GCSE Examiners' Report

Design and Technology

GCSE

Summer 2026

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Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each component.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.[1]

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	Eduqas offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.eduqas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and component level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each component that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results and Grade Boundaries and PRS (eduqas.co.uk)

[1] ***Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.***

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Exam Results Analysis	Eduqas provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.eduqas.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner | Eduqas

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Executive Summary

The 2026 GCSE Design and Technology assessment series maintained a standard comparable to previous years and achieved an excellent overall completion rate of approximately 99%, reflecting strong candidate engagement across both examined and non-examined components. Within Component 1, candidate participation in the compulsory core section was exceptionally high, with between 98.7% and 99.6% of the approximately 10,800 candidates attempting every question. Performance, however, varied considerably across the core content. Question 1 proved highly accessible, achieving a Facility Factor (FF) of 59.0, while Questions 2 and 3 represented the greatest challenge for candidates, recording Facility Factors of 32.9 and 30.4 respectively. These outcomes suggest that while candidates were willing to engage with all sections of the paper, some areas of core knowledge and application continue to present barriers to success.

Patterns of entry within the specialist material categories remained highly polarized. Natural and manufactured timbers continued to dominate candidate choice, accounting for 59.3% of entries and increasing by 10% compared with 2025. In contrast, more technically specialised routes attracted significantly lower participation, with Metals selected by 5.1% of candidates, Polymers by 4.7%, and Mechanical and Electronic Systems by 8.5%. Performance across material categories was less consistent than in previous years. Metals and Papers and Boards proved the least accessible options, generating Facility Factors of 44.7 and 46.4 respectively, while Fibres and Textiles was the strongest-performing material area, achieving a Facility Factor of 59.0.

A particularly positive feature of this year's examination was the significant improvement in candidate performance across all Question 6 variants. Accessibility increased by at least 10% in most material areas compared with the previous series, demonstrating that candidates are increasingly effective in using the visual stimuli provided to support their responses. This improvement was accompanied by a reduction in blank responses, indicating greater confidence and willingness to attempt questions, even where complete accuracy was not achieved. Candidates generally performed well on extended-response questions, demonstrating sound technical knowledge, appropriate use of specialist terminology, and a strong understanding of examination command words. Nonetheless, a recurring weakness remained the overreliance on generic environmental arguments that lacked direct relevance to the question context, limiting opportunities to access higher marks. Poor handwriting also continued to affect response quality across all attainment levels.

Component 2, the Non-Exam Assessment (NEA), continues to grow in popularity and showcased many examples of innovative design thinking, creative problem-solving, and effective assessment practice. Moderators reported numerous high-quality portfolios that demonstrated authentic design journeys, strong iterative development, and functioning prototypes produced with clear evidence of independent decision-making. However, moderation also highlighted continuing concerns regarding the accuracy and consistency of centre assessment. Although most centre marks were accepted, nearly a quarter of centres received downward adjustments following moderation due to over-generous marking and inconsistent interpretation of assessment criteria. Common weaknesses included insufficient evidence of iterative design development, poorly organised portfolios, superficial specifications, and limited evaluative analysis. While assessment of research and specification writing was generally accurate, moderation identified inconsistencies in the application of criteria for design development, manufacture, and evaluation. These findings reinforce the importance of robust internal standardisation, effective use of exemplar materials, and a greater focus on evidence-based iterative design practice to ensure fairness, consistency, and alignment with national standards.

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GCSE

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Component 1 – Design in the 21st Century

Overview of the Component

Key Performance Metrics:

The GCSE Design and Technology examination maintained a similar standard to previous series, achieving a strong overall completion rate of approximately 99%. Within the compulsory core section, Questions 1 through 5 maintained an excellent completion rate, with 98.7% to 99.6% of the roughly 10,800 total candidates attempting every question. However, candidate performance varied significantly across these core tasks. Question 1 proved highly accessible, yielding a Facility Factor of 59.0. Conversely, Questions 2 and 3 presented the highest structural barriers to student success within the core section, dropping to Facility Factors of 32.9 and 30.4 respectively.

Candidates demonstrated highly polarized entry choices and varying success rates across the optional specialized material categories. Natural and manufactured timbers remained the dominant material pathway and the most popular category overall, selected by 59.3% of all candidates (an increase of 10% from 2025). Consistent with past cohorts, fewer than 10% of candidates chose thermoforming and thermosetting polymers, ferrous and non-ferrous metals, or electronic systems. Specifically, entry rates remained low for Metals at 5.1% and Polymers at 4.7%. Combined with Mechanical and Electronic Systems at 8.5%, these technical routes attracted fewer than 20% of the overall cohort.

The Facility Factor was less consistent across material categories than in previous years, with metals, electronic systems, and papers and boards being the least selected and proving the most difficult for candidates to access successfully. The least accessible options were Metals and Papers and Boards, which generated the lowest optional Facility Factors of 44.7 and 46.4 respectively. In contrast, the most successful material area was Fibres and Textiles, which yielded the highest performance tier in the specialized section and matched the paper's peak Facility Factor of 59.0.

