

# Grading outside the box

## Lectures turn to alternative ways to mark students' performance

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**PETALING JAYA:** Malaysian public and private universities are turning to alternative ways to grade their students due to the movement control order (MCO).

Students are unable to take written exams in person until Dec 31 due to the government's move to postpone face-to-face teaching until the end of the year.

As such many institutions of higher learning have switched from mostly traditional written exams to also include other methods to test their students, ranging from interviews to holding debates.

A survey conducted by *The Star* on 61 of the 110 public and private universities in the country found that 42.6% of the institutions polled have changed the way they conduct the mid-term and final exams for most of their courses.

Some 21.3% of the universities are carrying out a mix of online exams as well as alternative methods of assessment.

According to Deputy Dean of Academic Affairs Prof Dr Muta Harah Zakaria from Universiti Putra Malaysia, some of the alternative assessments that are being implemented include dissertations, debates, experiments, interviews, mind maps, observations, open-book exams, class presentations, think-pair-share, role play, reports and peer assessment.

"UPM had already practised assessment-based learning prior to the MCO but during MCO, we organised a webinar series on online learning and circulated a guideline entitled 'UPM Virtual Classroom and E-Assessment Guidelines' for our lectures," she said.

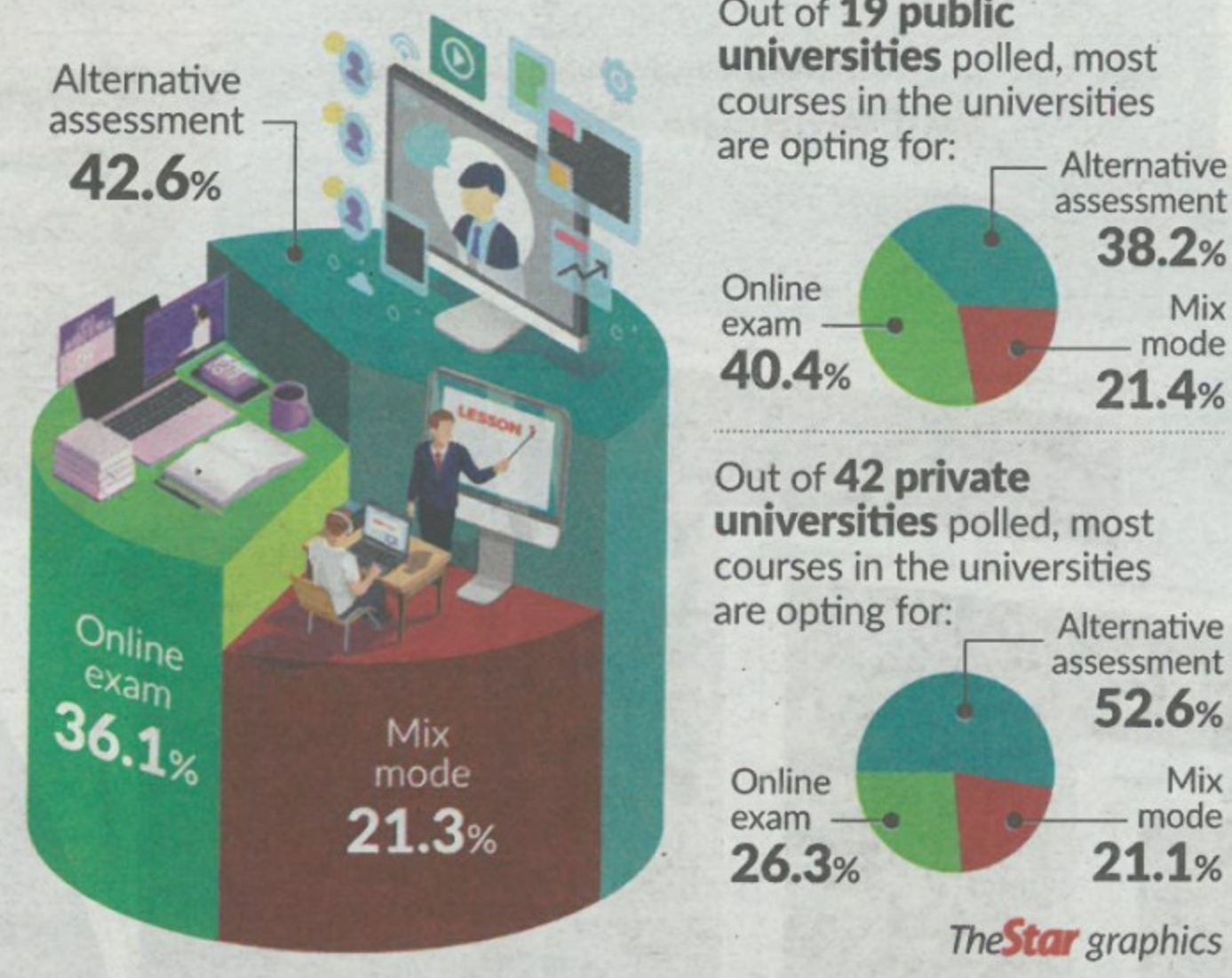
The Higher Education Ministry announced on May 27 that post-graduate students, as well as certificate, diploma and Bachelor's degree final year and final semester students who need to be physically present on campus, have been allowed to do so.

