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## Setting a Maximum Weighting for Exams

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Under the current Assessment Policy at UWA, like all other assessment tasks, exams can be worth between 10% and 70% (although exams administered by Central Administration must be work at least 40%). There is substantial evidence to suggest that highly weighted exams are a poor assessment mechanism and have a negative impact on student wellbeing, and consequently, we believe that the maximum weighting for exams should be decreased from 70%.

### *Student Wellbeing*

It is sometimes argued that students are more motivated to study for highly weighted exams, and that these exams produce better student achievement. However, it has long been established in the literature that while highly weighted exams does increase student motivation, it also greatly increases student stress and anxiety (1). This anxiety hinders students from achieving, and as such, increasing the exam weighting does not usually have the desired effect on student performance (1). Over 70% of students describe taking university exams as “very stressful” or “extremely stressful”, contributing to the ever increasing incidence of mental health problems in the student population (2), and this problem is compounded with higher weighting of these exams. We do not believe that it is equitable to add to student stress by making exams highly weighted.

### *Cramming*

Highly weighted exams encourages students to ‘cram’ content (3). This involves intense study of content over a short period of time, and is often characterised by a lack of retention (3). As such, highly weighted exams are a poor mechanism of assessment because, for many students, achievement in the exam does not necessarily indicate long-term achievement of learning outcomes. If an exam has a lower weighting, students are less likely to cram content for the exam and will be both less stressed and perhaps more likely to retain information.

### *Mark Uncertainty*

Lastly, having very highly weighted exams gives little opportunity for summative assessment within units. In the extreme case, a student could perform perfectly throughout the semester in summative assessment, and either get 100% or 30% in the unit, depending on their performance in the exam. Students should have the opportunity to complete summative assessment throughout the semester that forms a significant portion of their mark. We believe that it is unfair for such a high proportion of a unit mark to depend on the student’s performance over a two-hour period in an exam.

### *References*

1. Wolf LF, Smith JK. The consequence of consequence: Motivation, anxiety, and test performance. *Applied Measurement in Education*. 1995;8(3):227-42.
2. Headspace, The National Union of Students. *National Tertiary Student Wellbeing Survey*. Melbourne, Victoria; 2016.
3. Davis BG. *Tools for teaching*: John Wiley & Sons; 2009.