

Improving Assessment in National Courses Research: Higher Business Management

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Proposal

The following proposal was shared with learners and educators who stated that they had studied or taught Higher Business Management. It should be noted that the survey initially showed the incorrect times for the current and proposed exam duration. This was changed on the second day of the survey, and all responses collected before the change were removed from the dataset.

- We are proposing making the exam for Higher Business Management shorter, reducing the time from 2 hours 45 minutes to 2 hours and 15 minutes.
- No changes are proposed for Section 1.
- We would shorten Section 2 by removing 20 marks worth of questions.
- We are proposing these changes to improve the exam experience for learners and schools, while maintaining appropriate sampling of subject content.
- There are no proposed changes to the assignment at this stage. The weightings of the exam and assignment (the percentage they contribute to a final grade) would stay the same.

The proposed changes for Higher Business Management are:

Component	Current marks	Current duration	Current weighting
Section 1 + 2	30 + 60	2 hours 45 minutes	75%
Assignment	30	N/A	25%

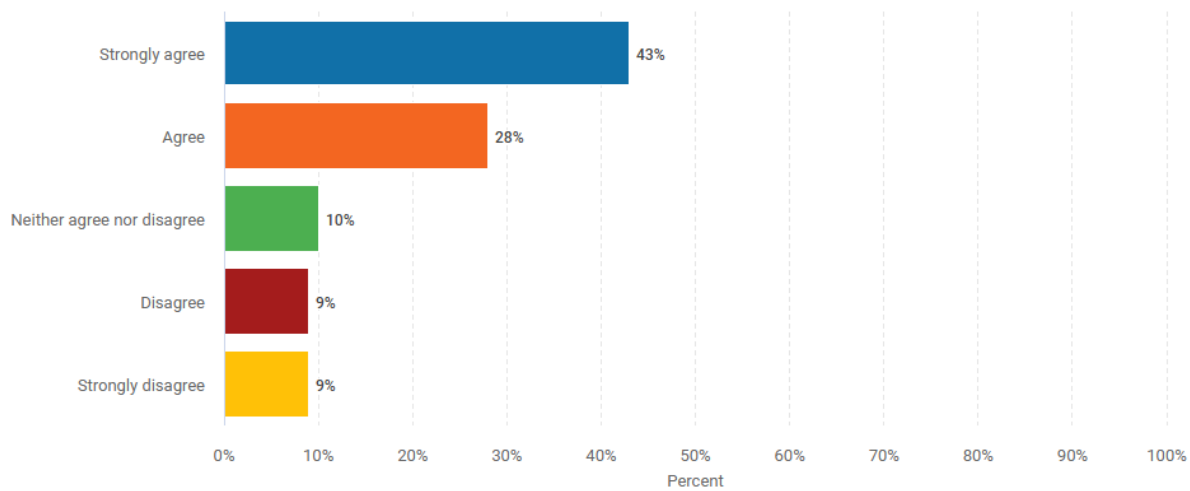
Component	Proposed marks	Proposed duration	Proposed weighting
Section 1 + 2	30 + 40	2 hours 15 minutes	75%
Assignment	30	N/A	25%

Findings: learners

We received responses from 148 learners who stated they had studied Higher Business Management. As shown in Figure 1, the majority (71%) of learner respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal, while 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes for H Business Management? Learner views.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes for Higher Business Management?