Conversely, a significant improvement in the accessibility of all Question 6 variations was noted this year, with performance rising by at least 10% across most material areas from 2025. This positive trend was supported by the fact that candidates continue to effectively use the visual aids provided in the examination paper to formulate relevant answers. There were fewer blank responses overall this series, indicating that candidates actively attempted most questions and secured partial marks even when the final answer lacked accuracy.

When engaging with the extended-answer questions throughout the paper, many candidates performed well, demonstrating broad technical knowledge and a robust understanding of engineering principles through articulate, justified responses that showed an excellent grasp of examination command words. Despite these strengths, a persistent thematic weakness emerged where many candidates heavily relied on generic environmental arguments. These responses often failed to align with the specific requirements of the prompt and were consequently awarded limited or no marks, underscoring the central need for candidates to read each question carefully and plan their responses in advance.

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Nevertheless, several scripts were outstanding in their structural execution, technical vocabulary, and subject knowledge, proving that these candidates are entirely familiar with the paper's structure and the expected depth of response. Poor handwriting, however, was noted as an ongoing, persistent issue across all candidate ability levels.

Mathematics questions are being tackled well by candidates and workings are almost always included within the answers provided. Candidates continue to struggle with:

- compound calculations related to percentages: Q1(b)(ii)
- mechanical advantage calculations: Q3(b).

Candidates demonstrated they are familiar with and can:

- interpret and calculate data from tables and graphs: Q1(c)(i); Q5(d)
- draw and label accurate graphs: Q5(d)(iii)
- calculate profit easily and interpret information towards a multi-step real world context calculation: Q6(b).

The following topics were well understood and well-answered:

- identifying renewable energy sources: Q1(a)(i)
- demonstrating knowledge of legislation and how it protects consumers: Q1(a)(iii)
- properties and characteristics of a range of materials: Q4(a)(b)(c)
- the usefulness of client profiles and theme board to designers: Q5(a)
- using words and pictures to sketch how a product can be functionally and aesthetically improved: Q6(a)(iv)
- relating properties and characteristics of specific materials to products: Q6(c)
- answering questions well that require an analysis or evaluative response: Q6(c) and (d).

Areas that need revisiting for improvement:

- technical materials: Q2(a) and (b)
- mechanisms and motions: Q3(a)(ii) and (iii)
- eccentric cams: Q3(c)(ii)
- stock forms (of all materials) and properties of copper: Q4(c)(i) and (iii)
- advantages of CAD: Q5(b)
- specialist tools and equipment for technical processes: Q6(a)(iii).

Comments on individual questions/sections

Question 1: Design and Technology and our world

The most accessible question in this year's paper.

(a) Candidates easily identified wind and hydro-electric energy from the images, though biomass energy was less widely recognised. Almost all could name a specific product powered by a rechargeable battery. Furthermore, while many candidates could provide examples of how legislation protects new products, several struggled to explain the underlying mechanisms of that protection.

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(b) Almost all candidates correctly calculated the cost of a single battery from the luxury brand pack. Many included workings, though this was unnecessary for a 1-mark question. Calculating the percentage savings for the value brand pack could be achieved through multiple methods, and some candidates struggled to select the correct approach. Nevertheless, many secured at least one mark.

Question 2: Materials technology

Overall, candidates struggled to access these questions due to a limited understanding of the specific technical materials outlined in the specification.

(a) Kevlar® was the most widely recognised technical material in the table. However, very few candidates were awarded full marks (3 marks) for this question, suggesting that a significant degree of guesswork occurred.

(b) Few candidates could adequately explain what a phase-changing material is or how it benefits users of sportswear. Those familiar with the material easily secured all 4 marks with a clear, concise definition. However, partial credit was awarded to candidates who correctly surmised that the material responds to heat or energy to provide both cooling and insulating effects. While these responses appeared to be guessed, they demonstrate that attempting a question can still yield positive marks.

(c) Candidates were much more comfortable providing examples of electronic devices integrated into sports clothing, with heart monitors being the most frequent response. However, they found it more challenging to discuss how these devices actively improve athletic performance. Moving forward, candidates would benefit from practicing context-based exam questions to encourage broader critical thinking.

Question 3: Electronic systems, programmable components and mechanical devices

Although the attempt rate was high, candidates struggled with several of the questions.

(a) Many candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of the difference between effort and load, though not all recognised that a rigid bar pivots on a fulcrum. Overall, this opening question was the most successful within Question 3. While candidates could readily list different types of motion, they found it difficult to identify the specific output motion from the provided diagram, which required careful analysis. The illustration of the wall light helped some candidates describe the function of a reverse-motion linkage, and many successfully attempted to define the key terms: *input*, *output*, and *pivot*. While some responses relied on guesswork, others showed a clear understanding. Nevertheless, this proved to be a challenging question for a significant number of candidates. Analysing the linkages of various commercial products and describing their movements would greatly benefit future candidates and build the familiarity needed to tackle these question styles.

