# A-LEVEL
# DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY: FASHION AND TEXTILES

7562/C: Non-exam assessment
Report on the Examination

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**Introduction**

The new approach to Fashion and Textiles embodied in this specification has resulted in a more challenging yet profound experience for students with some producing the most innovative work we have seen over the years. Though it has been successful for some, others have failed to address the assessment criteria and a high percentage of centre marks have been adjusted. In general, those teachers who had received training or contacted their NEA advisers in relation to contexts fared better as they fully understood the changes and the importance of choosing the most appropriate contexts.

Central to the success of the NEA is the selection, by the student, of a context that will provide them with the opportunity to challenge themselves as a designer. Care should be taken, and guidance sought, to ensure that the context chosen offers the student the scope and complexity for a piece of work that is worthy of consideration for the award of an A-level.

In order to do this they must understand the assessment criteria for Section A and view the context as a setting, background, environment, circumstance, condition, or surrounding that, when investigated, will uncover design opportunities for fashion and textile design. Through investigating the context in depth, real life design opportunities to create original, innovative ideas should materialise. Unfortunately, students were tending to follow the legacy specification method which was to choose a context and write a design brief at the start. The research was completed in order to provide information about product types and to inspire design through identified colour, pattern, shapes and styles. The assessment criteria are now very different and this legacy approach fails to meet them in any significant way.

The following are examples of contexts that students investigated, some more successfully than others:

"Disabilities – autism, sensory disorders, limited sight, dementia, movement - wheelchair"
"Self-confidence is greatly influenced by society's expectation of the perfect body"
"Mental health issues"
"Inclusive design"
"Homelessness"
"Science fiction and futurism"
"Challenging fashion norms and expectations"
"Cultural, social and moral appropriation within the fashion industry"

It was more difficult for students to identify design opportunities when they chose such contexts as the natural world, drama productions or works of art and these proved to be less successful. Designing a costume for a stage production is a design brief. If a particular performance was investigated it should have been done with a view to searching for opportunities to design a fashion product for a modern market. Some chose to design for an actual stage production which is very difficult when expert costume designers have already created stage outfits making it difficult to design anything more original.

**Section A: Identify and investigate design possibilities (20 marks)**

**Criterion - Excellent rationale provided for the context selected, with continuous reference throughout the project to the end user and the constraints that need to be considered in formulating a final solution**

- Identification and the writing of appropriate contexts and constraints was a significant issue for many students.
- Few wrote an appropriate or appropriately challenging context, with the majority tending to choose and work from inspirational themes.
- Constraints were seldom identified or mentioned as the student worked through the process. The most successful considered any restrictions or limitations at every stage with clearly identified thoughts presented on the design sheets.
- When inspirational themes were used as opposed to contexts, the students were unable to provide rationale for choice, or found it too difficult and simply chose not to offer any rationale at all.
- Some took design opportunities to mean a final garment solution inspired by a theme. These students did not understand that they should be looking to design and make prototypes that could solve real issues/ problems for others.
- Some recognised the importance of establishing appropriately qualified focus groups though few included experts and most relied on the opinions of their peers.
- Most provided profiles for clients and or end users though they often provided little information that would in all honesty direct their design thinking. The most successful were those who had access to real end users, interviewed them, had a real understanding of the issues and constraints involved and took their advice and opinions at every stage. The least successful were those who only involved the end user in giving opinions of their ideas.
- Very few chose inaccessible clients, i.e. design for a celebrity, realising it would be impossible to meet the assessment criteria in full.

