



A-level

D&T: Fashion and Textiles

7562/C

Report on the examination

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Introduction

This year's moderation of the A-level Fashion and Textiles NEA has highlighted the continued dedication of both students and teachers in meeting the demands of the specification. For the majority, the standard of work demonstrated a sound understanding of the assessment objectives, with many candidates producing creative, thoughtful, and technically accomplished portfolios.

Those achieving higher levels of attainment approached the NEA with a clear sense of purpose and curiosity, engaging in in-depth, open-ended investigations rather than being driven by a fixed outcome. These candidates demonstrated flair and originality in their design proposals, often taking creative risks that were informed by thorough research and critical thinking. Practical experimentation was purposeful and analytical, with students evaluating the effectiveness of their outcomes at each stage. Their work was clearly iterative, with reflective commentary used meaningfully to inform subsequent decisions and shape the final product.

In contrast, work at the lower end of the mark range tended to lack depth in both investigation and analysis. This limited the development of ideas, hindered evaluative thinking, and ultimately impacted the quality and originality of final outcomes. A common feature of lower-attaining work was a surface-level engagement with the assessment objectives, with minimal evidence of reflection or refinement throughout the process. To support stronger outcomes, students should be consistently encouraged to revisit the assessment objectives and marking criteria throughout the NEA. Embedding this reflective practice helps ensure all aspects of the specification are addressed and enables students to make more informed, purposeful decisions across each phase of the project.

Across this year's series, the quality of internal assessment by teachers showed a marked improvement compared to the previous year. Many centres applied the AQA assessment criteria with greater precision, demonstrating a clearer understanding of the key indicators that define each mark band. As a result, the awarding of marks became more consistent, with teacher annotations and candidate evidence aligning more closely to the AQA NEA mark scheme descriptors.

To build on this positive progress, teachers are encouraged to further strengthen their assessment practice by engaging with TOLS and attending the free autumn NEA feedback events. These opportunities provide valuable insight into national standards and expectations across different mark bands and sections of the NEA. Participating in these events will help teachers refine their judgement, ensure continued accuracy in assessment, and support a more consistent and confident application of the mark scheme.

A noticeable pattern across this year's submissions was the limited engagement with a clearly defined and accessible intended user or client throughout the design process. While many students appeared to start their projects with a general understanding of their chosen context, too few maintained an ongoing dialogue with a specific individual or group with a clearly articulated need. As a result, the iterative nature of the NEA process was often undermined by a lack of authentic third-party input, with many students relying heavily on

their own perspectives or informal peer feedback rather than structured consultation with a relevant client.

In several cases, the design context was either too vague or overly prescriptive from the outset, leading to restricted exploration and limited scope for meaningful development. When contexts were not clearly defined, students struggled to justify decisions, apply focused research, or adapt their ideas in response to real-world feedback—ultimately weakening the overall coherence and depth of the project. In some instances, outcomes appeared pre-determined, with little evidence of flexibility or design evolution driven by user input. In contrast, the strongest work emerged from students who developed contexts rooted in genuine, personally significant issues—often grounded in first-hand experience or close observation. These students engaged purposefully with real clients or users, using feedback to guide design decisions and refine outcomes in a responsive and considered manner. Their ability to remain open to change, driven by real needs and continuous interaction, resulted in more relevant, innovative, and well-justified design proposals.

To support higher levels of attainment, centres should encourage students to establish clear and realistic user relationships early in the NEA process and to view user engagement not as a one-off task, but as a continuous thread woven throughout the project.

Points for improvement and development within each section

Section A

Section A requires students to carry out a thorough, focused investigation that is clearly informed by the design context and the specific needs and preferences of an intended user or client. To access the higher mark bands, students must demonstrate a well-structured and reflective approach to research and enquiry, underpinned by a clear understanding of the assessment objectives.

