

Improving Assessment in National Courses Research: Higher Dance

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Proposal

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

- We propose the following changes to the choreography review:
 - The word count would be between 1,500 and 2,500 words. We propose introducing a penalty if the word count goes above the maximum by more than 10%.
 - The corresponding marking instructions will then be refined to reduce the number of points a learner has to make.
- There are no proposed changes to the current assessment structure, overall number of marks or weightings.

Findings: learners

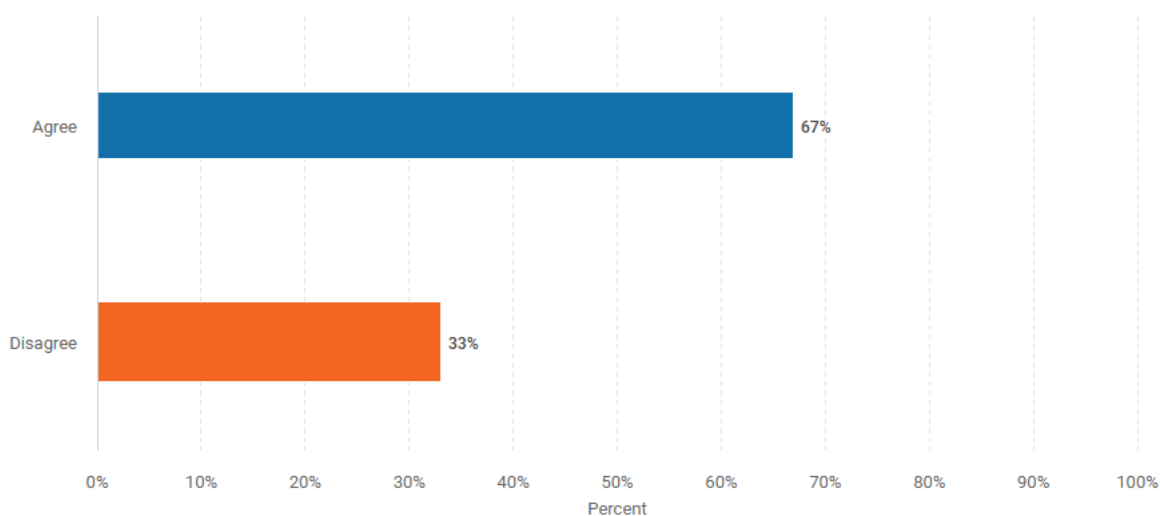
We received six responses from learners who said they had studied Higher Dance.

Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the proposed changes for Higher Dance. Because there were less than 5 responses to this question, the data collected for this question was not included in the report.

Respondents were also asked to what extent they agreed with the decision to begin the proposed change in 2026–27, should the change be made. Just six learners responded to this question. Because the number of Higher Dance learner respondents who answered this question was very low, the result is unlikely to be indicative of wider views of learners who study Higher Dance. As shown in Figure 2, 67% of learners who responded agreed, while 33% disagreed.

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



Base: 6 learners who said they had studied National 5 Dance

Qualitative analysis

Learner respondents were asked if they had any further comments that they would like to share about the proposed changes to Higher Dance. There were very few open-text comments from learner respondents, but one candidate highlighted their concern that the reduction in word count would not be adequate for accessing the detail required currently.

