

Improving Assessment in National Courses Research: Higher Politics

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Proposal

The following proposal was shared with respondents who stated they had studied or taught Higher Politics:

- The current Higher Politics question paper restricts study to the Conservative Party, the Labour party, Liberal Democrats, and the Scottish National Party. We propose that the course specification for section three be updated to reflect the emergence or significance of other political parties.
- We also propose increasing the duration of question paper 2 by 15 minutes. There will be no additional questions or marks added to the paper.

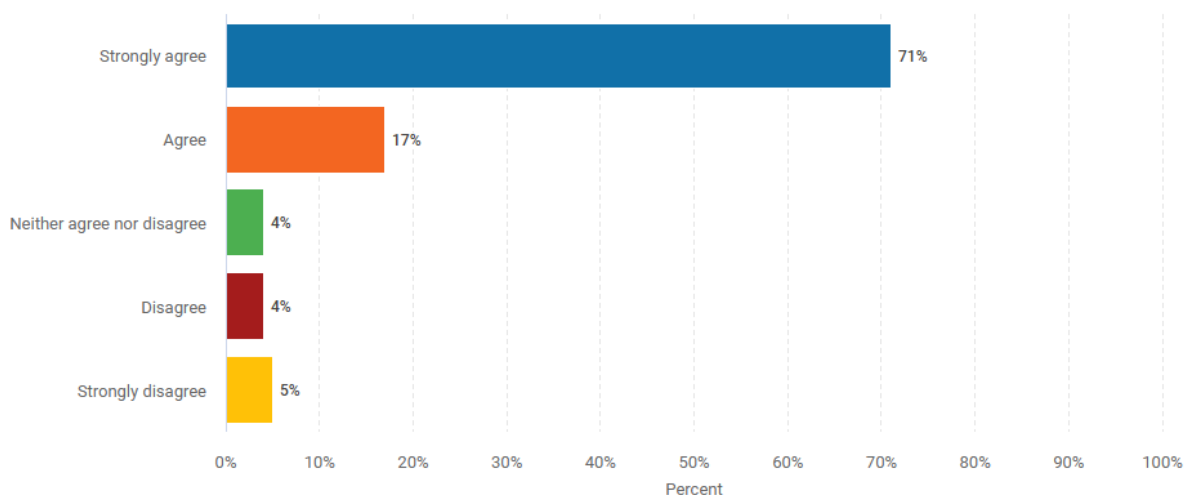
There are no proposed changes to the current assessment structure, overall number of marks or weightings.

Findings: learners

We received responses from 83 learners who had said they had studied or were currently studying Higher Politics. As shown in Figure 1, the vast majority of learner respondents (88%) agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed changes, while 9% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes for Higher Politics? Learner views

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



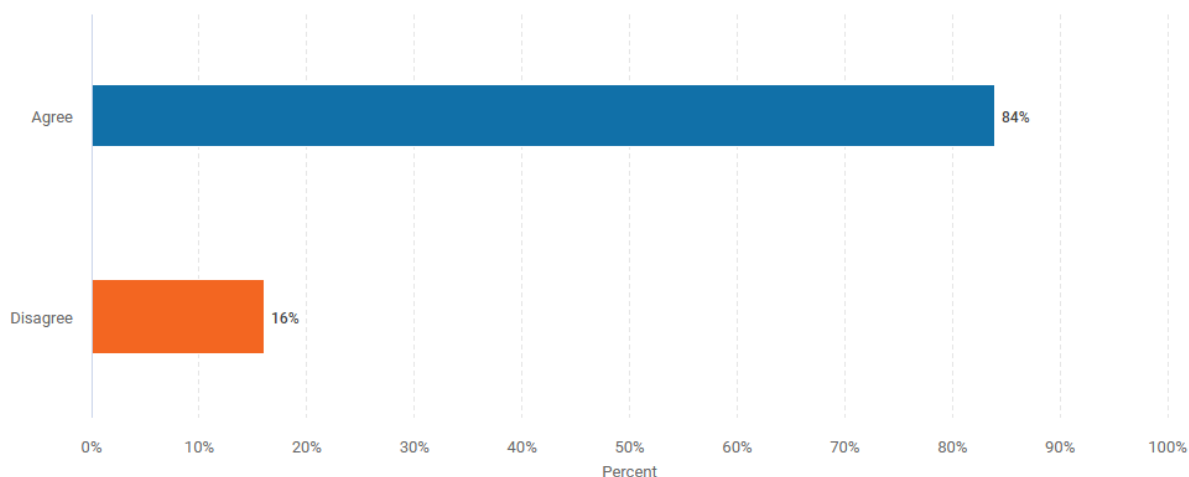
Base: 82 learners who stated they had studied Higher Politics

Respondents were then asked about the timelines for the proposed change if it was successful. In particular, whether they agreed or disagreed with the proposed changes being implemented

in 2026–27. As shown in Figure 2, the vast majority of learners (84%) agreed, and 16% disagreed.