To strengthen performance in this section, the following should be considered:

- Develop a personalised investigation that responds directly to the design context and a clearly identified user/client with a real and accessible need.
- Undertake a broad range of primary and secondary research, ensuring all investigations are purposeful and relevant. Examples include:
Primary research: interviews, user/client consultations, surveys, observational studies.
Secondary research: analysis of trends, materials, sustainability, market research, work of relevant designers and existing products.
- Ensure research is bespoke and not generic, clearly tailored to the student's own line of enquiry, and consistently linked to the user's needs and preferences.
- Incorporate practical experimentation throughout the investigation, not just during development. These should:
Be informed by research findings.
Include sampling, fabric testing, or technique trials that relate directly to the intended product or client.

- Present initial concept ideas that are directly inspired by research insights. These should begin to show a creative response to the context and evidence of the early stages of design thinking.
- Analyse, evaluate and reflect on all research activities, clearly documenting what has been learned and how it will inform ongoing decisions. This includes:
 - Highlighting what was successful or limiting.
 - Explaining how research findings will influence the direction of the design work.
 - Showing evidence of an iterative approach where ideas evolve in response to findings.
- Use a mix of visual and written communication to present investigations in a coherent and engaging format, ensuring clear links between research, practical enquiry, and user feedback.

Students should be encouraged to treat investigation as an evolving process, with findings continually shaping their thinking. Embedding reflection and responsiveness at this stage lays the foundation for a successful, user-focused outcome and a well-evidenced design journey.

Section B

Section B requires students to develop a clear and justified design brief and specification that directly responds to their investigation findings and user/client input. To perform well in this section, students must demonstrate how their understanding of the context, alongside primary and secondary research, has informed a refined design direction.

The highest achieving students demonstrated evidence of an iterative design process, where the brief and specification evolved logically from the investigative work carried out in Section A. The design brief should not remain static or generic; it must reflect a deepened understanding of the user's needs and clearly define the scope and focus of the project.

To meet the expectations of the higher mark bands in Section B, students should:

- Develop a refined design brief that evolves from the initial brief, showing a clear connection to:
 - Research findings from Section A.
 - User/client needs, preferences, and feedback.
 - A clearly identified design problem or opportunity.
- Justify the design brief clearly, explaining how the investigations shaped the revised direction of the project and outlining the intended purpose of the final outcome.
- Produce a detailed and realistic design specification that:
 - Clearly relates to the brief and context.
 - Includes measurable and relevant criteria (e.g., aesthetics, function, performance, sustainability, user requirements, materials, manufacturing constraints).
 - Is used as a working document to guide and evaluate design decisions throughout the

project.

- Demonstrate a link between the brief/specification and ongoing user/client engagement, showing that the design direction remains informed by their input.
- Ensure all written elements are clear, focused, and purposeful, avoiding generic or overly broad statements.
- Use the specification as a foundation for testing and evaluation, returning to it at key points during development to ensure ideas remain aligned with the identified requirements.

Teachers should encourage students to view the design brief and specification as live, working tools that evolve from meaningful investigation—not fixed statements made at the start of the project. A well-developed Section B sets the direction for creative development and ensures the project remains grounded in real-world relevance and design intent.

Section C

Section C focuses on the development of creative, viable, and well-considered design ideas that are informed by prior investigation and refined through practical experimentation. According to the marking criteria, students must demonstrate an *iterative design process*, showing how ideas are generated, explored, tested, and improved through ongoing modelling, feedback, and evaluation.

This year, while some students successfully showed iterative development, this was not consistently evident across all submissions. In several cases, students progressed directly to a final prototype with limited evidence of practical testing or meaningful refinement. As a result, some outcomes appeared predetermined and lacked the depth and responsiveness expected at this stage. In a minority of instances, marks awarded for Section C did not align with the quality of evidence presented and were overly generous, particularly where the iterative process was not fully evidenced.

To meet the expectations of the higher mark bands in Section C, students should:

- Demonstrate a clear iterative process, where design ideas evolve through continuous testing, modelling, feedback, and evaluation.
- Explore a range of creative ideas and solutions before narrowing down their design direction, showing breadth in initial concept development and depth in refinement.
- Use both 2D and 3D modelling techniques (e.g. sketching, CAD, toiles, sampling, mock-ups) to investigate and develop key features of their designs.