(b) This was a high-tariff question, and very few candidates were able to fully resolve the mechanical advantage calculation. Many secured a single mark for correctly adding the dimensions (352mm + 528mm). However, it was encouraging to see a large proportion of candidates attempting to calculate the effort force.

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(c) The diagrams drawn in part (c)(ii) indicated that candidates understand the mechanical operation of a cam and follower system, but they struggled to articulate in writing how the motion is transferred. This question was poorly answered; practicing written explanations alongside diagrams would give candidates more confidence when facing questions without visual prompts. While most candidates knew how to draw a follower accurately, many failed to include a correct slide. Furthermore, the cams drawn were frequently incorrect, failing to depict an eccentric cam with its shaft positioned off-centre.

Question 4: Materials

Knowledge of materials and their associated working properties has notably improved over successive exam series. Question 4 was the second most successful question in this 2026 paper, achieving a Facility Factor (F.F.) of 58.6%. Candidates successfully justified why their chosen material properties were appropriate for the products under discussion.

(a) Most candidates understood the term *function* and could correctly state a function for the clock product shown. However, a number of candidates failed to identify plywood as the manufactured board used for the base. Environmental reasons were the most common response to question 4(a)(iii). It should be noted that many candidates failed to attain full marks because they did not explicitly compare manufactured boards to natural timbers in their extended responses. The mark scheme outlines several key structural differences that would be highly beneficial to use as a teaching resource. Furthermore, a significant number of candidates discussed cost as a difference between the two materials, despite the question explicitly instructing them not to do so. On a positive note, most candidates identified a suitable finish for the clock base, with paint and varnish being the most frequent correct answers. Additionally, a large proportion of candidates explained very well why polystyrene is an appropriate packaging material, using accurate technical terminology to link its protective properties to the product.

(b) The most common responses explaining why corrugated cardboard is suitable for model-making were low cost, ease of cutting, painting, and ease of manipulation. However, few candidates fully evaluated these reasons, thereby missing out on maximum marks. While aesthetics, function, and cost were all valid responses to question 4(b)(ii), many candidates failed to secure both marks because they struggled to justify their choices.

(c) Candidates remain unfamiliar with standard stock forms, despite this topic being tested—albeit with a different material—in a previous series. Most could identify a commercial product made from copper, yielding some insightful and correct responses. However, a prevalent misconception was that copper is an insulator. Cost was also frequently cited; teachers should reinforce that cost is not a material property, highlighting the critical importance of candidates reading questions carefully. Furthermore, the question required candidates to reflect on copper's use specifically in building construction, which many failed to reference. Overall, this final sub-question was poorly answered.

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Question 5: Client Profile and Theme Boards

(a) A high proportion of candidates successfully identified at least one primary research source. However, it was surprising how many were unable to list any, particularly given the extensive primary research required for the Non-Exam Assessment (NEA). Candidates explained with reasonable clarity and appropriate examples how client profiles or theme boards assist designers in generating ideas. Notably, some candidates referenced both client profiles and theme boards in a single response, which restricted their maximum score to two marks.

(b) Computer-Aided Design (CAD) was frequently confused with Computer-Aided Manufacture (CAM) and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Candidates may have overthought their responses to this straightforward question. This is a core topic area that requires regular reinforcement to ensure candidates achieve better outcomes in future series.

(c) Candidates provided limited examples when discussing how their chosen designer or company influenced innovative product design. Teachers should note that any element from the "Designing and Making Principles" section of the specification can be tested within the core questions. This includes design collaboration, which is explicitly listed in the same section. Very few candidates knew what the "4 Ds" represented, resulting in poor performance on this sub-question.

(d) Based on the statistical data, this question was highly accessible to the cohort. The vast majority of candidates successfully stated an alternative factor that consumers consider important when purchasing products. Most candidates accurately calculated the ratio between quality and size, though not all simplified the ratio to its lowest terms. Additionally, most candidates successfully constructed and labelled the line graph.

Question 6: Electronic systems, programmable components and mechanical devices

(a) Candidates generally performed well on the knowledge recall aspects of this question, with the majority demonstrating a sound understanding of the logic gate's operation and correctly identifying the AND gate by explaining that the output is only active when both inputs are energized. Conversely, performance was considerably weaker when candidates were required to identify the purpose of a desoldering pump. Many erroneously confused the tool with a testing device or secondary soldering component, indicating limited practical familiarity with common electronic workshop tools. Responses to the design improvement task were highly variable. While stronger candidates communicated their iterations effectively through well-annotated sketches and concise notes addressing both the aesthetics and functionality of the logic gate training device, many failed to secure these marks. Weaknesses included providing basic sketches devoid of annotation, addressing only a single design parameter. Centres are advised to reinforce basic logic gate operations alongside hands-on workshop tool identification.

