

Improving Assessment in National Courses Research: National 5 Dance

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Proposal

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

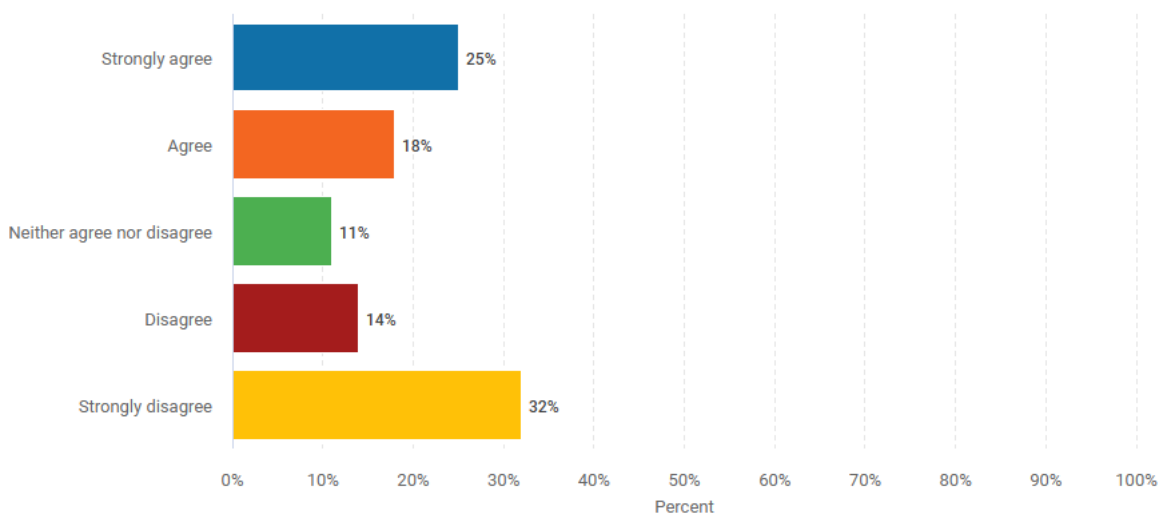
- We propose the following changes to the choreography review:
- The word count would be between 750 and 1,500 words. We propose introducing a penalty if the word count goes above the maximum by more than 10%.
- The corresponding marking instructions would then be refined to reduce the number of points 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 responses from 28 learners who said they had studied National 5 Dance. As shown in Figure 1, 46% of learner respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposed changes, whilst 43% said they agreed or strongly agreed.

Figure 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes for National 5 Dance?

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

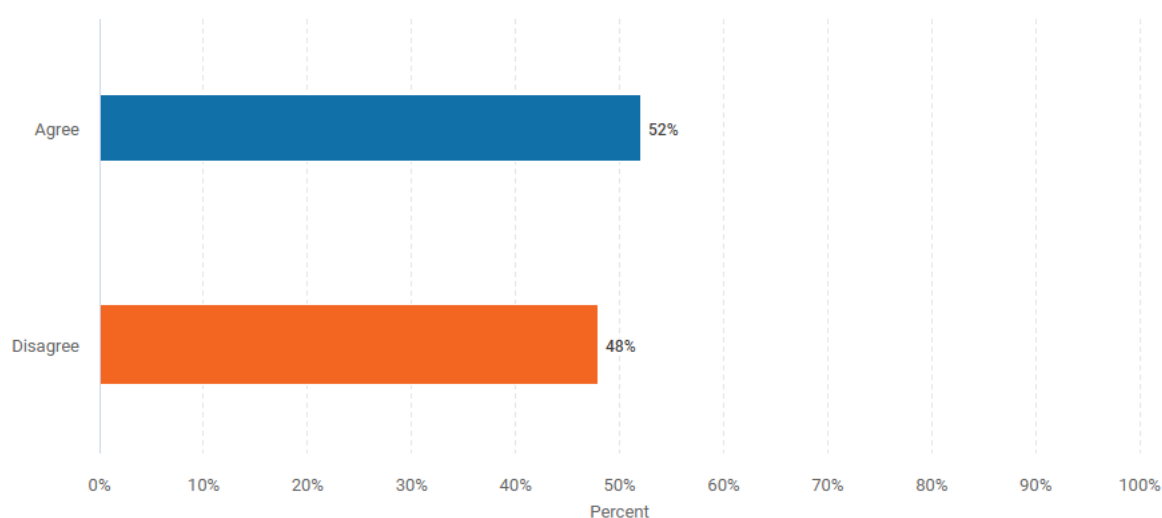


Base: 28 learners who stated they had studied National 5 Dance

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 2, the majority of learners (52%) agreed that the change should be made from the 2026–27 session, while 48% disagreed.

