

# A-level Business

## A teacher's perspective

The value of studying our specification and how it prepares students.

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# Andy Hammond

## A-level Business teacher

Andy is Head of Vocational Educational Faculty at Darrick Wood School, a large mixed comprehensive in south east London.

Andy talked to us about teaching the new [AQA A-level Business](#) qualification and how he prepared his students for the exam.

## Finding our way with the specification

Having previously taught the AQA spec, there were concerns about having to learn new content ourselves to deliver the new course, however we have found it easy to structure it over the two years.

Adjusting the school's sixth form calendar to reflect the linear world has allowed us more teaching time without the need to break off to do full mock papers, mark and provide feedback, and we've found that running with split teaching groups has helped to break up the numerate content which can be unpopular with the students.

The [materials](#) available on the AQA website have been handy and the students have been receptive to the formula sheets. As the spec grows older there is now a developing bank of [past papers](#) that can be used.

## Using the models to the students' advantage

The [models](#) provided have proven extremely useful in allowing the students to bring structure to their analysis and they have liked trying to think of real business examples to help illustrate these models when we first discuss them.

Given the love of a good model prevalent in HE Management and Business faculties, the experience our students gain in being able to use models to assess real business scenarios means that this skill is not such a shock to the system when they arrive at university.

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## Understanding the question papers

Each paper tests students' understanding of business rather than attempting to discreetly assess a portion of the specification. Papers 2 and 3 use real business contexts, where possible, and the opportunity, provided by questions on all three papers, to use business examples to support arguments offers a genuine reward to students who have been 'reading around the subject' for two years.



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The [multiple-choice questions](#) are a handy tool for ensuring breadth of specification coverage, while the [short answer questions](#) are a nice way of pushing students to recognise the importance of context to business activity.

Merely just 'knowing the spec' won't get you far in tackling an [essay question](#) that requires the use of specification knowledge and business examples to help build an argument that addresses the question set. Where my students have a good breadth of relevant knowledge of the specification, they discover they have a greater freedom in which arguments to develop and how to develop them.

There is no doubt the papers are considered challenging, however they do seem accessible at a straightforward level, with most of my students willing to have a go at pretty much any past paper question I throw at them.

## Preparing for the exam

After some poor performances in the first year, we realised the need to try to break away from merely asking students to produce answers to questions on 'the topic we have just finished' so we look to set questions that may involve a recently completed topic, but which also force students to link in prior learning, trying to encourage synopticity to answers.

"We look to set questions...which force students to link in prior learning"

Allocating time to completing past papers in school, supervised and in a single two hour sitting, helping students to recognise the challenge involved in tackling a whole series of questions on different specification areas in one sitting.

Students are encouraged to take ownership of the marking grids for extended answer questions. The consistency of these grids across all three papers really helps students to understand what features are required of a good or excellent answer. Marking of student answers seeks to build on this too, by using the terminology of the marking grid when feeding back.

We issue a 'remind yourself' reading list/schedule at the start of Year 13 – a chapter from the textbook a day – which allows the students to revisit the whole spec before the Easter break, the belief being it's important to revisit topics regularly.



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