(b) The straightforward profit calculation was executed successfully by most candidates to secure the single mark, whereas the subsequent multi-step manufacturing calculation proved significantly more demanding. While a small number of candidates completed the full sequence correctly, many struggled to apply the necessary mathematical operations, with common errors including the incorrect application of machine quantities and a failure to account for unit production times. Although partial credit was frequently awarded for successful intermediate steps—such as converting hours into minutes—many candidates were unable to bring the calculation to an accurate conclusion.

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To improve performance on high-tariff calculations, candidates should be encouraged to systematically isolate key data before beginning and to show all intermediate stages of their working clearly, ensuring they remain eligible for method marks even if the final answer is incorrect

(c) Performance on these extended analytical response questions was highly variable, with many candidates struggling to translate their subject knowledge into a structured, logical argument. While a small number of candidates produced well-developed responses—effectively linking the material properties of copper-based PCBs to their respective applications—very few achieved maximum marks due to a distinct lack of analytical balance. The primary barrier to top-tier bands was the omission of counterarguments; candidates frequently failed to include mandatory disadvantages The vast majority of the cohort demonstrated only basic, superficial knowledge, typically restricting their answers to generic comments regarding copper's conductivity without further technical development. Some candidates managed to access the middle mark bands by providing simple evaluative points relating material properties to manufacturing contexts, but these responses lacked the depth required for Band 3. To improve future performance, centres must explicitly reinforce that full marks on these banded questions can only be awarded when a balanced argument is presented. Regular practice using explicit, banded assessment criteria and sharing detailed mark schemes directly with students will help future cohorts understand the exact structural requirements, analytical depth, and breadth of responses expected at the highest levels.

(d) Similar to the results in part (c), responses to the evaluative question were variable. Candidates appeared less comfortable discussing the suitability of mass-manufacturing the electronic components sued on the PCB, with some responses suggesting a lack of understanding of what mass manufacture actually entails. Again, answers frequently focused too heavily on environmental impacts, which limited the marks awarded. To achieve Band 3 assessment criteria, candidates must provide a number of relevant examples. As observed in previous series, some candidates write excessively, causing their arguments to lose sequence and logic. Planning responses prior to writing would help candidates isolate key content requirements and ensure they take the time to break down the question thoroughly

Question 6: Paper and Boards

(a) Very few candidates were able to name Duplex Board or Carton Board, of which Carton Board is the most widely used – a common response was simply cardboard. Candidates appeared very familiar with wax coated card packaging and effectively explained—giving clear reasons—why it was used for pear packaging. The most common responses related to moisture and water resistance. Only a few candidates could state the function of a die-cutter mould clearly, highlighting the importance of sharing and naming images of industrial equipment and processes. 6(a)(iv) was highly successful; candidates completed this section thoroughly, offering a broad range of valid aesthetic and functional design improvements supported by clear sketches and well-labelled annotations.

(b) Most candidates correctly calculated the manufacturer's profit on a single batch of packaging. However, while many successfully calculated how many packaging could be cut by one machine in a day, they frequently failed to account for the 8 available die-cutting machines. This resulted in an incorrect final answer of 240, rather than multiplying by 8 to find the true total of 1920 batches. Consequently, a score of three marks was much more common than the maximum four marks.

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(c) Performance on the analytical questions was variable, though some candidates successfully met the Band 3 requirements when analysing the suitability of using card for the packaging of the pears. Responses addressed both the working properties and characteristics of card, with a heavy emphasis on their negative environmental impacts. Candidates should be encouraged to use counterarguments to the typically negative environmental narratives. It must be emphasized that the full five marks can only be awarded if the candidate provides at least one counterargument (whether positive or negative), as explicitly stated in the mark scheme. Answers often lacked a logical structure; planning responses prior to writing would help candidates secure full marks more frequently. Regular practice with analytical questions using the banded assessment criteria will help candidates fully understand the expectations of a 5-mark response. While candidates clearly possess the necessary knowledge, many struggle to apply it in a structured, logical manner. Sharing the detailed mark schemes with candidates would help them see the broad range of acceptable responses

(d) Similar to the results in part (c), responses to the evaluative question were variable. Candidates appeared less comfortable discussing the suitability of mass-manufacturing the card packaging, with some responses suggesting a lack of understanding of what mass manufacture actually entails. Again, answers frequently focused too heavily on environmental impacts, which limited the marks awarded. To achieve Band 3 assessment criteria, candidates must provide a number of relevant examples. As observed in previous series, some candidates write excessively, causing their arguments to lose sequence and logic. Planning responses prior to writing would help candidates isolate key content requirements and ensure they take the time to break down the question thoroughly.

Question 6: Natural and manufactured timber

(a) Most candidates were able to name a suitable manufactured board for the desk. Candidates appeared very familiar with a veneer laminate and effectively explained—giving clear reasons—why it is used for the surface of the desk. However, responses to the function of the router bit varied, revealing a significant gap in knowledge. Many candidates confused the router bit for an internet router and others were unsure of its function all together. 6(a)(iv) was highly successful; candidates completed this section thoroughly, offering a broad range of valid aesthetic and functional design improvements supported by clear sketches and well-labelled annotations.

