



GCSE

Design and Technology

8552/C

Report on the examination

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General comments

More than 53,000 students successfully completed NEA work in Design and Technology this year. At the top end, once again, some truly innovative original work was presented. The three contextual challenges offered for 2025 entry were equally popular with students. All contextual challenges allowed students to successfully meet the assessment objectives. A small number of centres mistakenly used contextual challenges from previous years. Please ensure that students to be entered for June 2026 are working on one of the following three contextual challenges:-

1. Supporting charities
2. Reducing waste
3. Products to help in the home

Full information on the 2026 contextual challenges can be found in the following document, which can be downloaded from Centre Services on the AQA website:- 8552-C-QP-DesignAndTechnology-G-for Jun26

In a number of centres, students investigated and recorded information about all three contextual challenges. This is unnecessary as students can select which context they want to investigate and should only include content related to that challenge. Any content related to the other contextual challenges will not gain additional credit.

Centres are reminded that they do not need to offer all three challenges. They may choose to offer just one or two of the challenges.

Approaches to working on the NEA

Many students successfully investigated and analysed the context independently, responding well to information they discovered during their research. The design folder then flowed naturally through a brief and specification, designing and developing ideas, investigating further as needed. Ideas were refined and detailed fully, in a way that would allow for manufacture by a competent third party (i.e. a D&T teacher). Feedback from a client/user was evident throughout the process.

In the work from some other centres, the approach was more formulaic. It often looked as if the students had a list of tasks to undertake. In these folders, work was sometimes unrelated, as if each part had been completed independently from other parts of the folder. Typically, an interview with a client or user, the findings of which were then ignored when writing the design specification. ACCESSFM and other similar prompts were sometimes used to support product analyses and specification writing. Where they were used, statements tended to be generic rather than specific. Moderators rarely saw a section B mark in the top band where ACCESSFM was used.

Centres are reminded that the provision of scaffolding and writing frames is forbidden in the subject specification. It is assumed that students were using ACCESSFM because it was

something that they had used in previous work, not because the centre had told them to use it.

Teacher assessment

AQA are pleased to report that the vast majority of centres fell within the tolerance allowed, in their marking of student work. A significant proportion of these were very accurate indeed! Congratulations must go to centre staff for their diligence in this work. Assessments were often supported by detailed annotation on the Candidate Record Form which explained why particular marks had been awarded, and where the evidence for these could be found in the folder. These statements were personalised to each student, and really helped moderators to understand, and generally confirm, centre marks. Copying and pasting of assessment criteria is not helpful in pointing moderators to the supporting evidence for marks awarded.

Some centres submitted marks that fell outside the AQA tolerance for NEA marking. Occasionally the marking was significantly outside the tolerance. Usually in these cases, marking was lenient in several or all sections. Before applying the assessment criteria to student work, it is important to read the paragraphs that precede each section of the criteria. These paragraphs provide useful information on the sorts of evidence that can be typically presented by students to gain credit.

The teacher online standardising materials also provide useful guidance on the application of standards for marks by AQA. These can be found by logging in to the centre services section of the AQA website.

A few centres with larger entries neglected to internally standardise sufficiently thoroughly. This sometimes led to work from different teaching groups or materials areas being assessed to different standards, possibly accurately, leniently or harshly. It is important to carry out internal standardisation thoroughly to avoid some students being penalised unfairly. Many centres are very successful in their internal standardisation. One technique used successfully, is to arrange all students' final prototypes and portfolios in a single rank order for the whole centre. If this is then followed by comparison of the portfolios on similar marks from different teaching groups/materials areas, problems are likely to be avoided!

In the reports in each section below, there is further information on how centres successfully and mistakenly applied assessment criteria.

Section A: Identifying and investigating design possibilities

It is important to identify a number of design possibilities from initial research of the context. A significant number of students immediately focused on one design possibility. By 'design possibility', AQA are looking for students to suggest things that could be designed within the chosen contextual challenge. From the short list they create, they can then select one that they feel meets the context well but also allows them to showcase their full range of skills and abilities in design and technology.

Most students did identify a client or user to talk to about. Interviews were often conducted, but with varying degrees of success. Too many students asked closed questions, neglecting to elicit the client's real needs.

