

Improving Assessment in National Courses Research: National 5 Business Management

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Proposal

The following proposal was shared with respondents who said they had taught or studied National 5 Business Management:

- We are proposing making the exam for National 5 Business Management shorter, reducing the time from 2 hours to 1 hour and 30 minutes.
- We would shorten Section 1 by removing 20 marks worth of questions (10 marks from each case study). Questions would still relate to case study content.
- No changes are proposed for Section 2.
- 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 the assignment (the percentage they contribute to a final grade) would remain the same.

The proposed changes for National 5 Business Management are:

Component	Current marks	Current duration	Current weighting
Section 1 + 2	40 + 50	2 hours	75%
Assignment	30		25%

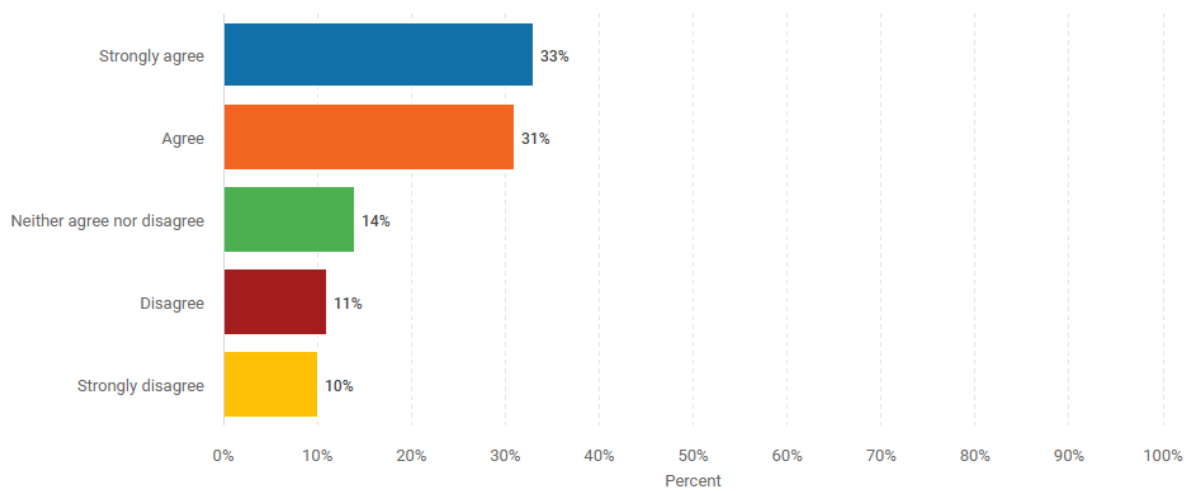
Component	Proposed marks	Proposed duration	Proposed weighting
Section 1 + 2	20 + 50	1 hour 30 minutes	75%
Assignment	30		25%

Findings: learners

We received responses from 210 learners who stated they had studied N5 Business Management. As shown in Figure 1, the majority (65%) of learner respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal, while 21% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes for N5 Business Management? Learner views.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes for National 5 Business Management?

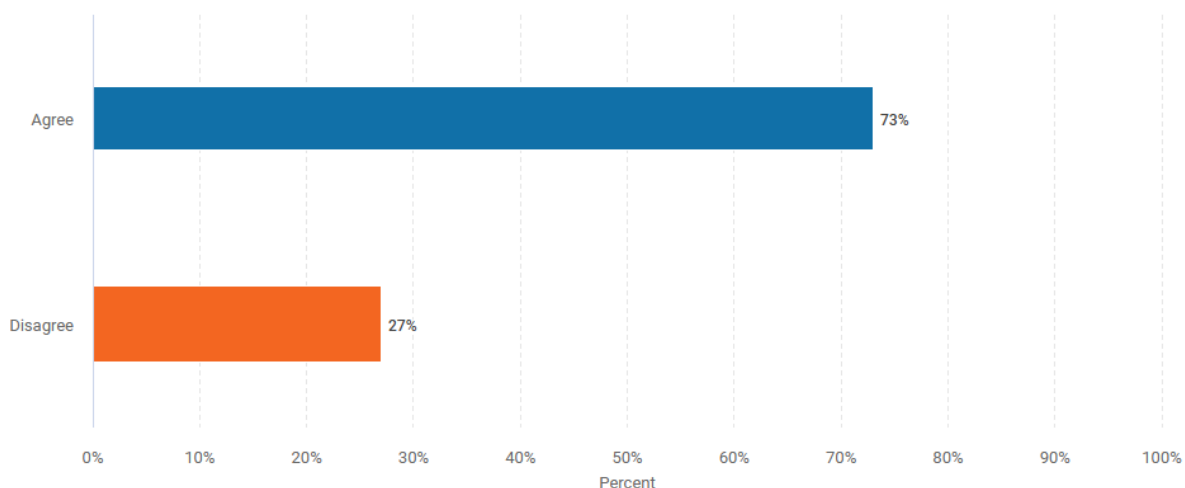


Base: 210 learners who stated they had studied N5 Business Management.