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

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



Base: 27 learners who stated 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 National 5 Dance. Seven respondents left a comment. While a similar number of learner respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (46%) and agreed or strongly agreed (43%), all comments were from those who disagreed with the proposed changes.

Challenges with the proposed word count

The main theme that emerged from the open-text responses was related to concerns with reducing the word count of the choreographic review. Many learner respondents saw the choreographic review as a way to increase overall marks within the practical component. These respondents thought that the choreography itself was the harder aspect, because in performance they were reliant on other learners who may be absent or not as confident. Although it was not one of the proposed changes to the qualification, many said that they would prefer a change to the choreography.

‘A lot of people struggle with choreography in dance with the making of it and relying on others to make it happen. So they tend to depend on the essay to pull marks up.’

‘I believe that the marks you can get from the choreographic review should stay the same as a lot of people use the review to bring up their marks.’

‘Instead of changing the length of the essay change the actual choreography rather than the essay which could actually bring up your mark.’

Although the majority of comments expressed issues with the choreography, one respondent disagreed with introducing a penalty for the word count and instead expressed that removing the question paper should be considered.

A minority of learner respondents expressed concerns that reducing the word count could make covering all of the required content difficult and discourage detail.

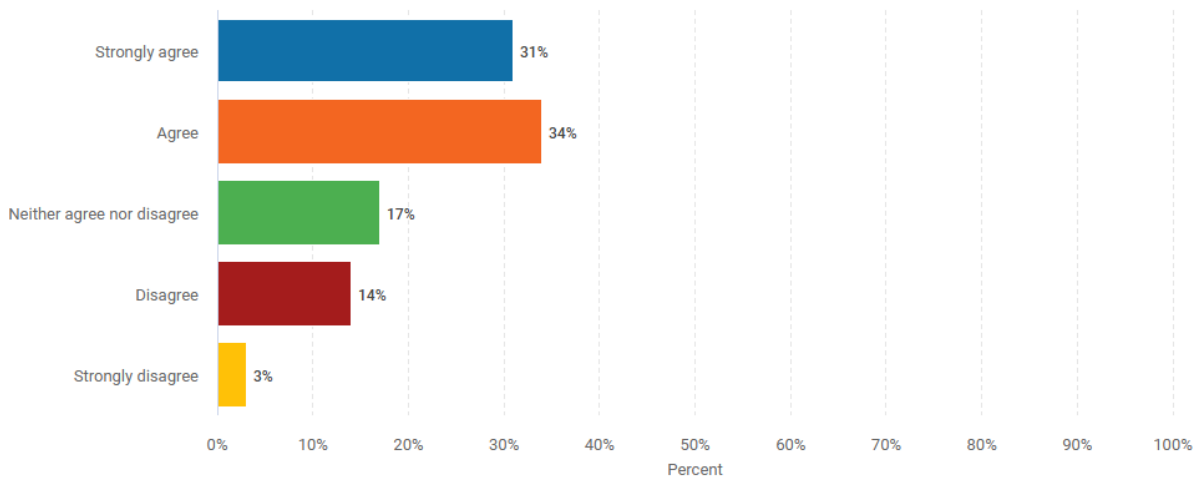
‘The dance essay is supposed to be in detail so not having enough words could cause pupils to lose marks for not being in enough detail.’

Findings: educators

We received responses from 35 educators who said they had taught National 5 Dance. As shown in Figure 3, the majority of educator respondents (66%) agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed changes, while 17% said they disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes for National 5 Dance?