**Criterion - Student employs a comprehensive range of strategies and techniques, including both primary and secondary methods of investigation, practical experimentation and disassembly, to thoroughly explore design opportunities. All sources have been fully referenced**

- Most students planned investigation work, though many used similar headings and appeared to be following teacher direction.
- Questionnaires presented by students tended to be weak with superficial questions or closed questions that were only directed towards allowing students to justify choices/ decisions they were making in relation to the direction of the NEA. It was far more informative when students interviewed clients and/or end users
- Students who claimed product analysis activities as product disassembly were more ‘hoop jumping’ and did not maximize their potential to learn from commercially designed products – this work had limited value when products from websites rather than actual products were used.
- The most successful investigated product design through disassembly and used it not only to understand construction but also as a method of exploring potential.
- Practical experimentation should be carried out to thoroughly explore design opportunities. Early thinking in a practical way. This is a different approach to the legacy spec when this experimentation was carried out as part of the development work. The most successful

investigated fabric qualities, methods of colouring fabrics, decorative or enhancement techniques along with modelling and making of part toiles. When it was done well as an investigation as opposed to development, it had an important and useful effect at a later stage. Lower ability students tended to present weak samples with little or no rationale for carrying out the investigation. They showed little understanding of why it was a valuable piece of research and how, as part of development, the most suitable techniques could be further experimented with. Some would benefit from considering more advanced techniques or combining the use of several to create interesting effects.

- One of the greatest challenges in the fashion industry is to produce garments that fit customers properly. The most able recognised that the characterisation of consumers according to size, weight and body shape could be improved and applied to clothing design.
- Some organised very relevant useful visits as part of their investigations. The most inspiring involved observing end users in their everyday environments carrying out routine activities. Interviews with experts involved also proved useful. Only a limited number gained useful information when visiting the Clothes Show, museums or exhibitions, and often there was only a tenuous link between the visit and their context.

**Criterion - First concepts are both fully relevant to the context and feasible for further development and are clearly communicated through a fully appropriate variety of methods and techniques**

- Many failed to recognise that first concepts were required in order to meet the assessment criteria and many only provided pencil sketched early/ first ideas towards the end of investigation work.
- Some showed good practice and interspersed their work with sketched concepts, re-designs and moulage. Few used other communication techniques such as collage, colourways or part toile making.
- In some folders this work lacked sophistication and was seen as a standalone activity with ideas not carried forward for further development in Section C.
- More able students saw first concept designs as an opportunity to really experiment and take risks.

**Criterion - All investigations relate directly to the design context, issues are identified and fully addressed and the student demonstrates a detailed and perceptive understanding of the information gathered**

- Some failed to understand that all their investigative work should relate directly to the design context and unfortunately their research was carried out in order to inform a design brief.
- Some students are still ‘hoop jumping’, perhaps following teacher direction, by carrying out and presenting information they perceive should be in their portfolio rather than, through critically thinking, identifying and addressing areas to investigate that have personal value to their work.
- Students who wrote aims and conclusions on each investigation page generally produced work that flowed better and linked together more coherently.
- Students who wrote a detailed summative analysis report at the end of Section A were able to develop design briefs and design specifications that better covered assessment objectives and contained greater clarity and explanation.

**Section B: Producing a design brief and specification (10 marks)**

**Criterion - A comprehensive, clearly stated and challenging design brief resulting from a thorough consideration of investigations undertaken, that fully addresses both the context and the needs and wants of the intended user(s).**

- A number of students mistakenly started their NEA projects with a design brief or design situation as fitting for the legacy specification requirements. It was mostly these students who fixated on a garment type without having carried out any investigation work.
- In an attempt to show an iterative approach some presented an early design brief at an appropriate stage of the investigation and then went on to develop it further when analysis was complete.
- Without identifying, investigating and interviewing intended users as part of Section A it was impossible to write a brief that fully identified their needs and wants.
- The most able did write challenging briefs that allowed them to fully engage in an iterative, experimental approach.