- Conduct practical experimentation and testing throughout the development phase—not just at the prototype stage. This could include:
Fabric and component trials.
Construction technique sampling.
Functionality, fit, and durability testing relevant to the design context.
- Seek and respond to ongoing feedback, particularly from the intended user/client, and show how this input directly influences design decisions and improvements.
- Critically reflect on the effectiveness of ideas and materials, identifying strengths, limitations, and opportunities for improvement as designs evolve.
- Avoid presenting a single, polished idea without showing the process that led to it. A strong Section C should clearly evidence how and why the final design direction was chosen and refined.
- Ensure that annotation and presentation of work clearly communicates the design journey, using both visual and written elements to support clarity and coherence.

Teachers should support students in understanding that strong design work develops over time and through critical engagement. Encouraging risk-taking, experimentation, and reflection will help students create more innovative, user-focused outcomes and produce the quality of evidence required for higher attainment in Section C.

Section D

Section D assesses students' ability to produce a high-quality, well-constructed final prototype that is appropriate to the user's needs, the design brief, and the specification. According to the marking criteria, this section should demonstrate skilled and accurate making, purposeful material selection, and clear evidence of decision-making throughout the manufacturing process.

This year, while many students presented final outcomes with evidence of competent construction, there was a lack of consistent documentation across some submissions. In particular, students in the lower mark bands often failed to provide clear, sequential photographic evidence of the manufacturing process. This limited the ability to fully assess practical skills and impacted the overall quality of submissions in this section.

Additionally, across a number of cohorts, corsets and circular skirts featured heavily as chosen outcomes. While these garments can showcase a broad range of technical skills—particularly in areas such as precision stitching, structured garment construction, and fitting—the creative development of these outcomes was often limited. In many cases, students relied heavily on unmodified commercial patterns, with little evidence of personalisation or innovation. At A-level, greater experimentation, pattern adaptation, and original design thinking is expected, especially when working with familiar or traditional garments. The most successful candidates demonstrated a willingness to push the boundaries of conventional silhouettes, construction techniques, or textile applications.

To strengthen performance in Section D and align with the higher mark bands, students should:

- Select materials, components, and techniques that are appropriate to their final design intentions, user/client needs, and the final specification.
- Demonstrate a high standard of skill, precision, and finish, showing competence and control in all construction processes.
- Provide comprehensive photographic documentation of the manufacturing process, including:
Clear, well-lit images of key stages.
Annotations explaining construction decisions, tool and technique choices, and any adaptations made during manufacture.
Evidence of problem-solving and real-time decision-making.
- Avoid over-reliance on unaltered commercial patterns, especially for commonly produced garments. Instead, students should:
Show how patterns have been adapted, personalised, or drafted independently.
Demonstrate how user feedback and earlier experimentation informed modifications.
- Ensure the final prototype clearly meets the specification, reflecting earlier development and responding directly to user/client needs.
- Present the final product professionally, with high-quality images from multiple angles, including close-ups of detail, fit, function, and finish.
- Include reflective commentary on the manufacturing journey, identifying challenges faced, strategies used to overcome them, and any changes made during the process.

Teachers should guide students to see the manufacturing stage as more than construction—it is also a creative, technical, and reflective process. Encouraging students to innovate and personalise even when working with traditional garments will lead to more distinctive, higher-quality outcomes that fully meet A-level expectations.

Section E

Section E assesses the student's ability to critically evaluate the final outcome in relation to the original brief, specification, user/client needs, and the iterative journey taken throughout the NEA. According to the marking criteria, strong evaluation should demonstrate analytical thinking, purposeful user testing, and considered reflection on the effectiveness of both the product and the design process.