Many students neglected to think about where the product they were designing might be used. However, successful students carried out investigation of this where appropriate. An example was a student designing a food holder to fit on the steering wheel of a (parked) car. They had photographed a car driver's space and then sketched onto the photo measurements of the steering wheel and the space available. They had also considered the size of the food that might typically be eaten in that situation. Many students ignored fundamental investigation like this, sometimes instead including unrelated and unused research information on e.g. famous designers.

NEA advisers are often asked how much investigation should be undertaken. This aspect of the work needs to be concise, focused and directly driving the specification and designing. Initial investigation needs to be 'sufficient to allow for an informed start on designing.' 'It is likely that further investigation and analysis would be needed during the design and development stages'.

Section B: Producing a design brief and specification

The design brief was tackled with varying degrees of success. One test that could be applied here is to open a student folder, read the design brief alone. Then ask yourself if you understand what it is they are setting out to design. Too many briefs were vague and rambling, struggling to clarify what is to be designed and why.

Specifications were also delivered with varying degrees of success. The best provided a precise justified list of criteria against which design ideas and the final prototype could be tested. They would include measurable criteria.

A significant number of specifications were vague and generic, with criteria not justified. Sometimes criteria would contradict the findings of investigation and analysis work; sometimes the target market would change too!

Section C: Generating design ideas

This is one of the areas where most students were able to score higher marks. 'In the highest band students are expected to show some innovation by generating ideas that are different to the majority of their peers, or demonstrate new ways of improving existing solutions'. That is a quote from the paragraph that precedes the assessment criteria for section C. Some fabulous design ideas were seen, with ideas communicated using a fluidity of techniques. Students here were switching to the most appropriate technique for the part of the concept that was being communicated.

Some students very successfully linked their ideas to their investigation work carried out earlier in the project. A significant number used a range of techniques to help them produce innovative ideas, including sketching around photos of completely unrelated images (nature and architecture were common sources).

Many lower-achieving students fixated in their design ideas. Lacking consideration of alternative solutions.

Section D: Developing design ideas

This section of the project may have produced the most diverse range of responses from students. At one extreme there were students who merely redrafted one of their initial concepts and called that development work. At the other extreme were the students who genuinely went 'on a journey' from their initial concepts through to a fully refined and detailed final design. On this journey, sketching, CAD work, 3D models, prototyping etc. were all used to help refine and detail the concepts. The work was often iterative in nature.

For the manufacturing specification, plans for making were presented in different ways including flowcharts, tables with all the making steps, photo diaries of making. These were supported by cutting lists/components lists, templates/patterns and dimensioned drawings/CAD. Whichever techniques are used, a third party should be able to make the final prototype from the information available in the design folder.

Section E: Realising design ideas

Some outstanding final prototypes were made by some students. High level skills of making in a range of materials, and high level finishing skills were evident in these. Where students worked in a single material, it was sometimes difficult to demonstrate a range of skills. Please remember that the preceding paragraph for section E states 'students will work with a **range** of appropriate materials/components...' and 'prototypes will be constructed through a **range** of techniques...'. 100% 3d printed CAD CAM projects were an example of prototype realisation that didn't always meet these requirements. It was more difficult for these sorts of projects to access the highest mark bands.

The quality of finish and accuracy of final outcomes varied considerably. Where moderators didn't agree with centre marks on this section, it was often where centres had awarded too many marks to some crudely made/unfinished looking final prototypes.

Section F: Analysing and evaluating

Most students carried out a final testing of their projects, with varying degrees of success. Neglected by many though, were the on-going analysis and evaluations that should be appearing throughout the design project.

Students need to be reminded that what they are evaluating is not 'how the project went' but how well their designs and final prototype work (meets the needs of the client/user). The paragraph that precedes the assessment criteria for section F clearly explains the sorts of evidence that a moderator will be looking for, in order to support centre marks. One area in section F where some centres over-marked, was when a student had neglected to work in an iterative way yet was still rewarded in the top mark band.

A common weakness across a large number of students was client feedback. It is expected that students go back to their client/user throughout the design process, not just at the end. Their feedback into designing and development helps form part of the iterative process and this also helps to lead to a final prototype that better meets the client needs.

Some students did not seek the views of their client/user on their final prototype. Not only is this required, but it would be good to see photographic evidence of the final prototype actually in use and being tested out with the client/user in its intended environment.

Conclusions

AQA would like to congratulate staff in centres for encouraging so many students to complete work of which they can justifiably be proud. The tremendous range of skills shown in good D&T portfolios is something that will support a student at any further education or job interview. Thank you for encouraging such innovative and creative work.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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