

# **Improving Assessment in National Courses Research: National 5 Environmental Science**

Published: June 2026

# Proposal

The following proposal was shared with respondents who stated that they had studied and taught N5 Environmental Science:

- We are proposing making the exam for N5 Environmental Science shorter, reducing the time over all three sections from 2 hours 30 minutes to 2 hours 15 minutes.
- We would shorten Section 1 by removing 3 marks' worth of questions. We would shorten Section 3 by removing an essay question (7 marks' worth).
- The proposed weightings of the exam and the assignment would stay the same.
- We are proposing these changes to improve the exam experience for learners and for schools, while maintaining appropriate sampling of subject content.
- There are no proposed changes to the assignment this stage.

The proposed changes for N5 Environmental Science are:

Component	Current marks	Current duration	Current weighting
Sections 1 + 2 + 3	66 + 20 + 14	2 hours 30 minutes	80%
Assignment			20%

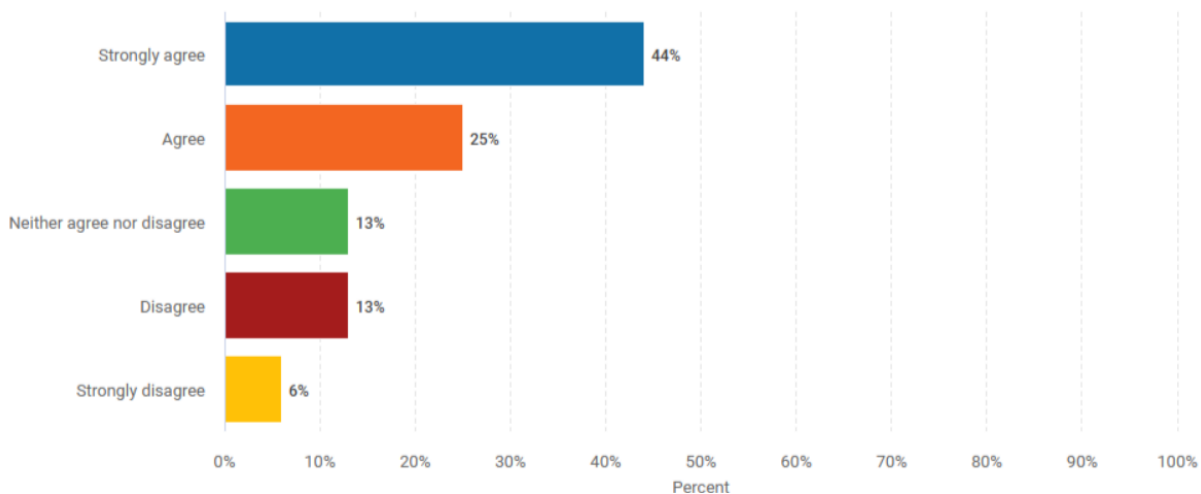
Component	Proposed marks	Proposed duration	Proposed weighting
Sections 1 + 2 + 3	<b>63 + 20 + 7</b>	<b>2 hours 15 minutes</b>	80%
Assignment	20		20%

## Findings: learners

We received responses from 16 learners who said they had studied National 5 Environmental Science. As shown in Figure 1, the majority (69%) of learner respondents agreed or strongly agreed that this proposal should be made, while 19% said they disagreed or strongly disagreed.

**Figure 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes for National 5 Environmental Science? Learner respondent views**