Figure 2: In the event that the proposed changes are made for Higher Politics, 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 Politics, do you agree or disagree that this should happen from session 2026/27?



Base: 83 learners who stated they had studied Higher Politics

Qualitative analysis

Learner respondents were asked if they had any further comments that they would like to share about the proposed changes to Higher Politics, and nineteen left a comment. Although the vast majority of learner respondents agreed with the proposed changes to Higher Politics, many of the learner respondents' comments did not relate to the proposed changes.

The key theme that emerged from the comments relating to the exam duration for question paper 2 was that the change was welcome, but not enough. A small number of respondents made reference to the proposal to include other political parties.

Perceptions of the proposed changes to the duration of the question paper 2

Some respondents felt that increasing the duration of question paper 2 would be beneficial for them as, at present, they reported struggling to finish the question paper within the allotted time. However, some felt that, even with the proposed change to the duration, there were still issues with the question paper.

'Paper 2 definitely did not have enough time for the amount you have to write so 15 would greatly help!'

‘I think the increase in time is beneficial, [...].’

Some respondents disagreed with the proposal to increase the duration of Paper 2 by 15 minutes, saying that more than this should be added.

‘Should increase it by around 30-45 mins, as it is very difficult to complete with the current timing’

‘I think the time for paper 2 should be increased more than 15 minutes.’

Perceptions of the introduction of other political parties

Some learner respondents commented positively about the proposal to include additional political parties. However, one learner respondent, while they agreed with the proposal, felt that the change was not necessary.

‘I also think studying more than just a few main political parties in the UK grows people’s knowledge of politics overall ’

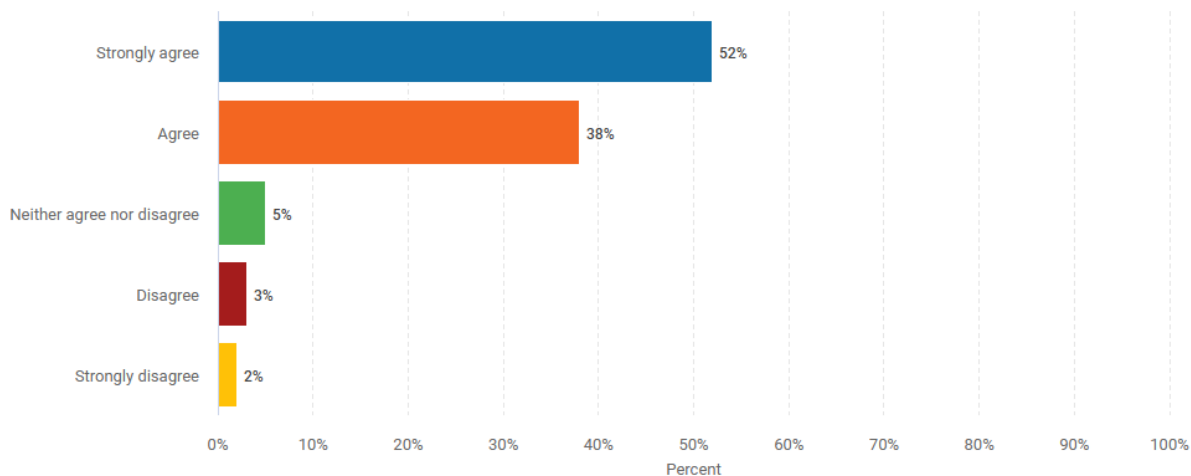
‘The inclusion of other parties such as Reform or the Green party would be good but not necessary.’