**Criterion - The student has produced a comprehensive, detailed and well explained design specification which will fully guide the student's design thinking.**

- When a clear context has been set, the needs and wants of end users identified and investigation work analyzed in depth, then students should be in a position to focus on a product type. Some failed to have this focus and presented sheets of ideas they were never going to develop. Likewise, if their specification states the prototype will be for a jumpsuit then only ideas for that product should be presented. There is neither sufficient time for the NEA nor space on 45 design sheets to be presenting a wide range of different product types.
- This was an area that still appears to be very teacher-led with all students within a sample presenting similarly styled work.
- A small number of centres encouraged their students to include within design specifications a column to list final testing strategies that could be applied in relation to each specification criterion.
- It was often disappointing to see that students failed to use their specifications to guide their design thinking

**Criterion - A detailed project management approach to prototype development, including time management and determining quantities and costs of materials, has been fully integrated into the specification.**

- This was seen as a new requirement with most failing to grasp the importance of a full project management approach. The challenge of project management is to achieve all of the project goals and objectives while honoring the preconceived project constraints. Typical constraints are scope, time, and budget. You must plan and stay in control of the plan. The most able students understood this and stayed in full control of the plan explaining if and why they deviated.
- Most did not have a full project management approach though did present planning for the following:
    - Gantt charts were used as working documents to show time planning for the whole process and/ or in more detail to show prototype development stages.
    - Tables, as traditionally used, were included to plan all aspects required for prototype development.

    - Pages from a 'week at a glance' diary were used as a working document to plan work and show intervention and contingency planning/ changes to plans as the project developed.Toile development and manufacturing diaries included timings.
- It is often difficult to include fabrics and cost in an initial design specification and most covered quantities and costs of materials in manufacturing specifications.

**Section C: Development of design proposals (25 marks)**

**Criterion - The rationale for design decisions is clearly documented and fully justified with constant reference being made to the design brief, specification and investigations throughout the development of their design proposal.**

- The most successful were fully focused on designing prototypes to meet the needs of the end users and worked independently, making reference to the brief and investigations at every stage. Their work was concise, flowed, was mature, and significantly different to that of their peers.
- Unfortunately, all too often students had the same in-school approach to evidencing work for this assessment criterion suggesting it was teacher driven.
- Again, only those working at the top of the ability range recognized and evidenced issues that emerged with further investigation as part of Section C. For some, their thinking and direction was not clear.

**Criterion - In the development of innovative design proposals the student will demonstrate clear evidence of originality, creativity and a willingness to take design risks.**

- If students do not meet this criterion they should not be awarded marks in the top band. Some teachers were awarding very high marks when there was no evidence of this criterion being met.
- Some developed first concepts and evidenced outstanding innovation and creativity when designing. These were the students who were genuinely designing with end users in mind and not an outfit for themselves to wear.
- The norm however was for students not to exploit the opportunity to take risks, show originality and then perhaps diffuse designs to respond to client and commercial demands.
- Talented illustrators appeared to have more confidence and be open to taking risk and showing innovation.
- Some students 'hid behind' CAD in the mistaken belief it would make their designs look sophisticated and innovative. Such work often contained few styling details and areas of interest.

**Criterion - Excellent use of a variety of modelling techniques to support ongoing development work throughout. This is supported by the use of drawings, sketches, annotations and notes showing clear evidence of design thinking.**

- Traditional approaches to modelling in textiles included paper modelling and draping fabrics over a mannequin. Often these appeared to be paying lip service to the criterion and were not genuinely influencing design.
- The most forward looking and focused experimented with fabrics and created 3D prototypes using inexpensive materials. This testing, along with the opinions of end users, allowed further development to take place.
- Most students used a variety of techniques to help creat the prototype pattern/template with very few totally relying on commercial patterns. Those that used commercial patterns with few

modifications struggled to show originality and independence when developing and manufacturing their prototype.
- It was disappointing that few supported changes to first toile iterations through sketching, annotated photographs or the written word, and thinking was not always made clear.
- Most involved end users or experts to give feedback on design ideas but few involved them wearing toiles to test/ check for fit.
- Most continue to focus on evidencing development of a basic prototype shape and not extending this work to applying proposed styling details, facings or linings etc. In doing so these students are not fully carrying out prototype development and are presented with unresolved issues later on when manufacturing.

