

Why Textiles Matters in D&T

Dawn Foxall, Founder & Chair of the Textiles Skills Centre

As the Textiles Skills Centre marks its tenth anniversary, the focus is on a decade of supporting high-quality textiles education within Design and Technology. It reflects on the Centre's impact on teacher confidence, subject knowledge and safe practice, and considers the role of textiles as a contemporary, industry-informed material area within the D&T classroom.

This year marks ten years of the Textiles Skills Centre supporting teachers and strengthening textiles education within Design and Technology. Established to build confidence, subject knowledge and sustainable practice, the Centre has grown into a national network that continues to influence classroom practice and the wider D&T community.

Over the past decade, the Textiles Skills Centre has played a central role in supporting textiles education within Design and Technology. By focusing on professional development, mentoring and shared practice, the Centre has worked to build teacher confidence, strengthen subject knowledge and support high-quality, relevant textiles teaching in D&T classrooms.

Weaving a Stronger Future for Textiles Education

We've supported thousands of teachers through CPD workshops, mentorship, and online courses, reaching tens of thousands of students in turn. The ripple effect is tangible: stronger teaching, improved GCSE results, and rising student uptake. Over two thousand teachers have attended our face-to-face training in schools and universities across the UK, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi, hands-on days filled with creativity, networking, and professional renewal. Our 'Become a Great Textiles Teacher' (BAGTT) programme, funded by ASET, has

supported more than 400 teachers, while our mentorship scheme has paired over 200 educators to share best practice and strengthen teaching across the country.

The Fabric of Design Thinking

Despite this progress, textiles faces ongoing challenges in many schools. Too often dismissed as "just sewing".

"Textiles sits at the intersection of creativity, technology and sustainability, making it a vital and future-focused material area within Design and Technology."

That misconception couldn't be further from the truth. When textiles is taught through a D&T lens, it becomes a dynamic and interdisciplinary area of the curriculum, blending science, design, engineering, and art. It's about problem-solving, material innovation, sustainability, and systems thinking.

Students don't just learn to make; they learn to design, analyse, and evaluate, developing the same technical precision and iterative thinking found in any other D&T material area.

In classrooms across the UK, this comes to life in exciting ways:

- Students deconstruct fast-fashion garments to understand construction, material properties, and sustainability issues.
- They prototype ideas in paper and calico, learning that failure and iteration are part of the creative process.
- They explore biomimicry, discovering how Velcro was inspired by burrs or how sharkskin textures transformed swimwear design.
- They experiment with e-textiles, digital embroidery, sublimation printing, or upcycling, blending traditional craftsmanship with emerging technology.

Through these experiences, young people learn resilience, critical thinking, and empathy. They ask why as well as how, considering impact and ethics, skills vital for the modern world.

A Subject that Shapes Futures

Textiles is not a nostalgic craft; it's a future-focused discipline that underpins one of the UK's most important industries. The fashion and textile sector is a global



powerhouse worth over £60 billion, employing 1.3 million people, and contributing more than £23 billion in tax revenue annually. One in every 25 UK jobs connects to this field.

To sustain this thriving industry, we need technically skilled, creatively confident young people, and that begins in schools. When textiles disappears from the D&T classroom, we lose a vital pipeline of designers, engineers, and innovators.

Textiles plays an important role within GCSE Design and Technology. It keeps the subject diverse, relevant, and reflective of real-world design. It gives students access to careers in sustainable fashion, material science, smart textiles, gaming and film costume design, and wearable technology.

Safety, Skills, and Confidence

Confidence in teaching comes from knowledge, and safety is at the core of that. Whether students are learning to operate sewing machines, digital embroidery equipment, heat presses, or cutting tools, safe practice underpins creativity.

The Textiles Skills Centre provides specialist training, guidance, and ready-to-use risk assessment templates to help teachers create safe and inspiring classroom environments. When teachers

feel safe and supported, they deliver ambitious projects. When students feel secure, they take creative risks. For textiles to continue to thrive within Design and Technology, greater curriculum coherence and recognition of its value at GCSE level would support more consistent provision across schools.

It is vital to promote equitable representation within assessment frameworks and to invest in professional development and modern resources that enable teachers to deliver high-quality, contemporary textiles education. It is also important to highlight the diverse career pathways connected to textiles innovation, sustainability, and technology, ensuring students understand the exciting and meaningful opportunities this field has to offer.

The last decade has proven that textiles is not only relevant but transformative. It sits at the intersection of creativity and technology, tradition and innovation, sustainability and design. Our focus isn't just on what's been achieved, but on what comes next.

The next decade will bring new challenges: AI, biomaterials, circular economies, and digital design. But one thing remains constant, the power of textiles to inspire, connect, and create change.



Tune In



tinyurl.com/dk29sk7w

Dawn Foxall and Roy Ballam discuss 'Unravelling the Fabric of Textiles Education', a paper commissioned by the Textiles Skills Centre. The conversation explores where textiles currently sits across primary and secondary.



tinyurl.com/3txhhyc4

Textiles Skills Centre Courses

Explore upcoming courses offered both in-person and online.

➤ Award Winner

Dawn Foxall, Founder and Chair of the Textiles Skills Centre, received the IET Excellence Award for Outstanding Contribution to D&T at this year's D&T Association Excellence Awards. Since founding the Centre, Dawn has created a collaborative community that connects industry with education, supporting thousands of teachers and students through training, mentoring, and national competitions.



Nominate a colleague or pupil for the 2026 Excellence Awards
tinyurl.com/u9b6rewh

