



**GCSE**

# **Design and Technology**

8552/C NEA

Report on the Examination

8552  
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## General comments on the NEA 2024

More than 50 000 students successfully completed NEA work in Design & Technology this year. At the top end, some truly innovative original work was presented. Of the three contexts offered by AQA as starting points, *securing or storing personal possessions* was the most popular. *Playing games* was the second most popular, and this was frequently selected by students working with paper and boards. A handful of centres mistakenly used contexts from previous years; please ensure that students to be entered for **June 2025** are working on one of following three contexts:

1. Educational toys and games
2. Supporting or participating in a sport
3. Eating away from home

Full information on the 2025 contexts can be found in the following document, which can be downloaded from the Centre Services log in on the AQA website:

8552-C-QP-DesignAndTechnology-G-for Jun25-E2

## Material choices for the final prototype

The majority of students worked in timber and/or polymers. Paper, boards, and textiles were the next most popular areas. A relatively small number of students worked with electronics, systems or metal. It was very pleasing to see some students successfully working in a wide range of materials to complete their final prototypes.

## Teacher assessments

AQA are pleased to report that the vast majority of centres' marking of student work fell within the tolerance allowed. A significant proportion of the marking was very accurate indeed! Congratulations must go to centre staff for their diligence in this work. Assessments were often supported by detailed annotation on the student 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 usually confirm, centre marks. Copying and pasting of generic comments from the assessment criteria is not useful in pointing moderators to suitable evidence to support marks awarded.

Some centres submitted marks that fell outside the AQA tolerance. 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 did not internally standardise sufficiently thoroughly. This sometimes led to work from different teaching groups or material areas being assessed to different standards, possibly some accurately, others 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 in a single rank order for the whole centre. If this is then followed by comparison of design folders on similar marks from different teaching groups/materials areas, marking should be more consistent.

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

### **Section A: Identifying and investigating design possibilities**

At the start of the work on the NEA, a centre can offer students one, two or all three contexts to choose from. Students need to select one before starting on their project. Some centres allowed students to research all three contexts initially. Only the work on the context finally adopted gets credit towards the mark.

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 that context. 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 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, failing to gain from the client their real needs. The *securing or storing personal possessions* context is a good example to exemplify. For this, there are some key questions that should be asked:

What does the client want to store?  
How many of each of these items?  
How large are these items?

These questions could also be asked of a number of potential clients/users to arrive at typical needs for the target market.

Whilst the questions above were asked by some students on this context, moderators saw far too many folders where this basic information was not gathered. Instead there were often studies of famous designers, design movements etc, where the information gathered was completely ignored at the designing stages. 'The work of others' could be product analyses which would strengthen the outcome.

For research work to gain credit, it needs to be focussed, and influence the designing and development. Research and investigation can be useful at all stages of the design process.

Two questions to ask of identifying and investigation work for this section of marks:

Is what is presented relevant?  
Does it influence the design and development of the product?

## 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, and ask if you understand what it is they are setting out to design. Too many briefs were vague and rambling, failing 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!

The use of ACCESSFM as a framework for specifications often led to generic statements. Centres should be reminded that the provision of templates or writing frames for any part of the NEA work is forbidden in section 4.4.3 of the subject specification. It is hoped that ACCESSFM was adopted by students only because they had used it in previous years. Where it is used, students should be encouraged to go beyond it.

## 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 in some folders, with ideas communicated using a fluidity of techniques. Students were switching to the most appropriate technique for the part of the concept that was being communicated.

Some students very successfully linked their ideas back 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 weaker students were fixated in their design ideas. Again, taking the *personal storage* context as an example, fixated designs were typically variations on a rectangular box.

## Section D: Developing design ideas

This section of the project may have produced the most diverse range of standards of responses from students. At one extreme there were students who merely redrew 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 best work was iterative in nature.

For the manufacturing specification, the best ones would allow a competent person (eg a specialist subject teacher) to follow the information in the folder to be able to recreate the final design prototype. Plans for making were presented in different ways including flowcharts, tables with all the making steps, photo diaries of making. Whichever technique is used, a competent third party should be able to make the final prototype from that information.

### **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/finished final prototypes.

### **Section F: Analysing and evaluating**

Most students are now carrying out a final testing of their projects, with varying degrees of success. Neglected by many though, are the ongoing analysis and evaluation 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 where some centres overmarked for section F was when a student had failed to work in an iterative way yet was still rewarded in the top category.

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 input into ongoing designs and development help form part of the iterative process, and also help to lead to a final prototype that better meets the client needs.

Some students failed to seek feedback from their client/user on their final prototype. Not only is this required, but it would be really good to see photographic evidence of the final prototype actually in use and being tested out with the client.

### **Conclusions**

Despite the advice listed above, 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 folders is something that could support a student at any college 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.