Respondents were also asked whether, if the proposed changes were made for National 5 Business Management, they agree or disagree that this should happen from session 2026–27. As shown in Figure 2, majority of learner respondents (73%) agreed, while 27% disagreed.

Figure 2: In the event that the proposed changes are made for National 5 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 National 5 Business Management, do you agree or disagree that this should happen from session 2026/27?



Base: 206 learners who stated they had studied N5 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 National 5 Business Management. Ten 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

Some learner respondents felt that time for the exam shouldn't be shortened as much as in proposal. The reasons for this were that they felt that time was already 'tight', and that candidates could benefit from slightly more time to answer questions. However, one respondent expressed that Business Management exam is too long in comparison to other subjects.

'The exam is tight for time so not sure about reducing the time by 30mins.'

'The time should be slightly extended as section 1 may have high-marking questions that require a long response.'

A few learner respondents criticised the proposal as they felt that reducing the size and length of exam would make it easier, which would disadvantage the candidates in the future.

'You shouldn't implement this change because it makes the exam easier therefore making the qualification easier to obtain. This depreciates the value of the qualification as a whole which can put students at a disadvantage when applying for universities.'

One learner respondent stated that the case study is good as is, and it shouldn't be altered.

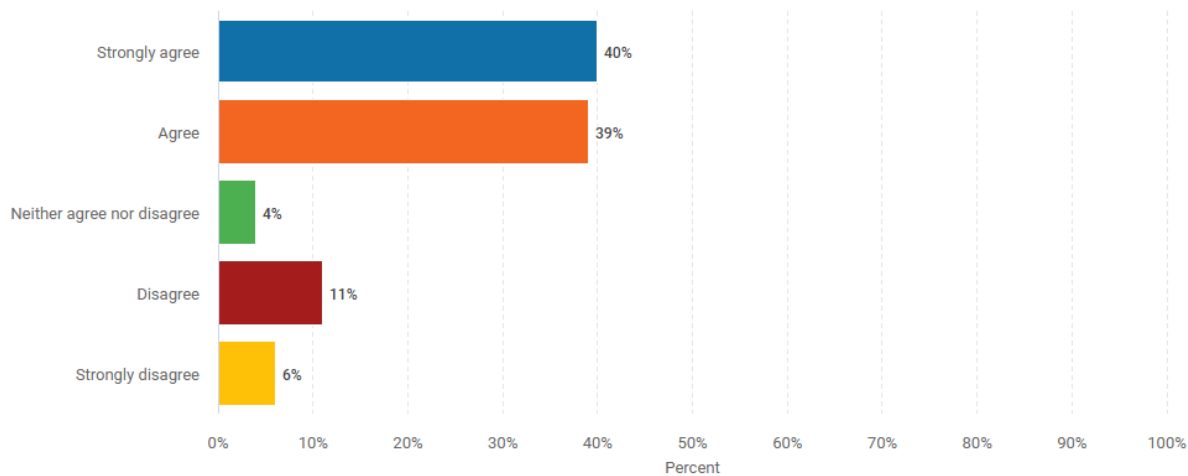
There were a few learner respondents who expressed agreement with the proposal in the open text comments, as they felt that the proposed changes would be helpful to learners.

Findings: educators

We received responses from 344 educators who said they had delivered National 5 Business Management. As shown in Figure 3, the vast majority (79%) of educator respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal, while 16% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes for N5 Business Management? Educator views.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes for National 5 Business Management?