**Criterion - Excellent ongoing development of design proposals, achieved through exploration of and experimentation with different materials, techniques and processes leading to an excellent quality design of a prototype for manufacture.**

- As part of a project management approach most had planned and given reasons for the work they intended to carry out as they developed a final prototype
- This criterion is explicit – development through exploration and experimentation with materials and techniques. This is relating to the full prototype not just the decorative elements. This was overlooked by many. All elements that make up a textile product should have been explored. Many focused on presenting one toile, samples of seams and decorative techniques to be used for styles they had already decided on.
- Few experimented with product construction and they were the only ones who made a range of mock ups of separate parts of the garment as they looked for innovative and original solutions.
- The most able identified and investigated fabrics and possible techniques as part of section A and went on to experiment in a more focused way with techniques they had already established would work.
- Fabrics were investigated with most students showing some subject knowledge as they made final choices. Students who were focused on originality experimented with different fabric possibilities to achieve the effects they wanted. Fabric can be expensive so they often used similar, cheaper versions to experiment with. Lower ability students tended to use calico for all the sampling irrespective of their final fabric choice. This showed a lack of subject knowledge and understanding that some techniques do not work effectively on all fabrics.
- Components such as fastenings, threads and interfacings were often overlooked and little consideration or exploration was seen.
- When students had access to laser cutters, 3D printers and sublimation printers they showed good awareness of technological possibilities through practical sampling.

**Criterion - Comprehensive and fully detailed manufacturing specification produced which makes specific reference to relevant quality control checks and allows fully accurate interpretation by a third party.**

- This is an area that most students are now doing consistently well, with some students presenting very professional technical documents. They understand what information is needed in order for a third party to make the prototype.
- A minority failed to show fabric swatches, working drawings and lay plans which are useful if not essential pieces of manufacturing information.
- Most incorporated quality control checks into their production plans.
- A limited number of students are starting to use mathematics in their portfolios to calculate fabric amounts to include in the manufacturing specification, and degrees of fabric wastage to consider in costings.

**Criterion - Project management for manufacturing allows for further development of design proposals in response to ongoing evaluation, testing and full consideration of contingency planning as prototype development takes place.**

- Where prototype development was thorough there was evidence that students were using a project management approach to reduce the potential for any significant unforeseeable issues impacting on prototype manufacture. At its best, students were systematically testing, evaluating and analysing their work and changing direction as appropriate to move towards an improved outcome.
- Students working at the lower end of the ability range had predeterimned the prototype they were going to make before development had taken place, they had selected a similar commercial pattern and produced superficial samples of techniques they were going to use and so this criterion was not met.
- Student use of third party feedback was generally very good throughout Section C and helped to guide this work. Most would have benefitted from having experts as part of their focus groups.

**Section D: Development of design prototypes (25 marks)**

The most successful students recognised that design prototypes are just that; they need to be directly related to the design proposals and show consideration, at all stages, of how the design thinking continues to be developed and the prototype(s) refined. During the development of their design prototype the top band students continued to experiment and adapt their design proposals as they progressed. Constant testing and evaluation formed part of this process and their thinking was clearly explained.

Students in the main continue to see the assessment criteria as linear and it will take time to build confidence that wherever an assessment criterion is met it will be rewarded.

**Criterion - Excellent justification provided for selection of appropriate materials and components and proposed techniques and processes, demonstrating an excellent understanding of material properties to ensure excellent quality prototype(s) that are fit for purpose.**

- In general, students were able to select appropriate fabrics and components through their subject knowledge and generally gave a sound rationale for their choices.
- The most able justified choices of techniques and processes in Section C showing a full understanding of material properties. Rationale for choice of components was often omitted or not provided with the same degree of conviction.

**Criterion - Significant complexity or challenge is involved throughout the production of prototype(s). The student demonstrates excellent manufacturing skills combined with an excellent understanding of the need for dimensional accuracy and precision.**

- As moderation is now carried out via postal submission only it is essential that the student and teacher provide evidence relating to the made prototypes. Some centres had their marks adjusted because there was insufficient evidence to support the marks being awarded.
- Photographs to support the assessment of prototypes were provided though students would benefit from including larger, clearer photographs in manufacturing diaries showing the internal working of the product from all angles, close ups of special features and the product in use.