(b) Most candidates correctly calculated the manufacturer's profit on a single gaming desk. However, while many successfully calculated how many desks could be drilled in a day, they frequently failed to account for the 50 available CNC routers. This resulted in an incorrect final answer of 96, rather than multiplying by 50 to find the true total of 4,800 gaming desks. Consequently, a score of three marks was much more common than the maximum four marks.

(c) Performance on the analytical questions was variable, though some candidates successfully met the Band 3 requirements when analysing the suitability of using a manufactured board for the gaming desk. Responses addressed both the working properties and characteristics of manufactured boards, with a heavy emphasis on their positive environmental impacts. Candidates should be encouraged to use counterarguments to the typically positive environmental narratives. It must be emphasized that the full five marks can only be awarded if the candidate provides at least one counterargument (whether positive or negative), as explicitly stated in the mark scheme. Answers often lacked a logical structure; planning responses prior to writing would help candidates secure full marks more frequently.

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Regular practice with analytical questions using the banded assessment criteria will help candidates fully understand the expectations of a 5-mark response. While candidates clearly possess the necessary knowledge, many struggle to apply it in a structured, logical manner. Sharing the detailed mark schemes with candidates would help them see the broad range of acceptable responses.

(d) Similar to the results in part (c), responses to the evaluative question were variable. Candidates appeared less comfortable discussing the suitability of mass-manufacturing the gaming desk, with some responses suggesting a lack of understanding of what mass manufacture actually entails. Again, answers frequently focused too heavily on environmental impacts, which limited the marks awarded. To achieve Band 3 assessment criteria, candidates must provide a number of relevant examples. As observed in previous series, some candidates write excessively, causing their arguments to lose sequence and logic. Planning responses prior to writing would help candidates isolate key content requirements and ensure they take the time to break down the question thoroughly.

Question 6: Ferrous and Non-Ferrous Metals

(a) A number of candidates struggled to name a suitable ferrous metal for the coat hook – a common response was aluminium, a non-ferrous metal. Additionally, candidates found explaining the purpose of countersinking the holes in the corners of the back plate difficult. Only a few candidates could state the function of the tool pictured (to cut the internal thread), highlighting the importance of sharing and naming images of industrial equipment and processes. 6(a)(iv) was fairly successful; candidates completed this section, offering mainly a broad range of valid functional design improvements supported by clear sketches. Marks were reduced for the lack of including aesthetic detailing.

(b) Most candidates correctly calculated the manufacturer's profit on a single coat hook. However, while many successfully calculated how many coat hooks could be manufactured in a day, they frequently failed to account for the 25 metal workers. This resulted in an incorrect final answer of 24, rather than multiplying by 25 to find the true total of 600 coat hooks. Consequently, a score of three marks was much more common than the maximum four marks.

(c) Performance on the analytical questions was variable, though some candidates successfully met the Band 3 requirements when analysing the suitability of using a ferrous metal to manufacture the coat hook. Responses addressed both the working properties and characteristics of ferrous metals, with a heavy emphasis on their negative environmental impacts. Candidates should be encouraged to use counterarguments to the typically negative environmental narratives. It must be emphasized that the full five marks can only be awarded if the candidate provides at least one counterargument (whether positive or negative), as explicitly stated in the mark scheme. Answers often lacked a logical structure; planning responses prior to writing would help candidates secure full marks more frequently. Regular practice with analytical questions using the banded assessment criteria will help candidates fully understand the expectations of a 5-mark response. While candidates clearly possess the necessary knowledge, many struggle to apply it in a structured, logical manner. Sharing the detailed mark schemes with candidates would help them see the broad range of acceptable responses.

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(d) Similar to the results in part (c), responses to the evaluative question were variable. Candidates appeared less comfortable discussing the suitability of mass-manufacturing the coat hook, with some responses suggesting a lack of understanding of what mass manufacture actually entails. Again, answers frequently focused too heavily on environmental impacts, which limited the marks awarded. To achieve Band 3 assessment criteria, candidates must provide a number of relevant examples. As observed in previous series, some candidates write excessively, causing their arguments to lose sequence and logic. Planning responses prior to writing would help candidates isolate key content requirements and ensure they take the time to break down the question thoroughly.

Question 6: Thermosetting and thermoforming polymers

(a) Most candidates were able to name a polymer suitable for the water bottle – a common response was polypropylene. Candidates found explaining the purpose of a silicon ring in a water bottle lid difficult but did provide a simple reason, such as it prevents water leaking from the bottle. Only a few candidates could state the function of the extruder, highlighting the importance of sharing and naming images of industrial equipment and processes. 6(a)(iv) was highly successful; candidates completed this section thoroughly, offering a broad range of valid aesthetic and functional design improvements supported by clear sketches and well-labelled annotations.

(b) Most candidates correctly calculated the manufacturer's profit on a single water bottle. However, while many successfully calculated how many water bottles could be blow moulded in a day, they frequently failed to account for the 12 available blow moulding machines. This resulted in an incorrect final answer of 5760, rather than multiplying by 12 to find the true total of 69,120 bottles. Consequently, a score of three marks was much more common than the maximum four marks.