This year, a similar pattern was observed in Section E as in previous sections. While some students carried out effective and targeted user trials, gathering meaningful feedback that informed critical evaluation, many others demonstrated limited engagement with this

process. In these cases, evaluation tended to be surface-level or descriptive, with little analytical depth or insight into how the product performed against the design criteria or how it could be improved further.

In several instances, the absence of authentic user/client involvement weakened the evaluation, resulting in generic commentary that lacked relevance or rigour. Some students presented only personal reflections or peer comments, without triangulating this feedback or exploring its implications in detail. Where marks were awarded for evaluation that did not meet the standard required for higher mark bands—such as being purely descriptive or unsupported by evidence—marks were adjusted accordingly during moderation.

To support stronger performance in Section E and ensure alignment with the higher marking criteria, students should:

- Conduct structured and purposeful user/client testing, involving their intended user in a meaningful way to assess:
 - Functionality
 - Aesthetic appeal
 - Fit/performance
 - Suitability for purpose and context
- Collect and document feedback from multiple sources, including:
 - The intended user/client
 - Subject experts (where appropriate)
 - Peers or teachers for practical insight
- Use feedback to inform critical evaluation, making clear links between the evidence gathered and the judgments made about the final prototype.
- Avoid generalised or overly positive statements—instead, demonstrate the ability to critique the outcome with balance, honesty, and insight.
- Evaluate the final prototype against the original design brief and specification, addressing each key criterion clearly and concisely.
- Reflect on the design and development process, identifying what worked well, what could be improved, and how the iterative process influenced the final outcome.
- Propose realistic improvements or next steps, showing an awareness of potential refinements and how the outcome might be developed further in response to feedback and how it could be developed for different production methods.
- Present evaluation clearly, using a mix of written analysis and visual evidence (e.g. annotated photographs from user testing) to support conclusions.

Teachers should emphasise to students that strong evaluation is not simply a summary or description of what was done, but a critical exploration of how and why decisions were made—and how well the final outcome meets the project's aims. Engaging genuinely with user feedback and grounding evaluation in evidence are key factors in accessing the higher mark bands in Section E.

Administration

For the majority of centres, Candidate Record Forms (CRFs) effectively supported the marks awarded, providing clear justifications that aligned with the evidence seen in the student portfolios. This greatly assisted moderators in verifying and agreeing with the centre's assessment decisions.

However, there were some exceptions. In a few cases, CRFs were submitted without any supporting comments at all, which made it difficult for moderators to understand how marks had been determined. Additionally, in some of the centres where adjustments were made, CRFs included only generic extracts from the marking criteria rather than specific references to the individual student's work. In many of these cases, the content referred to in the comments could not be located in the submission itself, further weakening the validity of the mark awarded.

Centres are reminded that CRF comments should offer personalised, evidence-based justifications for the marks given in each section. These comments should directly reference the student's work, demonstrating how it meets the descriptors for the relevant mark band.

To further support accurate moderation and the integrity of submissions, the following guidance on presentation is strongly recommended:

- Each NEA submission should include the student's full name and centre number clearly displayed on the front cover, and pages should be numbered throughout. This helps ensure work can be easily identified, especially if CRFs become detached during handling.
- Work submitted on A3 paper should be bound in a secure, portfolio-style format. An A3 portfolio with polymer sheets for inserting pages has proved most successful. The use of individual plastic sleeves to protect pages is encouraged, as this helps preserve presentation quality and reduces damage through repeated handling.
- Students should avoid including folded inserts, lift-up flaps, or layered elements that require unwrapping or unfolding to access information. While creative presentation can be engaging, hidden content complicates the moderation process and risks key evidence being overlooked.
- Students can include photographs of practical samples or development work that is too large or bulky to include in the portfolio. It is essential that these photographs are clear and fully reflect all aspects of the development work/prototypes. This includes close up images to assess quality and internal workings.

Encouraging students to present their NEA in a clear, professional, and accessible format from the outset not only supports fair and accurate assessment but also reflects the expectations of advanced-level study. Centres should share these expectations with students early in the NEA process to ensure consistency and quality across all submissions.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.