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

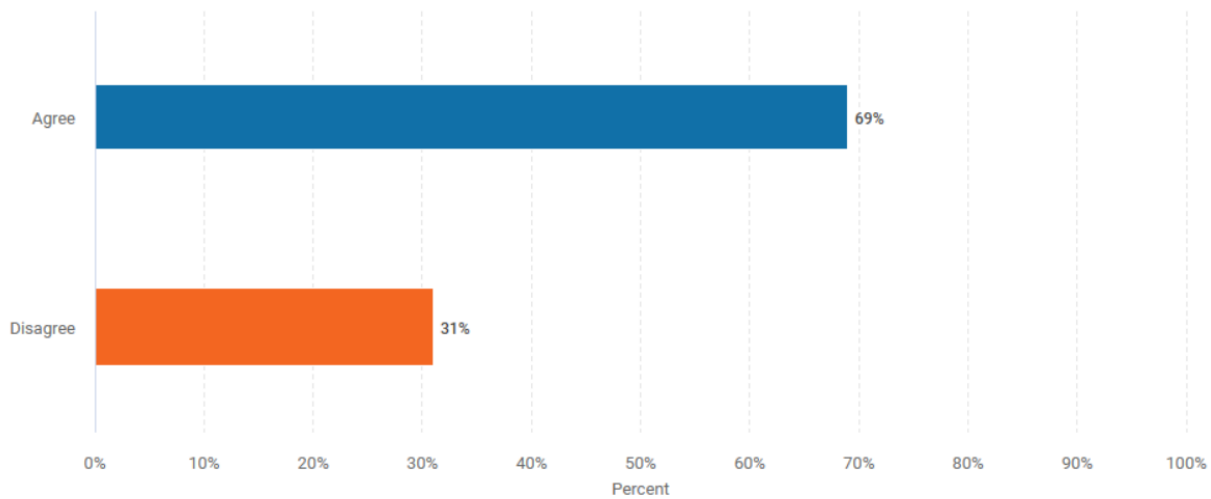


*Base: 16 learner respondents who said they had studied National 5 Environmental Science.*

Learner 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 (69%) agreed that the change should be made from the 2026–27 session, while 31% disagreed.

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



*Base: 16 learner respondents who said they had studied National 5 Environmental Science.*

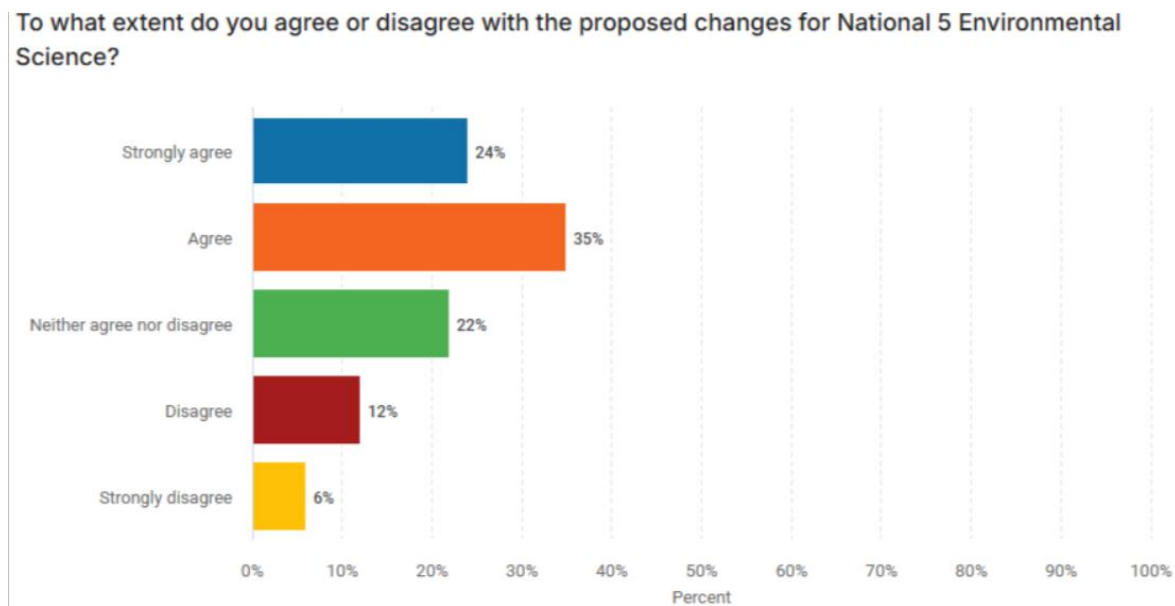
## **Qualitative analysis**

Learner respondents were asked if they had any further comments that they would like to share about the proposed changes to National 5 Environmental Science. Two respondents left a comment. Overall the comments were positive towards the proposals, though they still expressed concerns towards the unpredictability of the exam and the removal of the essay question for future candidates.

## Findings: educators

We received responses from 82 educators who stated they had taught National 5 Environmental Science. As shown in Figure 3, 60% of educator respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed changes for National 5 Environmental Science, while 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

