



Examiners' Report Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel GCSE
In Design & Technology
1DT0/02

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1DT0/02 GCSE Design and Technology Non-Examined Assessment 2025

Report from the PM.

Introduction

The GCSE (9 - 1) Design & Technology specification has continued to perform well and this year sees a more robust approach from centres towards the requirement for digitally uploading candidate work and documents via the Learner Work Transfer platform (LWT). This aspect has still caused a few issues this year but is seen as a vast improvement for security and access to candidate's work. We would like to take this opportunity to thank centres for continuing to choose us for their awarding body and to welcome the many centres that submitted work this year for the first time with Pearson.

As the Principal Moderator, it has been very rewarding and encouraging to see that so many centres have embraced the NEA aspect of assessment to allow their candidates to perform and demonstrate skills across all the assessment criteria. Whilst it has to be acknowledged that there were some discrepancies in both assessment, administrative protocol and compliance issues, the vast majority of centres have produced portfolios, and products that have addressed this year's contextual challenges and have been successful. We hope that the E9 report specific to the centres upon this year's assessment performance, alongside the resources on the website and future access to training opportunities in the Autumn and Spring terms, will allow centres to target and adjust their performance if necessary to bring about improvements year on year for their candidates.

It should be noted that yet again this year we are seeing administrative errors from centres; that could be related to either: incorrect samples uploaded for moderation, incorrect digital documents used, issues with presenting portfolios that have been scanned, addition/typo errors in transferring the candidate's mark recording different marks on Edexcel Online compared to the Candidate Assessment Booklet (CAB). This is a basic quality assurance checking procedure that needs to take place in the centre prior to the uploading of the sample for external moderation. Many centres provided excellent page references and the CAB contained helpful annotation to assist the moderation process guiding moderators to view the evidence and helping secure assessment marks with good reasoned annotation. Centres are reminded that irrespective of the requested sample, the highest and lowest scoring candidates from the centre must be included in the work uploaded to the LWT.

It should be noted that the summer 2025 series, has seen a Pearson wide decision for all specifications that offer NEA elements to seek additional samples of candidate's work for moderation where a centre's assessment had been judged to be inconsistent. This has caused some issues within centres and the request often resulted in delays in providing all the necessary additional documents.

Centres are to be congratulated on ensuring that the vast majority of candidates presented work that was within the required six contextual challenge themes set by the board, as a reminder they are different each year and are launched on the 1st of June annually.

Our team of moderators have reported a number of factors that we would like to share with you in this document. It is hoped that everybody will be able to glean some information both here and with the centre specific post moderation E9 report, that will continue to help you to improve the centre's performance in future years. It should be noted that the E9 report is available post results day from the centre's Examination Officer.

Administrative issues

Centres are reminded that only the work of the requested sample from Pearson should be uploaded for moderation, if any requested candidates are withdrawn then centres should upload a replacement portfolio. In addition to the sample, the work of the highest and lowest scoring candidates from the centre should also be uploaded if not included in the original sample request. This is very important as it enables us to capture your highest and lowest scores for the process of mathematically awarding appropriate grades to each candidate in the centre.

The majority of centres produced work that was in a format that was very accessible, however, there were many centres who had not read the guidance for submission document and had submitted work in the incorrect file or nomenclature format. One such problem was the Candidate Assessment Booklets (CAB) used by centres for each candidate. These should be used to guide the moderator to understand how centre assessment has been awarded.

They should not just be a copy of the assessment criteria; they need to inform and justify assessment decisions.

Centres should page reference this work to allow the moderator to be directed towards it and then the moderator can compare the centre's assessment to national standards for accuracy and fairness. This works only if the candidate's work is clearly labelled, is sequential to the assessment criteria and consists of a portfolio where page numbering has been used throughout. It is vital therefore that each CAB from the sample requested is utilised to the maximum, which are Excel format (.xlsx) with auto calculation features which mitigate most errors of addition for centre assessors. Centres who submitted 2019 Word (.docx) and PDF equivalents were asked to resubmit this document in the preferred format prior to the moderation proceeding.

