needs (1) a correct expression for work — $W = Fd$ or $-\Delta U_E = q\Delta V$ — and (2) a correct expression for F or ΔV in terms of E_{avg} — $F_{\text{avg}} = qE_{\text{avg}}$ or $\Delta V = E_{\text{avg}} d$ (full credit is also awarded for directly writing the correct combined expression $W = qE_{\text{avg}} d$).

Solution 3

(d)(iii) Mark scheme

- Both students are correct. Student 1 is correct: when the system is defined as the proton together with the two spheres, no external forces act on this system, so by conservation of energy the total energy of the system is constant — the increase in the proton's kinetic energy is exactly matched by a decrease in the system's electric potential energy; energy is simply transferred from one form (potential) to another (kinetic) within the system. Student 2 is correct: when the system is defined as only the proton, the two charged spheres (and their electric field) are external to the system, so the electric field does positive work on the proton as it moves through the potential difference, and by the work-energy theorem this positive external work increases the proton's kinetic energy. Full credit needs (1)

Solution 3

indicating Student 1 is correct with a valid discussion of energy transfer within the combined system due to conservation of energy, and (2) indicating Student 2 is correct with a valid discussion that an external force (the spheres' electric field) does positive work on the proton, changing its kinetic energy.