



Later Law Students Network

Mature Age Students - Parents and Carers
Working Professionals - Life Experience

LLSN POSITION STATEMENT ON UNSUPERVISED ASSESSMENTS AT MELBOURNE LAW SCHOOL

The Later Law Students' Network (LLSN) supports law students who identify as later law students because they fit into one or more of the following categories:

- Mature-aged students,
- Parents and carers,
- Students who have come to MLS from a professional background,
- Students who have returned to study after a significant break between now and their undergraduate course (i.e. from the workforce, after an Honours, Masters or PhD course, after significant travel, etc.) and
- Students who have some other form of life experience.

This list is not conclusive – the LLSN is an inclusive group that welcomes all law students to its events and gatherings. We also engage in advocacy work that extends beyond just the needs of the later law student cohort including encouraging assessment flexibility, fostering practical initiatives that increase student wellbeing, advocating for study/work-life balance and advocating for equality for all students no matter their background.

Below is a statement of the LLSN's position on take-home exams at Melbourne Law School.

- **Take-home exams should not be on the weekend.**

We are firmly of the opinion that take-home assessments should not be scheduled on weekends. The practice of scheduling on weekends directly conflicts with maintaining work or study - life balance. Such

an intrusion into our personal time affects our memberbase most acutely because they are disproportionately affected by university policies that create study commitments in out-of-work hours.

The LLSN would like to be clear that we do not propose disposing of take-home assessments altogether. We acknowledge that a diversity of assessment types is desirable and appreciate the pedagogical utility of certain assessment types for some subjects.

We would like to put forward the following potential suggestions while acknowledging that these are not necessarily practical (nor exhaustive), and that the LLSN is not in a position to assess their suitability. They are merely to supply points of discussion:

- a. MLS could replace take-home exams with traditional assignments. . Assignments would achieve the same benefits of take-home exams that fall on weekends (e.g., extended time for students to research, think and apply their knowledge while avoiding the stress associated with sit-down exams). But at the same time, assignments allow students to balance during-hours work with outside-of-hours commitments, such as caring for children.
 - b. MLS could release take-home exams earlier in the week so that students can choose which days to devote to the task. Currently, weekend take-home exams are released on Friday at around 4pm-5pm. This necessarily forces students to engage in study at unsociable hours i.e., after ordinary business hours and on the weekend. Students should be allowed to choose not to work on weekends and after 5pm in order to maintain a work-life balance.
 - c. MLS could move take-home exams to weekdays. While this may require coordination with the centralised exam-timetabling system, we are not aware of any reason why in principle this could not occur.
- **The inequity causes by take-home assessments should not be addressed through special consideration and extension mechanisms alone**

We wish to add that there may be a temptation to address these issues through the special consideration mechanism, but to do so would miss the point. The Juris Doctor course is full time, and as such students can be rightfully expected to be available during business hours to study and attend classes. However, expecting students to be available outside of these hours for study commitments (even those without family commitments) is to perpetuate a work-life imbalance that is an ongoing problem in the legal industry. While this is a problem beyond the scope of the LLSN's members, it disproportionately affects our members who, for example, may only have court-mandated child visitation rights during non-work hours, or may not have living parents that can provide low-cost housing and are forced into employment.

Currently, parents, carers and other students are forced to navigate these clunky, albeit worthy, mechanisms in order to avoid the negative consequences of such assessments. The LLSN believes upholding work-life balance should be designed into the assessment and course structure, and should be the default assessment-type for all students. Special consideration and extension procedures are no substitute for assessments that don't disrupt students' family, work and personal lives.