Centres can now upload a separate document to the LWT containing photographic images of the final prototype, or indeed MP4 files that might show a working aspect of the prototype or testing being carried out if appropriate. This is particularly helpful to show working mechanisms or electronic functions. It is requested that photographs are presented in a single document rather than uploading individual multiple images. This aspect is really helpful to the moderation process in attempting to agree centre assessment particularly for the skills and processes (3.1b) and quality and accuracy (3.2) criteria. Centres are requested not to send MP4's of every aspect of manufacture but to be selective and choose only appropriate files that support centre assessment.

Unfortunately, we did see some irregularities in the contents of portfolios and issues of plagiarism from some centres where candidates included the same work as a peer / had traced over existing product images or had used templates produced by the centre. There were instances where centres had supplied portfolios which had been laid out with pointers for what to include on each page. In other instances, centre assessors had left feedback for the candidate in the portfolio, which is also not permitted. Centres are reminded to be mindful of the current JCQ rules regarding the use of templates, feedback and plagiarism to avoid the centre being referred to the Malpractice team at Pearson for further investigation.

We have seen an increase in the use of AI from candidates in the portfolio work. Many aspects seen have been acknowledged by the candidate as a useful tool but other cases have seen attempts to mask candidate work and submit work with a pretence of other skills. We ask centres to please refer to the guidance on AI use in portfolios on the website.

Contextual Challenges

Most centres responded to the contextual challenges well and really entered into the spirit of working producing some well-made projects and products. Most centres had allowed candidates to have a free choice of the contextual challenges and candidates had selected from across the range; Sporting Achievements, Pre-school children's development or Landmarks. It was also observed that some centres did not consider the full range of contextual challenges restricting their candidates from the full choice of the themes. JCQ ruling states that all candidates should be given access to the full range of contextual challenges and they should be open to respond to these in their own way without being led or coerced by centres into choosing a specific context.

Assessment criteria:

1.1 Investigation of needs and research:

This section was reasonably well completed by many candidates who used this section to really set the scene of the contextual challenge, offered some photographic evidence of visits and showed some insight into who they were designing for (the client) and their needs. It was nice to see that on the whole, many centres had listened to previous feedback and now only researched one contextual challenge, rather than investigating or brainstorming all three

themes before deciding. However, some centres still do this as a class activity and present all the themes. This is wasting candidate time and offers no rewardable material for assessment until the chosen theme is seen. Generally, marks were appropriately allocated and centres appeared to know how to access the middle and top range of marks. This section is about **investigating the needs** of the user within the context of the challenge selected, having a specific user (client) is preferable to a generic one as they will be able to offer opinions in latter sections of the portfolio. Some centres and candidates made up a client, or used classmates which is not ideal, with others using parents and family members. This often meant they struggled to extrapolate developed requirements of the user's wants and needs which generally left this investigation being superficial.

The best responses were where the candidate had not only identified the key aspects for research, they had then explained why they were key points and had then also informed the reader how they were going to gather the information required. Where candidates did not always consider the contextual challenge in enough detail or approached it with fixed product ideas in mind, this led to superficial research. Questionnaires sometimes contained a range of closed questions and sometimes asked questions that would not have informed the design ideas or specification. Generally, candidates made good use of product analysis and disassembly to help develop their understanding of product functionality and construction, where this was considered and analysed it helped to guide candidate thoughts around the functionality of their outcomes in the following specification.

Some candidates unfortunately decided on the prototype that they intended to make, too early on in the design process, making little reference to the contextual challenge. A range of primary and secondary research was seen – particularly pertinent was site/location research that was conducted first hand and additional measurements of items/objects/locations that the prototypes needed to show consideration to investigation and needs and wants. Some centres, although reduced this year, had included lengthier legacy style research into materials, random anthropometric data or joining methods; this research usually did not link to the contextual challenge in any meaningful way and was felt to possibly be better placed in the 'development' section with reference to the refinement of the prototype if appropriate.

Mood boards (although reduced) were again seen that often bore little or no relation to the project being undertaken, **these should be avoided**. Some centres spend a lot of time looking at the work of various Designers in the investigation section, although this does not actually equate to actual marks in the criteria a more limited approach is recommended.

1.2 Specification:

Overall specifications are continuing to improve over the years with most centres now including some justification for specification points which was evident in a lot of cases. There tended to be a clear indication of where the points had arisen from with justifications related to the Contextual Challenge. Candidates generally correctly included the Design Brief in this section or in the investigation section just before the specification, however, some candidates still are omitting this requirement and this will limit assessment possibilities.