(c) Performance on the analytical questions was variable, though some candidates successfully met the Band 3 requirements when analysing the suitability of using a polymer for the water bottle. Responses addressed both the working properties and characteristics of polymers, with a heavy emphasis on their negative environmental impacts. Candidates should be encouraged to use counterarguments to the typically negative environmental narratives. It must be emphasized that the full five marks can only be awarded if the candidate provides at least one counterargument (whether positive or negative), as explicitly stated in the mark scheme. Answers often lacked a logical structure; planning responses prior to writing would help candidates secure full marks more frequently. Regular practice with analytical questions using the banded assessment criteria will help candidates fully understand the expectations of a 5-mark response. While candidates clearly possess the necessary knowledge, many struggle to apply it in a structured, logical manner. Sharing the detailed mark schemes with candidates would help them see the broad range of acceptable responses.

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(d) Similar to the results in part (c), responses to the evaluative question were variable. Candidates appeared less comfortable discussing the suitability of mass-manufacturing the water bottle, with some responses suggesting a lack of understanding of what mass manufacture actually entails. Again, answers frequently focused too heavily on environmental impacts, which limited the marks awarded. To achieve Band 3 assessment criteria, candidates must provide a number of relevant examples. As observed in previous series, some candidates write excessively, causing their arguments to lose sequence and logic. Planning responses prior to writing would help candidates isolate key content requirements and ensure they take the time to break down the question thoroughly.

Question 6: Fibres and Textiles

(a) A number of candidates correctly identified polyester or nylon as the most likely synthetic fabric for the child's school backpack. However, some unexpected answers were observed, including a natural fibre such as cotton. Candidates appeared very familiar with wadding and effectively explained—giving clear reasons—why it is used inside backpack straps. Surprisingly, very few candidates could identify the function of the specific presser foot shown. Although this presser foot serves multiple purposes, it is primarily used to sew zips to ensure high-quality control outcomes. Conversely, part 6(a)(iv) was highly successful; candidates completed this section thoroughly, offering a broad range of valid aesthetic and functional design improvements supported by clear sketches and well-labelled annotations.

(b) Most candidates correctly calculated the manufacturer's profit on a single backpack. However, while many successfully calculated how many backpacks could be sewn by one machine in a day, they frequently failed to account for the 500 available sewing machines. This resulted in an incorrect answer of 96, rather than multiplying by 500 to find the true total of 48,000 backpacks. Consequently, a score of three marks was much more common than the maximum four marks.

(c) Performance on the analytical questions was variable, though some candidates successfully met the Band 3 requirements when analysing the suitability of synthetic fabrics. Responses addressed both the working properties and characteristics of synthetic materials, with a heavy emphasis on their negative environmental impacts. Centres should reinforce that synthetic materials are extremely durable and can be recycled; candidates should be encouraged to use these points as counterarguments to the typically negative environmental narratives. It must be emphasized that the full five marks can only be awarded if the candidate provides at least one counterargument (whether positive or negative), as explicitly stated in the mark scheme. Answers often lacked a logical structure; planning responses prior to writing would help candidates secure full marks more frequently. Regular practice with analytical questions using the banded assessment criteria will help candidates fully understand the expectations of a 5-mark response. While candidates clearly possess the necessary knowledge, many struggle to apply it in a structured, logical manner. Sharing the detailed mark schemes with candidates would help them see the broad range of acceptable responses.

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(d) Similar to the results in part (c), responses to the evaluative question were variable. Candidates appeared less comfortable discussing the suitability of mass-manufacturing the backpacks, with some responses suggesting a lack of understanding of what mass manufacture actually entails. Again, answers frequently focused too heavily on environmental impacts, which limited the marks awarded. To achieve Band 3 assessment criteria, candidates must provide a number of relevant examples. As observed in previous series, some candidates write excessively, causing their arguments to lose sequence and logic. Planning responses prior to writing would help candidates isolate key content requirements and ensure they take the time to break down the question thoroughly.

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EDUQAS GCSE DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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Component 2 – NEA – Design and Make Task

Overview of the Component

The non-examined assessment (NEA) is a well-established component of the Eduqas GCSE qualification, with entry numbers increasing year on year. This year's moderation identified many examples of engaging, innovative design work alongside effective assessment practice in many centres. However, the moderation process also highlighted several recurring issues that continue to affect the accuracy of assessment and, ultimately, candidate outcomes.

Visiting moderation identified administrative issues in both new and established centres. Centres are reminded that every DT2 candidate marksheet must be fully authenticated for all candidates, and available on request regardless of whether they are included in the moderation sample. It is the responsibility of teaching staff to ensure that marks entered on the IAMIS accurately match those recorded on the DT2 forms. During moderation week, centres may also receive visits from Team Leaders and the Principal Moderator as part of Eduqas' internal quality assurance procedures. These visits form part of the moderation process and should not be interpreted as reflecting the performance of an individual centre.