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

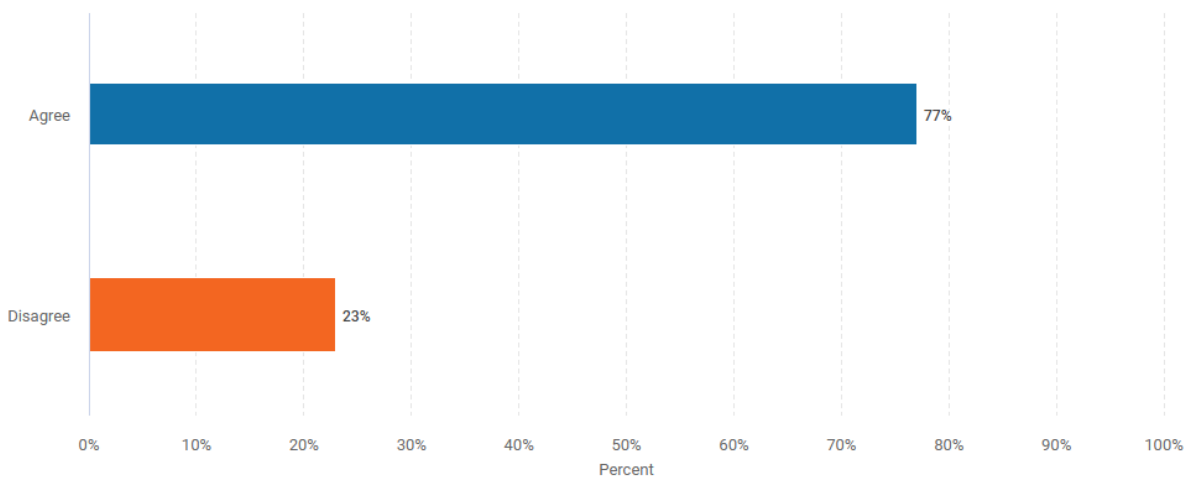


Base: 35 Educators who stated they had taught National 5 Dance

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, the majority of educator respondents (77%) agreed, and 23% disagreed.

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

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



Base: 35 respondents who said they studied National 5 Dance

Qualitative analysis

Educator respondents were asked if they had any further comments that they would like to share about the proposed changes to National 5 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 the change was implemented.

Benefits of the proposed changes

It was common for educator respondents to feel that the current requirements of the course demanded large amounts of time from both educators and learners. The main benefit perceived by a number of respondents was the potential for the proposed changes to reduce the 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 and in turn potentially increase understanding and national averages for learners in areas where marks fall down.

‘Compared to other subjects the assessment is extensive with Solo, Choreography, Essay and Exam. This must be slimmed down...’

‘I think the change in the review will reduce the allocated learning & teaching time so more time can be spent on the exam and practical components rather than on the review. I think this important due to the low averages pupils attain after comparing the exam component with national averages on the CFE machine.’

‘This will be beneficial in the classroom as less time will need to be spent on this element of the course’

Related to this, one respondent, felt that the proposed changes could also decrease time required by Visiting Assessors when marking the choreography reviews making the process less time-consuming.

‘[...] will help on VA days when getting through 12 candidates reviews can be a VERY lengthy process [...]’

One educator respondent also highlighted that the proposed changes would encourage learners to be succinct in their writing.

Challenges with the proposed changes

As with learner respondents, the most common criticism amongst educator respondents was concern that reducing the choreography review word count would hinder learners’ ability to

cover all requirements with the detail needed. The caveat, from most of these educator respondents' perspectives, was that such concerns could be alleviated by refining the marking instructions to ensure less is required of the learners to gain marks.

'I agree if the marking scheme is refined, however there are also disadvantages to the penalty as it may limit pupils being able to fully expand on answers to achieve the marks so I feel this change would be dependent on the new marking scheme.'

'The marking instructions would need to change and expectations if students are expected to get all the information required in a much shorter word count but still access full marks.'

Linked to this, one respondent said that the proposed changes may create additional barriers for learners with limited literacy skills who 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, one respondent was concerned that the penalty only appeared to apply to those going over the wordcount and not those writing less than the proposed limit.

'Do you then consider a penalty for those under the lower limit of 750? Why would we potentially penalize a strong candidate for going into detail when candidates who do the bare minimum may end up with the same mark due to the penalty depending on what that penalty is.'

Training and materials

Although not explicitly in agreement or disagreement with the proposed changes, many educator respondents expressed the need for additional provision of exemplification and support materials both more generally, but in particular if changes are to be implemented.

'Examples would need to be given as to what exactly is expected from a full marks essay with less words with guidance for teachers.'

'A few samples of Choreography Reviews that are 750-1500 would be helpful for teachers — this allows us to see the level of detail needed to get marks.'

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 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.