**Figure 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes for National 5 Environmental Science? Educator views**

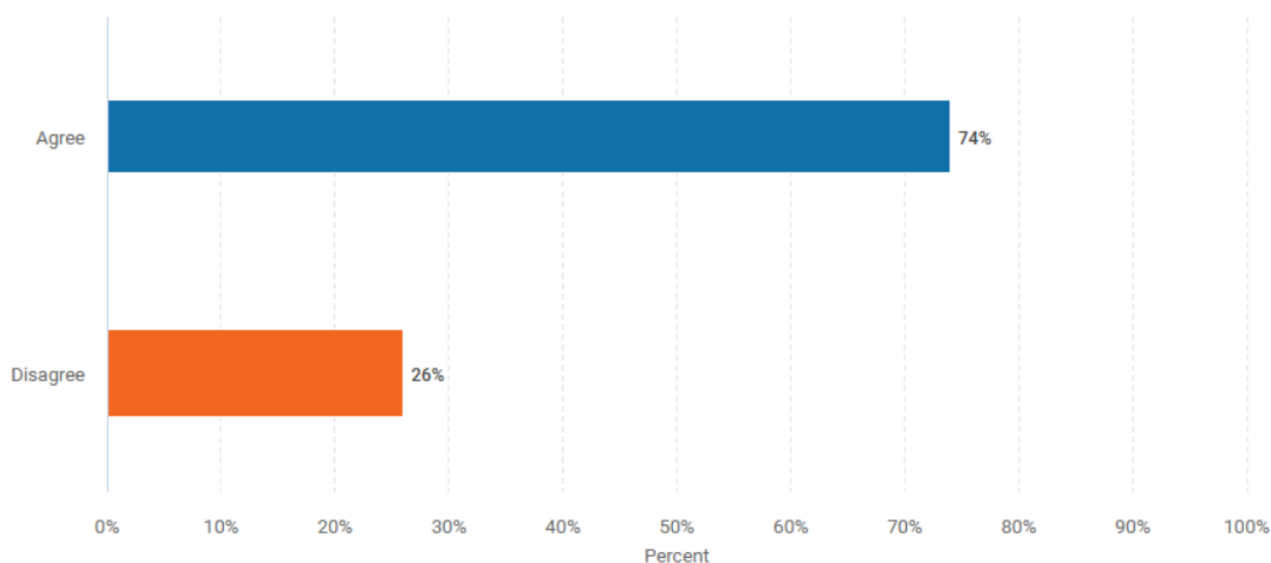


*Base: 82 educator respondents who stated they had taught National 5 Environmental Science*

As shown in Figure 4, 74% of educator respondents agreed and 26% disagreed that the proposed changes, if they went ahead, should be implemented from the 2026–27 session.

## Figure 4: In the event that the proposed changes are made for N5 Environmental Science, 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 Environmental Science, do you agree or disagree that this should happen from session 2026/27?



*Base: 82 educator respondents who stated that they taught National 5 Environmental Science*

### Qualitative analysis

Educator respondents were asked if they had any further comments that they would like to share about the proposed changes to N5 Environmental Science. Thirty-two respondents left a comment. Although 60% of educator respondents agreed with the proposals, most of the open-text comments expressed concerns with the proposed changes, explaining their reasoning.

### Benefits of implementing this change

There were a few comments from educator respondents related to the benefits of implementing the proposed changes. A minority of respondents left a comment agreeing with the proposals. They explained that they felt the assignment worked well and that the proposed changes would benefit learners who find the essay component challenging.

‘Yes, this is needed. The students struggle with the essays. Much better idea.’

‘This would be beneficial and I agree with removing the essay from section 3’

### Challenges with implementing this change

The majority of comments from educator respondents expressed concerns with the changes being proposed to National 5 Environmental Science. The key challenges that educators

perceived were that the length being proposed of the question paper was not right or in line with other sciences.

A common view among educator respondents was that two hour and 15 minutes for the exam was already too long, and that the duration should be reduced further to two hours. Some compared the National 5 Environmental Sciences exam to the other National 5 sciences. These respondents expressed that the National 5 Environmental Sciences exam should be brought in line with the exam length of National 5 biology, chemistry and physics, which would become two hours long if the proposals went into effect.

‘I think the exam should be shortened to 2 hours. 2hr 30 min is a very long time for 15 year olds to concentrate. Why reform it by only 15 mins?’

‘Why are biology chemistry and physics sitting for 2hr examinations at National 5, with the same weighting of 80/20. But Environmental Science is 2hrs 15mins. This is unfair, and based on national data, it clearly indicates students are disadvantaged taking this subject and performing worse than other science subjects.’

‘Exam should align with other sciences in weighting and time length’

A number of respondents also felt that it was unfair to shorten the exam by 15 minutes. Some felt that it should be shortened further in order to be consistent with the other sciences. Others expressed that it should not be shortened at all because the course was more demanding than other sciences and required more reading, and therefore more time.

## **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 Environmental Science. 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.