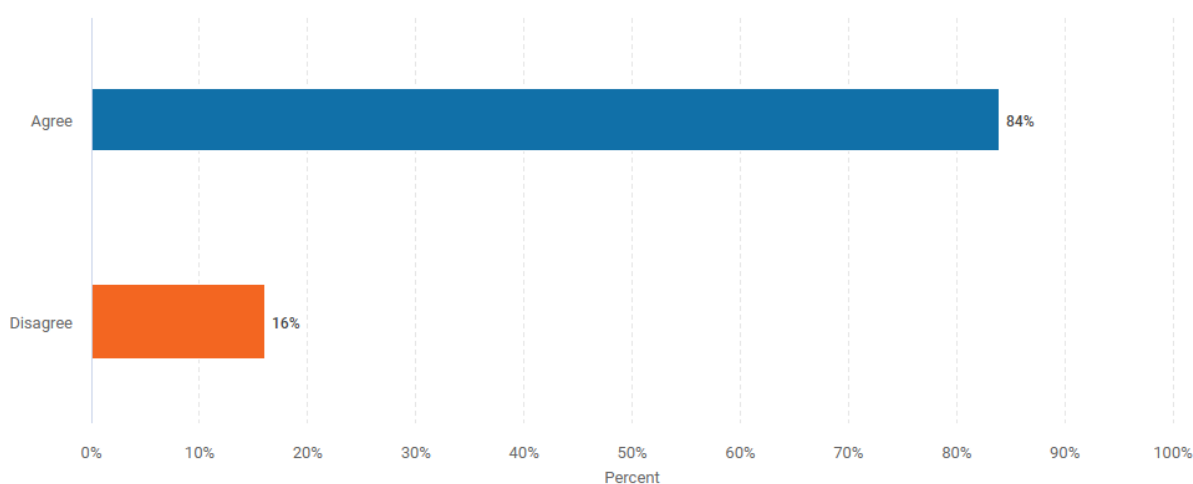


Base: 344 educators who stated they had delivered N5 Business Management

Respondents were also asked whether, if the proposed changes are made for National 5 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 (84%) agreed, while 16% disagreed.

Figure 4: In the event that the proposed changes are made for National 5 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 National 5 Business Management, do you agree or disagree that this should happen from session 2026/27?



Base: 343 educators who stated they had delivered N5 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 N5 Business Management. One-hundred-and-twenty-four respondents left a comment. Although the quantitative findings show that the majority of educator respondents were in support of the proposal, most comments were critical of the proposal.

Benefits of the proposed changes to the question paper

A number of educator respondents explained what they felt the benefits of the proposed changes to National 5 Business Management were. The main theme that emerged from the data was that the shorter exam would reduce the burden on learners, but there were also comments that it would reduce the repetitiveness of the questions, and would help learners who were sitting external assessments for the first time.

A common benefit to the proposed changes mentioned by educator respondents was the impact that the shortened question paper would have on learners. Some respondents felt that shorter exam would make it more accessible for learners, who found the current format of the exam challenging. Others said that the proposed changes would have a positive impact on the attainment and mental health of pupils.

‘I think this reduction in marks and time will make the course more accessible for a number of pupils. Pupils nationally are struggling with extended responses and the length of exams and I feel this proposed change could benefit learners whilst still providing a rigorous level of challenge for learners.

‘Providing there is no change to the course content itself I feel that this would be a positive change for pupils and teachers alike. I think if this could be rolled out in the 26–27 session without any changes to content or marking expectations then it will have a positive impact on the attainment and mental health of our pupils.’

Some of the educator respondents felt that the current exam was overly long, and that it would benefit the candidates, especially the ones that are in S4 stage, who were sitting externally-assessed exams for the first time.

‘I would welcome this change. It is a long paper for S4s who are sitting a formal exam for the first time. The prelim cannot prepare them sufficiently and it is difficult to fit in a second full prelim when pupils are focusing on their assignments.’

‘[...] S4 can find the 2h exam demanding so reducing the time may be beneficial.’

One educator respondent also felt that shortening the exam would reduce the repetitiveness and predictability of questions in the exam, which would support learners' development by allowing them to think more independently.

However, there were also few educator respondents who felt that the current exam length worked well, and they expressed that there was no need to change something that already works.

'Students have no issue with the two-hour exam. They finish in time and feel they can tackle the paper well so why change something that works?'

'I don't see an issue with the current length of the exam.'

Although most of the comments that expressed agreement with the proposed changes were in relation to the length of the exam, one respondent explained that reducing the number of marks in the case study element of the question paper would help focus learners on using information from the case study to answer questions.

'I find that only potentially 2 questions rely on pupils extracting information from the case study and many are questions that don't rely on the use of the case study. These are focusing on the "from the case study" questions. I think decreasing the amount would be beneficial to pupils and with the 10 marks making it more specific to the case study.'

Challenges with proposed changes to the question paper

The majority of the comments submitted by educator respondents were around the various challenges that they saw surrounding the proposed changes. The main theme that emerged from the data was that candidates may be disadvantaged by the reduction to the size and the length of the question paper, as they would lack enough opportunity to demonstrate the breadth of their knowledge and understanding of the course, as well as that the reduced size of the question paper would make it easier, which would leave them less prepared to progress to Higher level.

It was common for educator respondents who disagreed with the proposal to express that the reduction in the size and length of the exam would disadvantage candidates. For these respondents, the proposed changes would reduce the opportunity for learners to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding of the course. Some said that it would increase pressure on learners as each mark would be worth more.

'A reduction of 20 marks does not allow pupils to display that they have an understanding of the course content, especially in the case study section where they have to apply this to a real-life scenario. Case studies are more realistic of what they will

face in the real world when they are applying their business knowledge from various areas to one project.'

'The smaller sample means pupils are more harshly punished for areas they are unsure on, and they could have comprehensive knowledge of areas that are less likely to be questioned. The only way to accurately sample pupil understanding is with a greater scope of questions.'