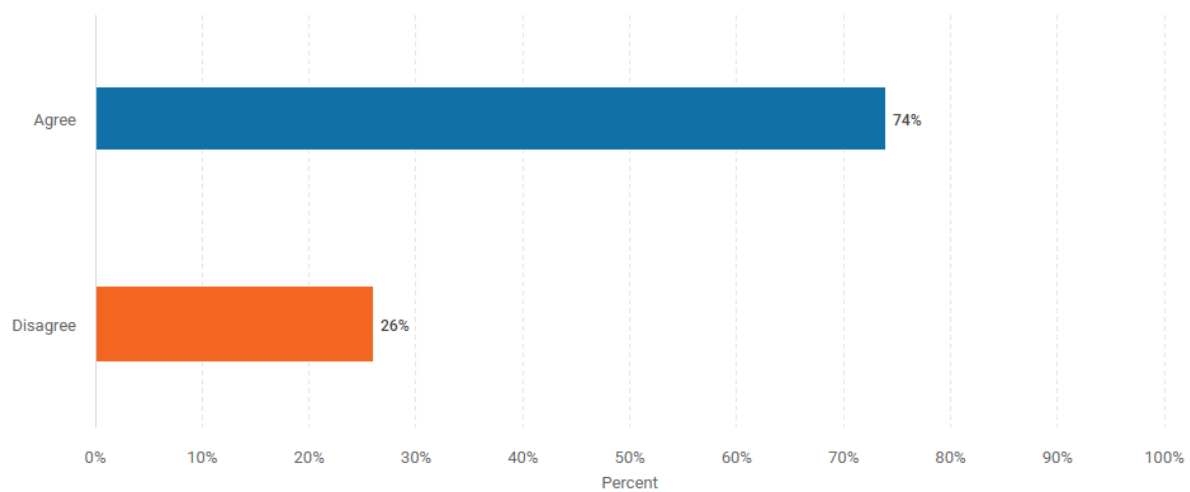


Base: 148 learners who stated they had studied Higher Business Management

Respondents were also asked whether, if the proposed changes were made for Higher Business Management, they agreed or disagreed that this should happen from session 2026–27. As shown in Figure 2, the majority of learner respondents (74%) agreed, while 26% disagreed.

Figure 2: In the event that the proposed changes are made for Higher Business Management, do you agree or disagree that this should happen from session 2026–27? Learner views.

In the event that the proposed changes are made for Higher Business Management, do you agree or disagree that this should happen from session 2026/27?



Base: 148 learners who said they had studied Higher Business Management

Qualitative analysis

The respondents were asked if they had any further feedback that they would like to share about the proposed changes for Higher Business Management. Eleven learner respondents left a comment. Although the quantitative findings show that the majority of learner respondents were in support of the proposal, most comments were critical of the proposal.

Challenges with proposed changes to the question paper

The most common theme that emerged in the learner respondent comments was the perception that reducing the size of the question paper, and reducing sampling, would disadvantage candidates. These respondents felt that it would be unfair that less of the course content that they had revised for the exam would be assessed. Some of these respondents felt that the course content should be reduced alongside a reduction in the size of the question paper.

‘[...] I also think some of the course content should be removed as there is far too much to get through in the academic year and far too much which can be assessed. If the exam is reduced in length there will now be even more content which learners are revising which will never be assessed. Surely we should be looking at quality not quantity to give your learners the best experience and the best chance of being successful.’

‘It is good as the exam is very long but the information that students need to learn should also be reduced as there is so much, it means you will assess even less content which doesn't seem fair.’

One learner respondent expressed the view that the proposed changes would make the exam too easy, as they felt that the only challenging part of the current exam is the amount of questions in it.

Less common views

Other views were each expressed by one respondent. One felt that the proposed exam length of 2 hours and 15 minutes did not go far enough, and that exam length should be further reduced. Another thought that the current exam length was too long and that 2 hours and 15 minutes would be a suitable time for learners to finish both sections.

‘I don't think it goes far enough. I'm dreading the length of my higher Business exam this year. 2 hours 15 is still too long.’

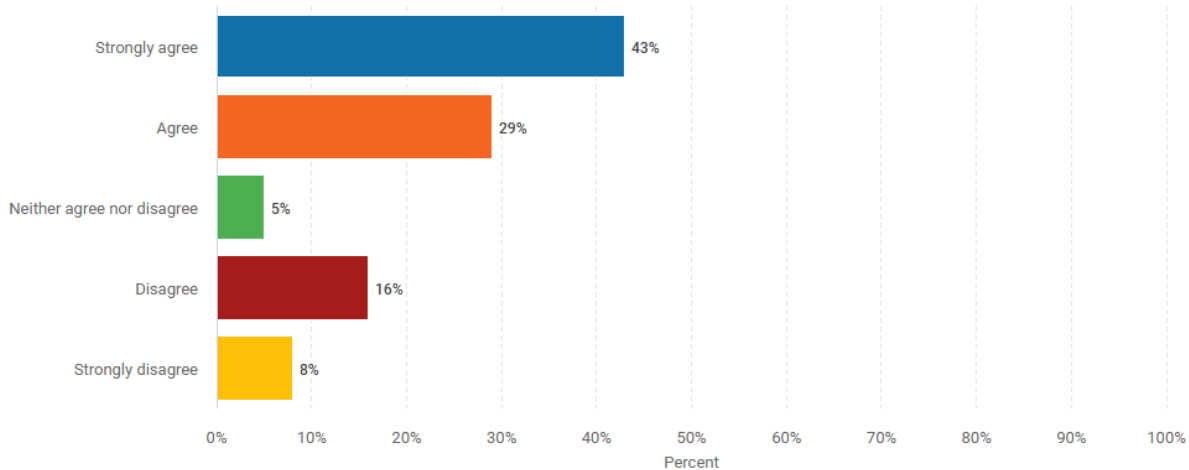
Another respondent expressed agreement with the proposal in the open text comments, as they felt that the proposed changes would be helpful to learners.