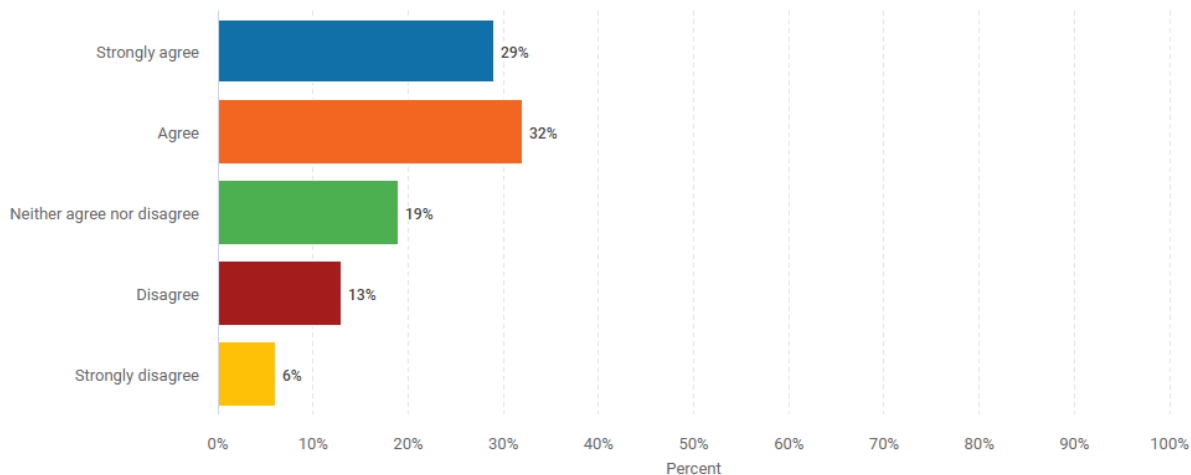
‘It is almost impossible to add the detail required for the choreography review within this word count. For example, mine was 8000 words’

Findings: educators

We received responses from 31 educators who stated they had taught Higher Dance. As shown in Figure 3, the majority of educator respondents (61%) agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed changes, while 19% said they disagreed or strongly disagreed.

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

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

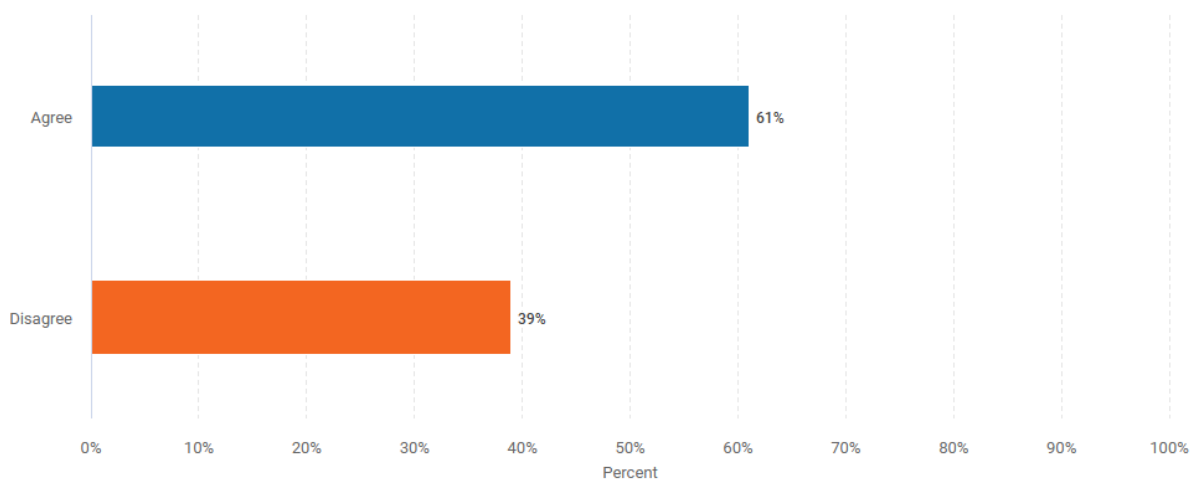


Base: 31 Educators who stated they had taught Higher Dance

Respondents were also asked to what extent they agreed with the decision to begin the proposed change in 2026–27, should the change be made. As shown in Figure 4, again, 61% of educator respondents agreed, while 39% disagreed.

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



Base: 31 Educators who stated they had taught Higher Dance

Qualitative analysis

Educator respondents were asked if they had any further comments that they would like to share about the proposed changes to Higher Dance. Seventeen respondents left a comment. Comments about the proposed changes were varied, with respondents highlighting both potential benefits and challenges that may arise from the proposed changes. Respondents also highlighted the need for additional support through the likes of Understanding Standards, particularly if change is implemented.