'I think we need to be careful to recognise that when we reduce the marks of any exam, every mark that a student does not achieve, it puts more weight on each of the marks awarded. Students can afford to lose fewer marks in the exam, which increases pressure on the student.'

Another theme that emerged from the data was the feeling that reducing the size and length of the exam would make the assessment easier. These respondents perceived that reducing the number of marks and time allowed to complete the question paper would disadvantage candidates by reducing the breadth and depth of learning, or providing less challenge to candidates.

'I don't think shortening the exam is useful at all. I think the exam element of the course should remain as it currently is as this allows the broad scope of the course to be assessed. Reducing course content or reducing the exam simply makes the exam easier. We need to maintain the current breadth and depth of learning.'

'Making the exams easier and shorter does not increase the integrity of the qualification.'

'I strongly disagree with this decision and think it will have a negative impact on learners and their ability to progress through the subject and provides less challenge compared to what is expected in other Business Education subjects such as Accounting.'

Moreover, there were repeated mentions that shortening the exam would negatively impact the progression from National 5 to Higher, as these respondents felt that National 5 learners would not be prepared enough for next level. One respondent, however, felt that the proposed changes would create a better progression to Higher, rather than both exams having the same amount of marks.

'Reducing the number of marks for each case study means that pupils will not be tested in the same depth as they currently are. It will also not prepare pupils for the case study at Higher which is currently worth considerably more marks.'

'This is not required for our learners. Reduced focus on application of knowledge in case study questions will lead to learners being less prepared for the next level of study at Higher. This will also encourage more rote learning of content.'

'I believe the level of demand in the N5 QP for Business Management is as it should be; reducing the complexity and length of the exam paper would not prepare candidates well enough for progressing on to (and the demands of) N6 next session.'

There were also some general comments where educator respondents disagreed with proposal, stating that the change was not needed, that the exam should not be shortened in any way, or that the current exam allows for a broad examination of knowledge already.

'I think that a reduction in the number of marks without any change in course content actually penalises the pupils. There is nothing wrong with the exam format as it currently stands as it allows for a broad examination of knowledge across all the units.'

'Exam should not be shortened in any way.'

Challenges with proposed changes to the case studies

Another recurring theme in the qualitative responses from educators was disagreeing with the proposed changes to the Section 1 of the question paper, more specifically to the reduction of marks to individual case studies. Some respondents felt that reducing the number of marks in Section 1 would not give learners enough opportunity to be tested on their application of knowledge or ability to use real-life contexts to analyse business information. Respondents said that the skills required to answer the case study questions, such as critical thinking, interpreting and analysing, were key skills that learners should be assessed on. Instead, some of these respondents felt that marks should be reduced in Section 2 of the paper, which they felt was more knowledge-based.

'Please keep the marks at 20 (absolute minimum 15–16 marks) for each case study in Section 1 of the N5 paper. These are important skills in reading real life contexts and interpreting / analysing business information. Reduce the marks in Section 2 — to allow less theory heavy content to be taught [...]

'I would suggest looking further at the assessment model. I support any reduction weighting / duration in the exam, but taking away from the case study is the worst thing to do, as it's the only part of the assessment that really involves application. The rest of the exam becomes a pointless memory test. [...]

'Having a case study on 20 marks devalues the subject — you spend all year on various topics and all it leads to is 20 marks. 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. I believe Section 2 is the one that should be reduced as the ability to 'recall knowledge and terms' is not what should have the greatest weighting. Organisations have to be creative and innovative and the ability to read and interpret is more important than recall of terms and knowledge per se.'

Other educator respondents expressed agreement with the reduction of marks in Section 1, but felt that it would be better if this was done by keeping one case study worth 20 marks, instead of having two case studies with 10 marks each. They felt that this would maintain the appropriate level of difficulty of the Section 1 of the question paper, would keep developing critical thinking meta skills, and would also help with a progression to Higher.

‘I agree with the idea of reducing the exam and allowing additional time, however would suggest removing one full case study would maintain challenge and greater purpose for the case study element. Having two 10-mark case studies does not seem like it would have a high degree of depth in assessing the use of business information and would not prepare learners for a higher degree of challenge in Higher.’

‘I am happy with the changes to section 1 in terms of reducing it from 40 marks to 20 marks however I feel like it would be more beneficial for candidates to have the 1 x 20 mark case study instead of 2 x 10 mark case studies.’

Challenges with implementing the changes 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, feeling that they would need more time to update learning materials. One also felt that S3 pupils in some centres had already started the N5 Business Management course, so would then need to alter what they had already learned.

‘More time will be required to alter current assessment materials.’

‘It will take time to adapt materials so doing this within the next session is unrealistic when we have huge workloads at the moment.’

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 National 5 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.