Many of the issues highlighted in previous reports remain evident this series, particularly the inconsistent application of the assessment criteria. Accurate assessment is essential to ensure fairness for all candidates and to maintain standards.

Following external moderation, most centre marks were accepted as accurate or within tolerance. However, where centre assessment was judged to be over-generous, marks were adjusted to more accurately reflect the assessment descriptors and to align with the national standard. In most cases, marks had been awarded from incorrect bands, quite often two bands adrift of what the work deserved. Centres should pay closer attention to the assessment descriptors when determining the most appropriate band before selecting a mark within it. Where assessment was found to be inaccurate or inconsistent across the sample, moderation was extended to the full cohort to ensure that every candidate received an accurate and fair outcome. Centres should note that internal standardisation across all teaching groups, regardless of material area, is mandatory. Robust standardisation ensures that the assessment criteria are applied consistently across the cohort. Where standardisation is ineffective or has not taken place, inconsistencies arise, leading to an adjustment in centre marks. This series, nearly a quarter of centres received a downward adjustment to their marks.

Across all specialist areas, moderators saw excellent examples of creative, well-executed outcomes supported by well-organised portfolios. These submissions demonstrated clear ownership of the design process where candidates had taken pride in their work. However, many portfolios lacked organisation or contained incomplete evidence, suggesting that time management and planning remain areas for improvement for some. The strongest NEA submissions demonstrated an iterative design process, where candidates continually developed, tested, evaluated and refined their ideas into realistic proposals. This cyclical approach is central to the assessment objectives but continues to be underdeveloped in many portfolios, with candidates often progressing too quickly to final solutions without sufficient evidence of exploration, testing or refinement.

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The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within the NEA is becoming increasingly common. While AI may support activities such as refining initial design ideas, centres should ensure its use complies with current guidance. Work produced wholly or substantially by AI cannot be credited as the candidate's own. Centres should refer to the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) guidance on AI use in assessments to ensure the integrity of the qualification is maintained.

Successful NEA submissions reflect each candidate's individual design journey. From identifying a genuine design opportunity through to producing a fully functioning prototype that meets the needs, wants and values of intended users, with candidates demonstrating independent decision-making throughout. Moderators continue to identify examples where teacher direction has unduly influenced the design process or where iterative development has been limited. Such approaches restrict creativity, reduce opportunities for meaningful design thinking and do not fully reflect the intentions of the non-examined assessment.

Comments on individual questions/sections

(a) Identifying and investigating design possibilities – 10 marks

This section was generally assessed fairly across most centres. However, the quality and relevance of evidence should determine the mark awarded, not the quantity of work produced. Centres should encourage candidates to manage their time in proportion to the marks available; with only 10 marks allocated, this section should account for approximately 10% of the overall assessment time. A concise, focused approach is recommended.

Candidates should identify a range of genuine design opportunities to inform potential design briefs. While all three contextual challenges should be available, candidates should decide independently how many to investigate; centres should not make this decision for them. Marks should reflect the breadth and quality of the opportunities identified. Candidates who focus on a single problem or begin with a predetermined solution are likely to achieve lower marks, whereas stronger responses identify realistic problems that lead to innovative design opportunities.

Research and investigation should be purposeful, relevant and directly inform the development of ideas and a realistic, meaningful specification. References to professionals or companies should only be included where they have a clear influence on the design process, as required by the assessment criteria. Too often, such content including mood boards, is included without contributing to subsequent design decisions.

User needs, wants and values underpin all assessment objectives and remain central throughout the iterative design process. Many candidates relied on unrealistic target users, such as celebrities, limiting the authenticity of their work. Engaging with genuine users or stakeholders provides far more meaningful insight into design problems. Ongoing dialogue with a real user is significantly more valuable than relying on generic questionnaires.

(b) Developing a design brief and specification – 10 marks

To access the top mark bands, candidates should consider a range of design problems, develop several potential design briefs, and justify the selection of a final brief through relevant and focused research. While this approach was evident in many centres, some candidates began with predetermined ideas and failed to explore alternative opportunities, limiting both the quality of their design process and the marks available.

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Design specifications should be derived from research, investigation, and early testing or modelling. Too often, candidates produced generic lists of desirable features with little evidence of how the specification was informed by their research. Measurable criteria, such as dimensions, weight or cost, should be fully justified rather than simply stated. Where cost is included as a specification criterion, it should inform design decisions and be evidenced in the final evaluation; otherwise, its inclusion has little value. A well-developed specification should guide the development and evaluation of ideas and include clear criteria for testing the final outcome. This remains an area requiring further development in many centres.

Most centres assessed this strand appropriately. However, some superficial or underdeveloped specifications were awarded marks that were too high. Centres are encouraged to use the exemplar projects available on the secure website to support accurate application of the assessment criteria.