- The most successful challenged themselves and designed complex prototypes with high levels of demand.
- Some students self-penalised by making up existing designs with few special features or embellishment. The prototypes should be original and the product of extensive exploration and experimentation with fabrics, threads and techniques so it is expected that some aspects of either construction or decoration would be unique when high marks are being awarded.
- This criterion was generally met well with most producing prototypes that were worthy of an award at A-level.

**Criterion - The student has selected and used appropriate tools, machinery and equipment, including CAM where required, and worked with a high level of skill, precision and accuracy to produce their prototype**

- Evidence to show that this criterion has been met must be provided through teacher annotation, student evaluation and photographs.
- Some felt it necessary to present lists or photographs of the tools and equipment used which showed a lack of maturity and perhaps confidence. The prototype would not be the quality shown in photographs if this criterion had not been met. It was clear to see the tools that had been used in many of the production diaries.
- It is helpful if students evidence any specialist tools or equipment that have been used especially if it explains the quality, professional accuracy and finish achieved in the final prototype.

**Criterion - Prototype(s) fully address the design brief, satisfying all major points of the specification and take into account all amendments/modifications to their original design proposals as necessary**

- Most students were successful in making prototypes that related directly to the identified final design proposal. The most confident justified and explained if direction had changed.
- When specifications were weak or lacked details, it was difficult for students to meet this criterion at the highest levels.
- Only top band students continued to develop the prototype as part of Section D with most stopping development on conclusion of Section C. These students continued to test and modify as the work progressed. Changes made to the original intention were fully explained and justified.
- Many had not adopted an iterative approach and carried out no further testing until the prototype was fully made. Testing against the design specification was then included as one of the final testing strategies. Few formally tested against the design brief as work was progressing.

**Criterion - Student makes all required modifications to the prototype in a fully considered manner in light of feedback from user trials and third-party feedback and as a result of testing and evaluation carried out against earlier iterations of the prototype**

- Only the most talented maintained an iterative approach from start to finish, recording feedback at every stage from users and then adapting and changing designs as the work progressed. Final designs and toiles were evaluated well but this was the end of the development and exploration for most.

- Changes/ modifications made were listed in production plans and final evaluations, and were decisions made by students to rectify areas of making not fully addressed at the prototype development stage.

**Criterion - Quality assurance is evident throughout and it is clear where planned quality control checks have been applied throughout the process to ensure consistency and safety**

- Quality assurance was evident in photographs of prototypes and quality control mostly presented as lists in manufacturing specifications, production tables or flowcharts.
- Moderators have in part to rely on teacher annotation on the student record forms when looking for evidence that this criterion has been met. For some it was missing.

**Criterion - Clear evidence throughout the manufacturing processes that appropriate health and safety processes have been both considered and employed**

- Students who produced thorough work considered H&S in relation to individual processes carried out to make the prototype.
- Again, the moderator looks at comments made by the student throughout the project, and at photographs of the making stages along with teacher annotation.
- Some found it necessary to include a design sheet on health and safety issues in the workplace. This was research not related to their work and took up 1 of 45 valuable sheets.

**Section E: Analysing and evaluating (20 marks)**

This section carries as many marks as section A and yet the evidence to meet the criteria was minimal for many. Analysing and evaluating should form part of everything they do; perhaps it does but students are failing to explain and record their thinking. Ongoing evaluation should be seen to be informing the decision-making process, particularly being used to bring about modifications to design proposals and prototype development. Central to this is the close and regular involvement of the proposed client/user(s) making sure that the prototype is both fit for purpose and meets the requirements of the client/user(s) rather than just meeting those of the student.