Benefits of implementing the proposed changes

A recurring theme expressed by educator respondents was the feeling that the current course was extremely demanding and time-consuming with multiple components putting a lot of pressure on both learners and educators. One common benefit perceived by educator respondents was the potential for the proposed changes to reduce time spent on the choreography review. In particular, educator respondents suggested that such a reduction would allow more time to be spent on other components. One respondent also noted that the change could improve the Visiting Assessment process.

‘There is not enough time to get through all the technique work, solo performance, choreography piece and the review. A lot feels rushed and brushed over. I think 2 styles is great but again — the amount of additional written work is unbalanced.’

‘...more time [could be] allocated for learning & teaching of the exam component.’

‘...this is a very good idea as it will encourage centres to spend more time on other elements of the course and again, help the marking process on VA day.’

In a similar vein, one respondent noted that the current structure of the course relies heavily on literacy capabilities and written work, which could be seen to overshadow the creative and performative elements which they felt should be the focus of the course. Although this comment wasn't explicitly positive or negative such views could be tied to the idea that the proposed changes may allow a refocusing of some time away from the written review.

‘The overall weighting of written course assessment combined with the review seems to undermine the value / difficulty / significance of being able to confidently and technically perform on a stage in front of an audience, show high levels of creativity and excellent people skills to create a unique and thoughtful piece.’

Potential challenges of implementing the proposed changes

In terms of challenges with the proposed changes, the most common theme expressed by educator respondents was the concern that the reduction of the choreography review word count would hinder the learner ability to cover all requirements with the detail needed, for example by discouraging learners from engaging meaningfully with their research and penalising them for more in-depth responses.

‘I strongly disagree with this proposal. The existing word count range provides students with the necessary flexibility to demonstrate a thorough and nuanced understanding of the choreographic process. Implementing a penalty for exceeding the maximum would risk discouraging students from engaging deeply with their research, planning, and analysis. Such a restriction could penalize candidates for producing comprehensive, high-quality work, which would be both unfair and counterproductive to the learning objectives of the course.’

One respondent highlighted that the proposed changes may create additional barriers for learners with limited literacy skills who, they said, rely on using additional words to fully communicate points.

‘Some young people have very limited English and literacy skills, which makes it difficult for them to express themselves clearly. As a result, they often need to use more words to explain their point. As a result, they may struggle to access the marks available, as they are unable to communicate their understanding clearly and effectively.’

On the other hand, some educator respondents expressed that the proposed changes would address such concerns by refining the marking instructions to ensure less is required of the learners to gain marks and in turn less extensive writing required.

‘[...] in order to achieve the current marking scheme pupils need to write way above the recommendation to achieve the marks. It is excessive due to the overall percentage it gives towards the final award so I would agree to a more refined approach.’

Implementation date

Although a larger portion of educators (61%) agreed that the proposed changes should be implemented from the 2026–27 session, a number of respondents expressed concerns around implementing the changes at both National 5 and Higher levels in the same year. These respondents highlighted that learners sitting National 5 in 2025–26 would be writing less at Higher if the proposed changes were implemented for both levels in 2026–27.

'I think it would need to be rolled out with N5 first then Higher the following year to ensure a smooth transition with the same cohort. Otherwise, will have candidates that have written nearly 5000 words at N5 and then have to change to streamline at Higher!'

'Changes from 27–28 to allow this to develop through new candidates'

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 Dance. 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.

Conclusion

While the number of learners who study teach Higher Dance is smaller than a lot of the other subjects in this survey, the response to this survey was particularly low. This raises questions about the reliability of the data, and readers should be wary of attempts to generalise these responses to the rest of the Higher Dance learner population. As such, professional judgement will need to be exercised when making a decision about the proposed changes.