(c) Generating and developing design ideas – 30 marks

Successful candidates demonstrated a strong understanding of the design problem and the needs and wants of users before developing solutions. Where problems were not fully explored, or user needs were vague or unrealistic, outcomes were often less effective. Teachers should encourage candidates to avoid preconceived ideas and encouraged them to develop ideas through meaningful user engagement instead. Teacher-led solutions also impede design.

Initial ideas should be broad and varied, supported by low-fidelity modelling to quickly identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for further investigation. As ideas develop, higher-fidelity modelling, including CAD where appropriate, should be introduced. The design specification should be treated as a working document that drives development alongside regular consultation with stakeholders and users. The design specification remains underused as a design tool in most centres.

In centres with a strong understanding of the iterative design process, candidates produced more creative, functional and user-centred outcomes. Candidates in these centres consistently modelled, tested, evaluated and refined their ideas, including practical testing of materials, construction methods and finishes. This hands-on approach provided clear evidence of incremental development and justified high marks. By contrast, some centres over-rewarded limited evidence of iteration. A small number of sketches, CAD models, construction processes or in textiles a few seam or decorative technique samples completed as class exercises, do not constitute an iterative design process and should not be awarded marks in the highest assessment bands.

Candidates should also integrate technical considerations, including materials, dimensions, finishes and production methods, throughout the development process rather than treating them as isolated research tasks. Greater emphasis on this is needed across many centres and specialisms.

Every stage of the design journey should be clearly documented, with focused and relevant evidence of analysis, evaluation and refinement of ideas, models and test pieces. It should be evident how candidates progressed from initial concepts to the final prototype. In many submissions this progression was insufficiently demonstrated.

Application of assessment criteria for this strand ranged from accurate and fair to overly inflated and generous. Centres are reminded to apply the assessment criteria carefully, ensuring marks reflect the quality and extent of iterative development, and to use exemplar NEAs to support standardisation and consistent marking.

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(d) Manufacturing a prototype – 30 marks

Candidates must provide a detailed logical sequence for the manufacture of their prototype that is clear enough for a third party to replicate their prototype. It should include a defined timeline, appropriate health and safety considerations, relevant constraints and reference to end testing as stated in the assessment criteria. Centres are reminded that a pictorial diary of manufacture is not required as it does not represent a manufacturing sequence and is not referenced in the assessment criteria. Overall, the quality and detail of manufacturing sequences require further refinement in many centres.

The quality, accuracy and technical skill demonstrated in the manufacture of prototypes varied considerably. During moderation, many sophisticated, well-made and fully functioning outcomes were seen that met the design objectives and fully justified marks in the top bands. Centres are increasingly embracing modern manufacturing techniques, such as 3D printing, alongside traditional methods, although this remains less evident in fibres and textiles. The skills demonstrated and the quality and accuracy of outcomes showed significant variation. Several outcomes in all material areas lacked finesse or were presented in a partial or incomplete state. There remains a concern that, in some centres, candidates are not being taught the practical skills required by the specification or given sufficient workshop time to practise and refine them. Delivery by non-specialist staff, reduced teaching time and limited access to workshop facilities can significantly restrict candidates' opportunities to develop the technical knowledge and practical skills needed to achieve their full potential.

Application of the assessment criteria for this strand ranged from mostly accurate and fair to overly inflated and generous. In some cases, high marks were awarded where the evidence more closely matched the descriptors in the band below, or occasionally two bands below. To justify marks in Bands 3 and 4, candidates must demonstrate consistently high levels of accuracy and precision throughout construction, together with careful attention to the quality of the final finish. Evidence suggests that some centres do not yet have a secure understanding of the standards required for awarding marks in the highest bands. Centres are reminded to undertake robust internal standardisation and cross-moderation, particularly where candidates produce outcomes using different materials and processes, to ensure the assessment criteria are applied consistently.

(e) Analysing and evaluating design decisions and prototypes – 20 marks

As this assessment strand is worth 20% of the overall mark, candidates need to produce a substantial body of evidence to achieve marks in the top band. The quality of summative evaluations varied considerably, with marks often awarded generously.

Higher-band responses should critically evaluate the design brief and specification, incorporate user feedback, present evidence-based end testing against measurable criteria, and identify justified modifications or future developments. End testing, ideally through user trials supported by photographic or video evidence, is essential in demonstrating the success of the final outcome.

Where iterative development is limited, with little user engagement or reference to the design specification, opportunities to award marks are reduced consequently marks in the lower bands would be more appropriate.

Evidence of ongoing analysis and evaluation throughout the iterative design process can also be credited and should not be overlooked if a separate summative evaluation has not been submitted.

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Centres are encouraged to allocate sufficient time to this assessment strand and apply the assessment criteria more consistently.

Internal marking of NEA submissions

Eduqas provides exemplar NEA projects on the secure website to help centres achieve accurate assessments. Centres are strongly advised to use this resource for standardisation to avoid mark adjustments. It is clear some centres are not utilising these exemplars. Centre reports give feedback on assessment accuracy following moderation. Internal standardisation between teachers and specialist areas is mandatory. However, some centres failed to implement this or did so ineffectively.

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