Candidates often produced a good range of specification points that were realistic points and higher-level candidates added many measurable factors including writing some technical points. It was found that candidates had either written a broad specification that allowed them to come up with a wide range of ideas, or they had written a very tight specification which made the ideas narrow and preconceived.

The assessment criteria refer to the justification of the performance requirements, however, this was often the weakest part in the specification rather than focussing on it. When candidates performed well on this section it was often due to having used the headings from the specification or by using ACCESS FM or CAFÉ QUE to elicit a wide range of statements covering a wide range of areas, which in turn supported the writing of a fully detailed specification. This section is perhaps best achieved where candidates have a format with the specification point, a detailed justification, and a measurable point/section. This detail would also help candidates in the final section where the product is "tested and evaluated" as it gives measurable points to test the end product against. This work

will also be used in the **review** section looking at how the initial ideas rate against the specification points. Moderators reported that some candidates produced specifications that were limited to the middle mark band as they lacked any sort of justification back to the contextual challenge.

In general, centres still seem to be over assessing this section as many candidates seem to have difficulty writing measurable specification points. A significant proportion of specifications needed to have more points regarding the specific desirable qualities required by their products that included measurable elements and justification in terms of their brief and contextual challenge. It is noted that where candidates produced detailed, measurable and justified specification points their review and evaluation sections tended to be in greater depth and more coherent.

2.1 Design ideas:

Most centres submitted good work in this section that had been accurately assessed with many centres submitting excellent sketch work, although the use of pencil work needs addressing as the scanning quality can be weaker if not dark enough. Annotation of sketches however, was not generally focussed on the project's specification points. Some centres had directed their candidates to produce three or four different design ideas to solve the contextual challenge but other centre's candidates might produce ten ideas plus, but they often overburdened the candidate lacking any real detail and taking up far too much time to be useful. Candidates must be encouraged to annotate in more detail and add mini sketches to indicate the possible fabrication processes that could be used to make them or explain what materials might be used to make the prototype. Centres that have clearly taught their candidates to sketch and design well, indicate that ideas were well annotated with a detailed understanding of materials, processes and techniques, score well.

Many candidates are not meeting the assessment criteria of using a design strategy, referencing user needs and wants or specification points. Where candidates were leniently assessed, it was generally due to lack of these points. Research gathered in the earlier sections needs to be better used in leading and formulating design ideas that relate to all key specification points. Where there were examples of slightly lenient assessment candidates' work did not contain technical annotations alongside the design ideas and were not supported by research, so tended to sit in the mid-level 2-mark range. Due to the nature of the GCSE specification, we saw electronic systems projects, graphic-based projects, product design-based projects and textiles projects. There were a few centres who were using textiles with electronics, product design with textiles, product design with electronics and systems and graphics-based product design projects. Those candidates that used only CAD for presenting their design ideas did not usually successfully generate a good range of ideas but had access to adapt and change them in the development section later. A combination of CAD and sketch work should be encouraged. In some centres, however, much of the design work seen was too similar, showed limited creativity with little annotation to explain intention, materials or processes.

When candidates performed well on this section it was often due to using a range of techniques to support the iterative development of ideas, including quick sketch, annotated sketches and simple CAD. The best work was annotated with clear references made to the specification how the idea met the user needs and wants 'mini detail' drawings which helped explain the material, process, and techniques choices. When candidates performed less well it was often due to offering only a limited range of ideas, traced images from research and the ideas seen were simplistic, undeveloped, and repetitive nature. Annotation about material and processes was often missing from the lowest performing work. Some centres overmarked this section, giving high level credit for limited or no annotation. Typically, the candidates in these centres had decided what their product would be in section 1.1 and this limited their ideas.

It should be remembered that this section is for initial ideas. **The finished "final design" the candidate produces should not be identical to images produced here in 2.1, there has to be room for refinement and development through iterations otherwise access to marks later could be restricted.**

2.2 Review of initial ideas:

The moderators reported that the review stage was generally completed better this year, but that it remains a very mixed approach across many centres, with some centres over assessing candidate responses in this criterion.