For everyone else, online learning will continue until Dec 31.

Final semester and final year stu-

### How are public and private universities evaluating students' performance during online classes?

A survey by The Star conducted on 61 out of 110 universities in Malaysia.



dents who do not have good Internet access and are in non-conducive environments for online teaching and learning have also been allowed to return to campus as early as July 1 to use their campus facilities for online learning.

Universiti Teknologi Mara's head of Assessment and Evaluation said the university had transitioned from examinations as part of students evaluation to allowing flexibility for lecturers to implement continuous assessment that fulfilled the overall learning objective throughout the MCO.

"We have postponed the traditional style of sit-in exams and implemented a more open and innovative concept which allows both lecturers and students to use their creativity in expanding the dimension of their teaching and learning capabilities," he said.

Assoc Prof Dr Syamsul Nor Azlan Mohamad said traditional exams might train and test the students' cognitive ability but specially-

designed e-assessments could allow students to develop their critical thinking and real-life problem-solving skills, in addition to being able to build students' soft skills and digital skills.

Universiti Malaya, HELP University, Quest International University Perak, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia and Universiti Sains Malaysia are among other universities conducting alternative assessment method in most of its faculties.

Meanwhile, 36.1% of the universities are still opting to conduct online tests or exams as a method to evaluate their students' performance, especially those involving technical courses such as medicine, architecture and engineering as they need to meet the requirements of professional accreditation bodies.

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's Centre for Academic Leadership (UTMLead) deputy director, Assoc Prof Ir Dr Hayati Abdullah said that the schools of engineering in the

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university were mostly retaining the final exams for the undergraduate courses but the final exams would be conducted online.

"The university is also looking into e-proctoring that will put in place live invigilators or alternatively an AI system that will record exam sessions and provide reporting as well as evidence of a breach of integrity.

"For now, we are implementing automatic recording of online exam sessions, where the data is submitted to the university for inspection from our side," she said.

Academic Quality Assurance Unit Coordinator Dr Muhamad Faiz Md Din said that lab courses at Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia had been changed to simulation-based or virtual labs where lecturers demonstrate the experiment online and students must submit their report through the university's e-learning medium.

The engineering lecturer said although the method of delivery had changed, the course outcome fulfilled the professional accreditation body's requirement.

"Our foundation students have successfully completed their final exam online using Microsoft and Google form, as well as our e-learning platform last month and I believe online learning will become the new norm for most universities.

"Lecturers, who previously had not fully utilised the online learning method, are now more prepared and creative in teaching online as the pandemic has unintentionally become a drive for online innovation for the university," he said.