Findings: educators

We received responses from 93 educators who said they had taught Higher Politics. As shown in Figure 3, the vast majority of educator respondents (89%) agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed changes, while 5% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

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

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

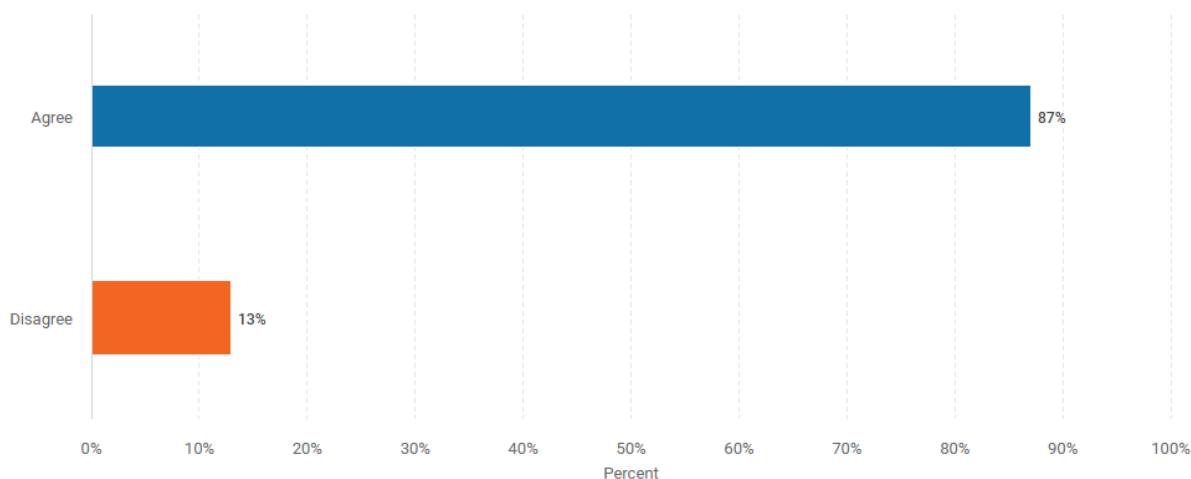


Base: 93 educators who said they had taught Higher Politics

Respondents were then asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the proposed changes being implemented in 2026–27. As shown in Figure 4, the vast majority of educators (87%) agreed, and 13% disagreed.

Figure 4: In the event that the proposed changes are made for Higher Politics, 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 Politics, do you agree or disagree that this should happen from session 2026/27?



Base: 93 educators who stated they had taught Higher Politics

Qualitative analysis

Educator respondents were asked if they had any further comments that they would like to share about the proposed changes to Higher Politics, and 55 left a comment. Although many of the comments from educators did not relate to the proposed changes, we received a number of positive comments relating to both proposals.

The key theme that emerged from the comments relating to the exam duration for question paper 2 was that it was a welcome change. The proposed amendment to the course specification, was also viewed positively.

Perceptions of the proposed changes to the duration of the question paper

It was common for respondents to feel that increasing the duration of question paper 2 would be beneficial to learners and educators.

‘This would be a welcome change. For candidates and staff.’

‘I very much welcome the extra time for Paper 2. I feel that students, who are very capable of answering the 20-mark data question well, are often penalised by running out of time to fully complete it. By adding an extra 15 minutes to this paper, it will make the completion of the paper much more likely and allow candidates to access the full range of marks. [...]’

However, there were also a few comments that disagreed with the proposed change to the duration of question paper 2, but for differing reasons. One respondent felt that 30 minutes should be added to paper 2 while another felt that an additional 15 minutes was too much.

‘15 mins extra in Paper 2 will help, but I feel it is still insufficient. I think an additional 30 mins is needed to allow candidates to complete both the skills questions to the best of their abilities. [...]’

‘I think making the exam 15 minutes longer will then give us an exam that is over 3 hours long in total which I believe is excessive.’

Perceptions of the introduction of other political parties

Some respondents commented positively about the proposal to update section three of the course specification to reflect the emergence or significance of other political parties, saying this was essential for Higher Politics to remain current.

‘I think this is a sensible move, especially with the emergency of prominent political parties like Reform UK. The current model is far too restrictive.’

‘I wholeheartedly support increasing the party coverage as there are other parties with representation that candidates may wish to consider.’

However, a small number of respondents raised concerns around the timings for the implementation of this proposal and asked that it be delayed until session 2027–28.

‘I very much agree with both changes and I'd like to see the increase in time to paper 2 be implemented in 26–27 however it would be more beneficial to practitioners to have a year to discuss and work on changes around political parties.’

‘From session 27–28 would be best to give us time to prepare, and we would still need parameters about which parties are to be included — Reform and the Greens yes, but beyond that maybe not.’

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 Politics. 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.