Centres are reminded that this section should include both analysis and evaluation comments. Candidates in the main reviewed each idea against the specification, justifying each idea and evaluating it against the specification. Overall, for many, the review pages remained a weaker point of the NEA's. If a centre approached it well then, most candidates were successful. Those who did not include measurable points in their specifications tended to not score highly here. Some good work was seen where candidates had clearly reviewed their work objectively against the initial specification as a separate sheet and had considered user group (client) feedback all in relation to the contextual challenge. On too many occasions however, candidates simply resort to using RAG colour coding, tick boxes, smiley faces or a scoring system ranging from 1 to 10 for example, to review their work often alongside the design idea in question. Where candidate's work was repetitive and simplistic, candidates did not score highly. This is a simplistic approach and is not subjective and candidates must be better guided in future series to undertake objective and detailed evaluations.

Reviews were often seen beside the sketched design ideas. If this is the case, centres still need to annotate, including page numbers, the CAB's to help identify where the marks are coming from. A separate sheet is preferable rather than making comments alongside the initial design idea sketches where more room exists to expand the thoughts and decisions. Ideally targeted user group (client) feedback should be used which is relevant to the product rather than using peers in the class for opinions. Where candidates used client feedback; this added depth to their review and allowed candidates to go on to develop their idea and include features they might not have necessarily included if based purely on their own review. A summary of findings ideally then guides the candidate into the development stage with better results both here and potentially in the development stage.

2.3 Development of design ideas into a chosen design

Most candidates entered into the true spirit of the iterative development section by carrying out further research, developing the initial design over several iterations, including modelling to test the functionality culminating in a chosen design with sufficient details for a third party to manufacture it. Many candidates scored well in this criterion; however, many centres are reported by moderators to be leniently assessing this assessment criteria. Centres should remember that, where this criterion is worth 12 marks, then there should be enough actual work seen in the portfolios when it is compared against the other assessment sections. Some candidates had limited extra research, many centres credited research that was at the beginning of the folder as opposed to being in this section. Candidates who started their project with a design fixation of what they wanted to make for the prototype tended not to develop their initial ideas well and need to be encouraged to provide evidence of iterative design where the initial design solution has clearly been refined, transformed and modified through modelling of specific features.

The use of traditional modelling approaches was well observed alongside 3D drawing work which in some cases was completed to a very high level and was effective. All too often though, development was limited to some basic refinements with little consideration of the user or as part of the final chosen prototype's "making" journey. Occasionally centres credited written comments and development from the 2.1 and 2.2 sections of the folder. Testing of the prototypes at this stage was also usually limited. Candidates should use a range of methods to iterate, using sketch models, cardboard models and maquettes, toiles, methods of manufacture samples including jointing and seams, circuit diagrams, PCB schematics, mechanical kits, breadboarding and computer aided design. Candidates do not need to use all of these methods but should be using a range of these and using them in a cyclic fashion, for example, sketch, model, sketch, model, CAD, model and finalise. Some candidates' folders tended to progress almost directly from the review of ideas to the final chosen design with only very limited development work. It is important that the design really moves on during this section and candidates should be considering form and function, e.g. dimensions, joining processes, user needs and the overall needs of the product in relation to the contextual challenge.

The inclusion of CAD was present for a good number of centres utilising 2D, 3D and graphic development and this dovetailed nicely in the iterative design process by carrying out some light CAD work in the earlier stages and some more detailed CAD work later once the designs had been firmed up. The most successful candidates presented work that contained a lot of detailed evidence, showing how they focused on specific areas of their design, using modelling and a range of iterations to improve the aesthetics and function of their design idea.

This section also includes the Chosen Design which should include the details needed for third party manufacture. This aspect still tended to be missing from many candidates and finding a proposed design to compare the finally made product with was difficult in many cases. In this section candidates should produce: working engineering drawings in third angle orthographic, cutting lists, lists of bought in components, assembly drawings, exploded diagrams, final CAD renders, vector drawings of CAD/CAM CNC files, circuit schematics, PCB track patterns, wiring diagrams, coding and programming, patterns, line drawings and lay plans, design for print and graphic DTP images. Some candidates used commercial textile patterns and had clearly evidenced the changes they had made to these patterns, through the use of sketches, notes and photographs which helped clarify the marks awarded.

