

Research Summary: Review into the removal of the question paper from practical subjects

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Why we did this research

We wanted to know whether the question paper was still a suitable form of assessment for some practical subjects, and to find out:

- if practitioners agreed or disagreed with removing the question paper in their subjects
- why practitioners thought that the question paper should be removed or kept
- if the question paper could be replaced with another type of assessment

How we did the research

We surveyed 1,026 practitioners on their views about removing the question paper in their practical subjects. Practitioners were from Practical Cake Craft, Practical Cookery, Practical Electronics, Fashion and Textile Technology, Practical Metalworking, and Practical Woodworking. After the survey, we held focus groups with 28 practitioners to understand the reasons why they wanted to keep or remove the question paper in their subject, and whether the question paper could be replaced with another form of assessment.

What we learned

- Most practitioners in Practical Metalworking, Practical Woodworking, and Practical Cake Craft agreed that the question paper should be removed from these courses.
- Practitioners in Fashion and Textile Technology, Practical Cookery, and Practical Electronics had mixed views.
- The focus groups revealed that practitioners had strong views about the question paper in their subjects.

What will change because of the research?

As a result of this research, we are removing the question paper from National 5 Practical Cake Craft, National 5 Practical Metalworking, and National 5 Practical Woodworking from session 2025–26. We are keeping the question paper in National 5 Practical Electronics.

This year, we are also running a second research project to help us understand more about the question paper in Fashion and Textile Technology, and Practical Cookery.

Summary of key findings by subject

Subject	Agree	Disagree	Comments
Practical Metalworking (Nat 5)	79%	16%	Across the subjects, Practical Metalworking practitioners were most in favour of removing the question paper. Focus groups discussed both complete removal to suit practically skilled learners and replacement options.
Practical Woodworking (Nat 5)	75%	20%	The majority of practitioners were in favour of removing the question paper and felt replacing it with an assessment with more real-world applications would be better for learners.
Practical Cake Craft (Nat 5)	72%	21%	Removal was less contentious than for Practical Cookery as the question paper is more limited in coverage. While the majority agreed with removing the question paper, several practitioners (who also taught Practical Cookery) were strongly against it.
Fashion and Textile Technology (Nat 5)	67%	30%	There was more support for changing the question paper at National 5 than Higher level. The focus group was small, but all participants were opposed to removing the question paper as they feel it sets the groundwork for the Higher course. They considered the possibility of reducing the weighting of the question paper.
Practical Cookery (Nat 5)	61%	34%	In the focus groups, those who were strongly opposed to removing the question paper expressed that removal or replacement would impact credibility, costs and workload. There was considerable interest in changing the assignment instead.
Practical Electronics (Nat 5)	58%	32%	Support for removing the question paper was much lower than the other subjects as Practical Electronics is more aligned to the sciences and engineering. However, few practitioners were involved in the research, making it difficult to generalise our findings.
Fashion and Textile Technology (Higher)	53%	40%	Removal of the question paper was divisive among practitioners as they see theory as integral to the course. Practitioners felt the question paper creates parity with other Higher qualifications for progression.