Findings: educators

We received responses from 266 educators who stated they had delivered Higher Business Management. As shown in Figure 3, the vast majority (72%) of educator respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal, while 23% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes for Higher Business Management? Educator views.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes for Higher Business Management?

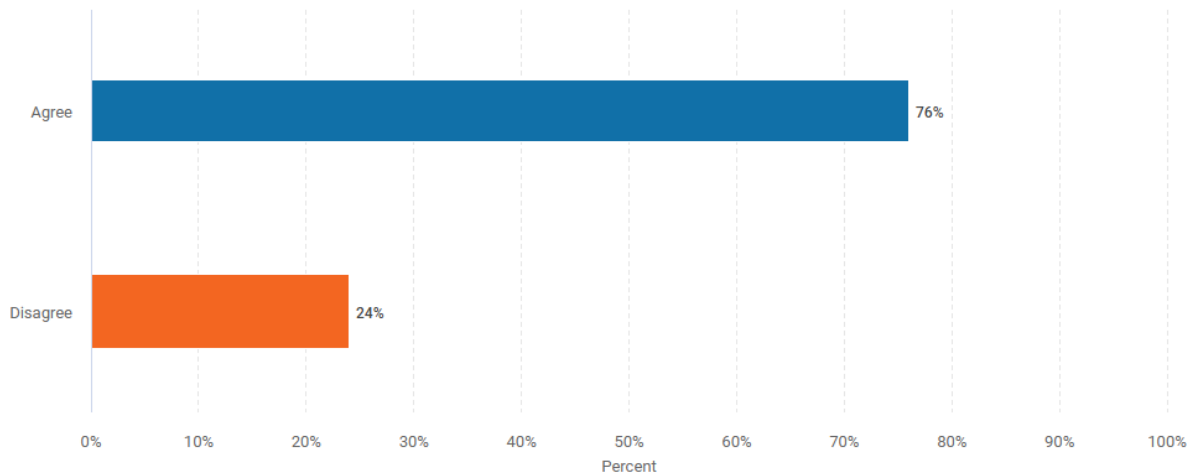


Base: 266 educators who had delivered Higher Business Management

Respondents were also asked whether, if the proposed changes are made for Higher Business Management, they agree or disagree that this should happen from session 2026–27. As shown in Figure 4, again the vast majority of educator respondents (76%) agreed, while 24% disagreed.

Figure 4: In the event that the proposed changes are made for Higher Business Management, do you agree or disagree that this should happen from session 2026–27? Educator views.

In the event that the proposed changes are made for Higher Business Management, do you agree or disagree that this should happen from session 2026/27?



Base: 263 educators who said they had delivered Higher Business Management

Qualitative analysis

Educator respondents were asked if they had any further comments that they would like to share about the proposed changes to Higher Business Management. One hundred respondents left a comment. Although the quantitative findings show that the vast majority (76%) of educator respondents were in support of the proposal, most comments were about proposing an alternative change to Higher Business Management.

Benefits of the proposed changes to the question paper

There were a number of comments from educator respondents that explained what they felt the benefits of the proposed changes to Higher Business Management were. The main benefit expressed by educator respondents was that the shorter exam would reduce the burden on learners, as these respondents felt that the current exam length was too long. Some also expressed that the current exam length disproportionately impacts less able learners and those who had extra time, so reducing the duration would be especially advantageous to these learners.

'I strongly agree as I feel that 2 hours 45 minutes is an extremely long exam for this stage. (...)

‘I think this is a sensible change. 2 hours and 45 mins is a very long time and for pupils who are in receipt of AAR and get for example 25% extra time this takes the exam to almost 3 hours and 40 mins. I fully agree with this change.’

In addition, there was a number of educator respondents who felt that the exam length should be furthered shortened. Several suggested that a two-hour exam would be more appropriate, citing learners with extra time and the necessity for breaks.

‘I would propose that no NQ exam should be more than 2 hours. This is long enough for pupils to be in an exam situation without a break.’