Communication:

It is in this section that we can credit the communication that is used to design and develop the candidate's ideas. In too many cases we are still seeing that centres had written 'throughout' in the CAB and this should be refrained from. **Communication is only assessed through (2.1) Design Ideas and (2.3) Development of a Chosen Design** and these criteria assess not only the use of graphical communication, but also the use of written communication and the use of computer aided design. This year we have seen that many centres have, more often than not, accurately assessed this criterion against national standards.

Graphical work was well assessed by centres and saw candidates using a wide range of graphic techniques including 2D, isometric, perspective and orthographic. Written work was also often appropriate to the design work and candidates were able to annotate in some detail. Moderators reported that any leniency in assessment was often due to one of the three key elements (graphical, CAD or written) being weaker than the other two.

Candidates that utilised CAD had used it in many ways: 3D CAD software, circuit schematic software, circuit board software, electronic programming software, graphic design software for graphics and textiles drawings and 2D CAD vector-based drawing packages. Most candidates included photographs in the development stage (modelling) – at best these were clearly annotated and added much to the project's overall feel. In several cases, we saw no CAD work utilised in centres. In a modern age, CAD should be used as a tool for design and with more and more types of CAD becoming cheaper with many web-based ones being free. Some candidates showed laser cutting in their manufacture diaries for instance, but had not included screenshots of the vector drawing package here in this section, that could have supported an increased mark in this area.

2.5 Review of chosen design:

What is expected here is for candidates to look at the points taken forward from the "Review of Initial Ideas" and evaluate if these points have now been improved post development as opposed to looking at the points that had not been changed. The first bullet point in the criterion relates to the **analytical points** that review the design idea across the development section. The second bullet point relates to the **evaluation** of the chosen design against the specification points. Candidates generally produced a review on a separate sheet, which made it easy to see where the marks were awarded. There were incidents where centres were asking for marks when the candidate had evaluated their work in the previous development section, which was often difficult to agree and is not recommended good practice.

The Review of Chosen Design section was in a lot of cases omitted from portfolios. In most cases, candidates had reviewed the chosen design against every point of the specification but was broad and lacked detail. A large number of candidates failed to complete this in any depth, instead they had completed this section using evidence from the

annotation of the final idea which resulted in weaker responses.

In some cases, the centres had leniently assessed this criterion, where candidates were awarded a range of marks (even full marks) with no evidence. Centres referred to previous work in design ideas and development in the CAB to justify their marks. Formal reviews were sometimes missing, centres missed assessment opportunities for this section as candidates didn't explain this in detail. Some good examples were seen when candidates used a table to help demonstrate this, helping them to test the idea against their specification. In some centres, the candidates' reviews were often without any client feedback, were descriptive or repetitive and not objective in terms of referencing the contextual challenge.

3.1a Manufacture – selection of materials:

This criterion relates to evidence that underpins and exemplifies the candidate's reasons for choice of materials that will be used in their product and the fitness for purpose (what appropriate properties do the materials have). This section tended to be leniently assessed again this year by a large number of centres as most candidates had used appropriate materials but they had failed to explain and justify why they had chosen these materials in the portfolio in any depth, or were omitted completely. Quite simply, this section could be completed on a single A3 page (Slide).

Centres generally awarded credit in this area where no explicit reference to materials was made anywhere other than in the investigation (1.1) or the diary of manufacture, which did not include properties and, as a result, centre assessment tended to be leniently awarded when compared to national standards.

Where candidates performed well in this section, they had included a separate area where different materials were identified and listed with material properties, showing how their research linked to specific properties for the chosen materials, which were relevant to their designs; contextualising the material properties to the chosen prototypes; this allowed marks in level 3 to be awarded.

When candidates performed less well it was often due to candidates failing to provide a dedicated materials selection table, or when they did, the information was superficial and only offered generical information about possible materials, without justifications linked to the actual prototype.

It must be remembered that assessor's annotation alone in the CAB cannot be credited, without evidence from the candidate in the portfolio.

3.1b Manufacture – skills and processes:

This section relates to the range of skills and processes used by the candidate to manufacture the product and pertains to the competence or skill of the process. Centres are to be congratulated on the whole for the level of outstanding products that were made and well assessed this year. Most candidates were able to show photographic evidence of the stages of manufacture. In many centres candidates had produced work that was suitably challenging and had demonstrated a wide range of skills accurately performed and were appropriate for Key stage 4.