**Criterion - Comprehensive evidence of analysis and evaluation throughout the process, which has clearly informed the chosen context, client or user and the subsequent development and manufacture of the prototype**

- Students who wrote aims and conclusions on each page generally produced work that flowed better and linked together more coherently.
- When students presented a detailed summative analysis report at the end of Section A, they were able to develop design briefs and design specifications that better covered assessment objectives and contained greater clarity and explanation.
- Few involved their end user/client/ focus group to explore for design opportunities in Section A but most did ask their opinions when design ideas had been presented. Unfortunately for some this was a superficial exercise with most opinions going in the direction the student wanted them to. It was clear some had set their mind on making an evening dress that appealed to themselves.
- Only a minority involved the end user in testing and trialling the toiles, with involvement tending to cease once a final idea had emerged. In most cases it reappeared when objective third party feedback was needed to test the prototype.

**Criterion - Testing is carried out in a focused and comprehensive way with clear evidence of how the results have been used to inform the design and any modifications to the prototype**

- Students who were genuinely designing for others and not themselves evidenced the best work as they were able to use the same person(s) throughout the process to provide feedback that had real value.
- Teacher direction often resulted in students from the same centre having the same approach to testing and evaluating when the most able should have been adopting a more independent approach
- By adopting an iterative approach, the student should continually test their ideas through modelling, sampling and the making of mock ups. Findings should be recorded clearly along with an explanation of how they were informing designing. This was done well by the most able.
- Some exciting testing of techniques and processes was seen including the testing of natural dyes to create required effects, the possibilities when using the laser cutter and sublimation printer.
- Less impressive were the students who tested a range of fabrics to establish the working properties. This was often superficial and a task carried out to show they had covered the testing assessment criterion. The most able recognised that when fabrics are bought, the fibre content should be established and then subject knowledge applied to give them the properties. The wisest only tested fabrics for specific working qualities, those they did not know, that were essential to determine if the prototype would work. Most failed to test fabrics to establish the most suitable tensions for different threads and stitches.

**Criterion - Student has provided a well-reasoned critical analysis of their final outcome which links clearly to their design brief and specification and provides full justification for the extent to which the prototype is both fit for purpose and meets the needs of the client/user**

- Testing against the design specification was a strategy used by all students though for many it was a straightforward 'yes, the criteria have been met' and with no detailed explanation.
- The tests decided on by some students contained little rigor and there was no sound evidence to suggest they had even been carried out. In these cases, subjective comment formed the basis of analysis of the final outcome.
- In order to establish that the prototype is both fit for purpose and meets the needs of the client/user it must be tested through user trials. Some failed to do this and merely presented their prototype on a mannequin. If it is for a specific group then ideally it should be tested by more than one consumer.
- The most successful carried out and photographed thorough user trials that tested the prototype in its intended environment and involved a range of people (some with appropriate expertise) giving detailed and insightful feedback.
- For top band students a wide range of appropriate final testing strategies were identified and successfully carried out providing the student with a wealth of information from which a well-reasoned critical analysis of the prototype could be written.

**Criterion - A comprehensive critical evaluation of their final prototype, clearly identifying how modifications could be made to improve the outcome, together with a full justification for these modifications and full consideration provided for how the prototype could be developed for different production methods**

- The iterative approach to designing and the wording of the assessment criteria suggest that the final prototype that has been rigorously tested is not perfect and could be improved. Only the most able students took this on board. As prototypes were being trialled, they took photographs, did improved sketches, wrote down both theirs and the end users' opinions and then went on to develop specific aspects that needed modifying. Not only did they present modified sketches they also altered patterns/templates, produced new technique samples and in some cases constructed part toiles to show how the product could be improved or further developed.
- The criteria state a comprehensive critical evaluation of the final prototype and yet many took this to mean an analysis of the process they had gone through.
- Some students understood that there was a requirement to communicate prototype iterations in ways other than just the written word.
- Modifications were mostly sketched and often carried out without any great care. An innovative approach seen was to use a tracing paper overlay to show suggested modifications sketched over a drawing of the final design proposal.
- Some students presented further designs to show an extended product range rather than modifications specific to the prototype manufactured.
- Consideration of how the prototype could be developed for different production methods was mostly ignored or misunderstood. Few suggested changes to the design of the prototype to accommodate different production methods.

**Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.