‘I feel the exam should be taken down to 2 hours — as this is plenty time, given the increasing number of AAA requirements of extra time — this would still enable those student to sit a suitable length of exam.’

A few educator respondents also left general comments stating that they agreed with the proposals, without elaborating on why this is the case. Although some others stated they would agree if they had more information on the details of the changes.

‘Again, if there are no significant changes to the content or the marking expectations then I feel this would be a positive change.’

Challenges with proposed changes to the question paper

The majority of the comments submitted by educator respondents were around various challenges that they saw with the changes being proposed to Higher Business Management. The main theme that emerged from the data was the perception that candidates would be disadvantaged if the number of marks in section 2 of the question paper were to be reduced. A less common, although still prevalent, theme was the perception that the proposed changes would have a negative impact on progression from National 5 to Higher Business Management.

Removing 20 marks from Section 2

It was common for educator respondents to disagree with the proposal that 20 marks be removed from section 2 of the question paper. Many respondents expressed that the less-able candidates would be most disadvantaged by this change, perceiving section 2 as the less challenging part of the exam where learners could pick up more marks.

‘The shortening of the section 2 I believe would disadvantage candidates who struggle to complete the case study due to the analysis and problem solving of information.’

‘Section 1 presents the most challenge for learners in my experience. Pupils who are C/D performer often pick up the majority of their marks in section 2. Reducing scope for them to do so may disadvantage the less able from achieving a pass.’

In addition, many of the educator respondents expressed the view that, instead of removing the marks from section 2 these should be removed from section 1 instead, as they felt that this was the more challenging part of the paper. There were also a number of respondents who felt that marks should be removed from equally from both sections, rather than just section 2.

‘I would prefer the case study to be reduced as the section 2 questions are more challenging and appropriate for young people. I would suggest reducing section one by 10 marks and section 2 by 10 marks.’

In contrast, a few educator respondents expressed that they agreed that the proposal did not include changes to section 1. For these respondents, maintaining the structure of section 1 allowed the qualification to uphold its validity, and provides the opportunity for candidates to develop critical thinking skills.

‘Having a case study on 30 [marks] maintains the credibility of the subject. I believe the ability to read information and interpret is a key skill — ‘critical thinking’ meta-skill and one that should be developed not minimised. (...)’

Related to the proposed changes to section 2 was the concern that reducing the number of marks would mean that the course would not be sufficiently sampled. Some of these respondents had the perception that lower-ability learners could be penalised by losing out on the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge on a greater selection of topics.

‘I don’t agree with these changes. You would be reducing the marks awarded for section 2 quite drastically and would be making section 2 shorter than the N5 section to. I think the exam as it currently stands is lengthy but having this length allows the assessment of most of the content of the course by removing these marks you are then removing the ability to assess most of the content of the course.’

‘Unless there is a reduction in the course content I do not think that this proposal makes sense as pupils will still have to know all of the content but are questioned on fewer of them. For weaker candidates fewer questions can mean that topics they are strong on are not examined.’

Progression from National 5 to Higher

A few respondents held the view that the proposed changes would impact learners’ ability to progress to Higher. There were concerns that the case study portion of the exam would be weighted more highly for Higher but weighted lower for National 5 under the changes being

proposed. Those who voiced these concerns felt that this would create a larger jump between National 5 and Higher for those sitting both qualifications.

‘[...] Is also at odds with proposed changes at N5 where case study content is valued a lot less in proposed changes (with more emphasis on general questions). Here the opposite is being suggested.’

‘This is the area that pupils tend to do well in so to reduce the marks in this section seems unfair. Plus it means that a bigger majority is case study when it is reduced at National 5 then pupils will find this challenging.’

Implementing the change in 2026–27

Although the vast majority of respondents agreed that the proposed changes should be implemented at the beginning of the 2026–27 session, a few educator respondents left a comment regarding the suggested timelines for proposal to take place, expressing the feeling that they would need more time to implement the changes, in order to update learning materials.

Alternative suggestions

Some educator and learner respondents used the free text box to give varying suggestions for alternative changes that they felt should be made to Higher Business Management. We haven't included these comments in the analysis, as they did not directly answer the research questions and were out of scope of this research. We passed the comments on to our Qualifications Development teams to make them aware of the themes that emerged on this topic. We'll consider alternative changes to National Courses as part of wider qualifications reform in the future, and learners and educators will have opportunities to share their views and input more directly to this work.