Candidates had produced an extremely wide range of final prototypes for the contextual challenges across all material specialisms and in some cases overlapping specialisms. We did see prototypes that were solely Timber, Metal, Polymer or a mixture of the three, Textiles products and Textiles with electronics encased inside, Systems products that were encased in a range of different materials. but invariably we saw what we hope is a growing trend of candidates' crossing over materials types to produce the desired product. A number of candidates took full advantage of the ability to use mixed materials to create some really innovative products.

The team of moderators reported that there were instances this year of centres allowing candidates to use very simple construction techniques, or solely laser cut products, perhaps for speed of construction, often with a low level of demand which led to some much poorer evidence of a range of product skills and manufacture which will

also ultimately be restricting candidate assessment in (3.2) quality and accuracy.

In some instances, candidates had provided little or no information / justification as to why tools, equipment and processes had been used especially to record health & safety issues. Often the centres had correctly filled in the CAB but in some cases, it was difficult to justify how marks had been awarded particularly at the top end when trying to judge competency through manufacture. Centres would be advised to guide candidates to include such evidence either via good close up photographs or written comments to justify these high marks, **good sequential manufacturing photographic evidence is so important here to help support marks awarded by centres, through this we can see the candidate using a wide range of tools, processes and equipment so can then better assess the skills and quality of what has been produced by the candidate.**

3.2 Quality and Accuracy:

This section was again a pleasure to witness the varied and detailed work produced by GCSE candidates in centres. The level of complexity of projects, variety of materials used in the prototype, to produce a product that solved the contextual challenge problem with a pride candidates had in their work was often well demonstrated.

Where centres accurately marked skills and processes (3.1b), they also tended to mark quality and accuracy (3.2) appropriately. Similarly centres that leniently assessed skills and process also tended to leniently assess the quality and accuracy marks.

Detailed close up photographic evidence of the individual candidate's work could be better used in this section to justify the award of higher marks where the product includes the manufacture of high-quality component parts that are accurately assembled and well finished. The candidate should include photographic evidence in the folder of the finished prototype they have made.

Where moderators have seen projects that did not have the complexity and rigour for KS4 or had prototypes that did not show close up detail to confirm quality and accuracy, it was much harder to agree centre assessments.

4.1 Testing and Evaluation:

The responses to this section varied widely across centres; at best this section was very detailed with a clear range of relevant and measurable tests analysing the product that the candidate made in response to their chosen contextual challenge. This was often with good photographic evidence or MP4 files showing the "working tests" and the product alongside their results also containing user group (client) feedback. These tests were developed from the ones initially described in the initial specification points. The photographic results of tests in situ were displayed in a detailed, objective evaluation with fully justified reasoning on performance.

Where candidates did less well this section was often omitted or very brief with little basic and superficial information, often without the inclusion of a specific Life Cycle Analysis (LCA).

A LCA should discuss the sustainability of the product from cradle to grave through headings like Raw Materials, Materials Processing, Manufacture, Distribution, Use, Maintenance and Disposal. The Life Cycle Analysis was attempted and accomplished well in many cases, meaning that the higher band grades could be reached by many candidates, although many life cycle analyses were based on a single material and did not refer to the product in its entirety. A number of candidates failed to produce a life cycle analysis of any depth, where they were evident, they often included generic comments. There were many candidates who had failed to understand how to conduct a life cycle analysis effectively with many missing it out completely.

Third party and user group evaluation was in evidence but, for most cases, it lacked objective or detailed evaluative comments that were of use in assessing the merits of the prototype. In other cases, a simple table of specification points and met/not met assessment occurred. This was often subjective, especially with tick boxes being used or where one or two generic tests which were not objectively measurable against the specification were used.

Where initial specifications (1.2) were not measurable, technical and specific, evaluations tended to be vague and meaningless. In some cases, we saw a copy and paste of the specification from (1.2) which was then RAG colour-coded or merely with an added column to a table that said 'Yes/No' which was very basic and would have only scored points if there was a greater body of work to help support the criterion. It is again recommended that the user group feedback does not necessarily come from peer groups but reflects the thoughts of the target user/ client of the prototype and the challenge it was set in.