

Assessment in Tertiary Education – Shaping tomorrow's Leaders

Marking for university degrees in Mauritius is done through continuous assessments and through final examinations, which account for an average of 44% and 56% of total marks respectively. This statement emanates from Business Intelligence firm, VERDE, who was commissioned in April 2016 by a local entity to undertake a market research exercise. The aim of this exercise was to provide an analysis of the assessment methods being used by tertiary education institutions to evaluate university students.

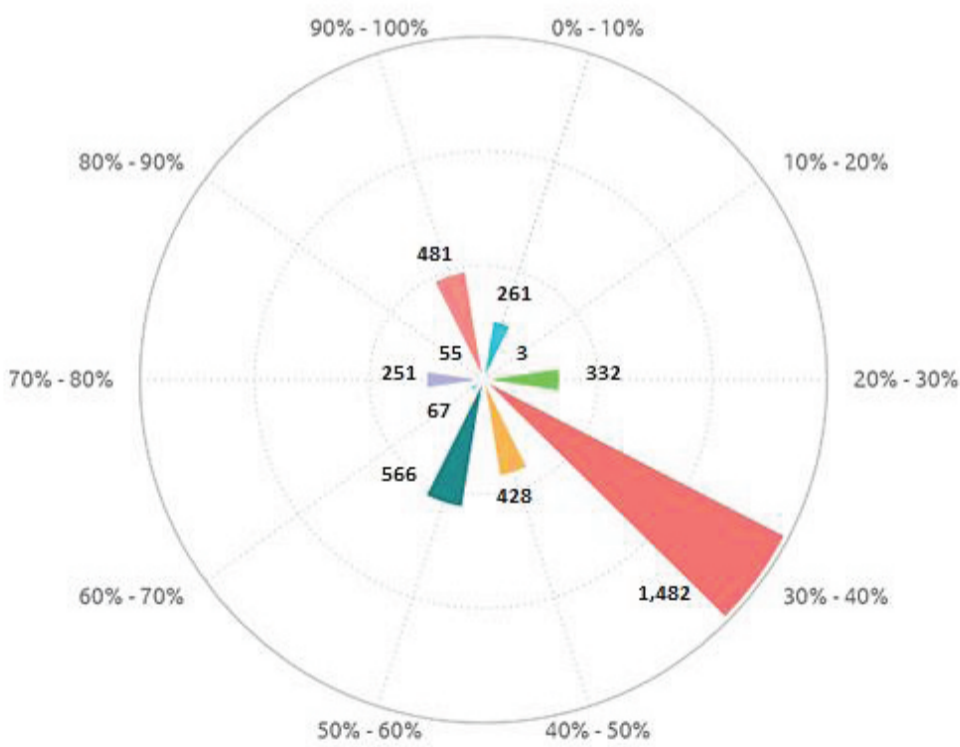
At a time where the whole education system is being reviewed, we are left to wonder whether this grading system at tertiary level guarantees better educated students. Are we using a framework that is in line with practices from global institutions?

To answer these questions, VERDE used data compiled from 21 public and private tertiary education instituions in Mauritius, which were providing details in full transparency or which had information readily available on their websites. More than 3,900 modules across 13 departments from both undergraduate and postgraduate courses were considered.

The research, which is vastly quantitative and of some 60 pages, reveals that 12% of the total modules assessed are based entirely on continuous assignments, 7% are based entirely on exams, and 81% are a mix of both. 13% of undergraduate modules and 20% of postgraduate modules are based exclusively on continuous assessments. The research also highlights that, whilst private institutions’ allocation to examinations is on average 46%, this figure climbs to 63% when it comes to public institutions.

VERDE’s findings on private institutions depict that, for undergraduate courses, examinations account for 45% of marks as opposed to 52% for postgraduate courses. For undergraduate courses, the top exam-focused courses are Finance with its exam allocation at 75%, Health Sciences at 49% and Social Sciences at 47%. For postgraduate courses, the research reveals that examinations account for 61% for Business, 32% for Finance and 27% for Social Sciences.

Contribution of continuous assessment in university course modules

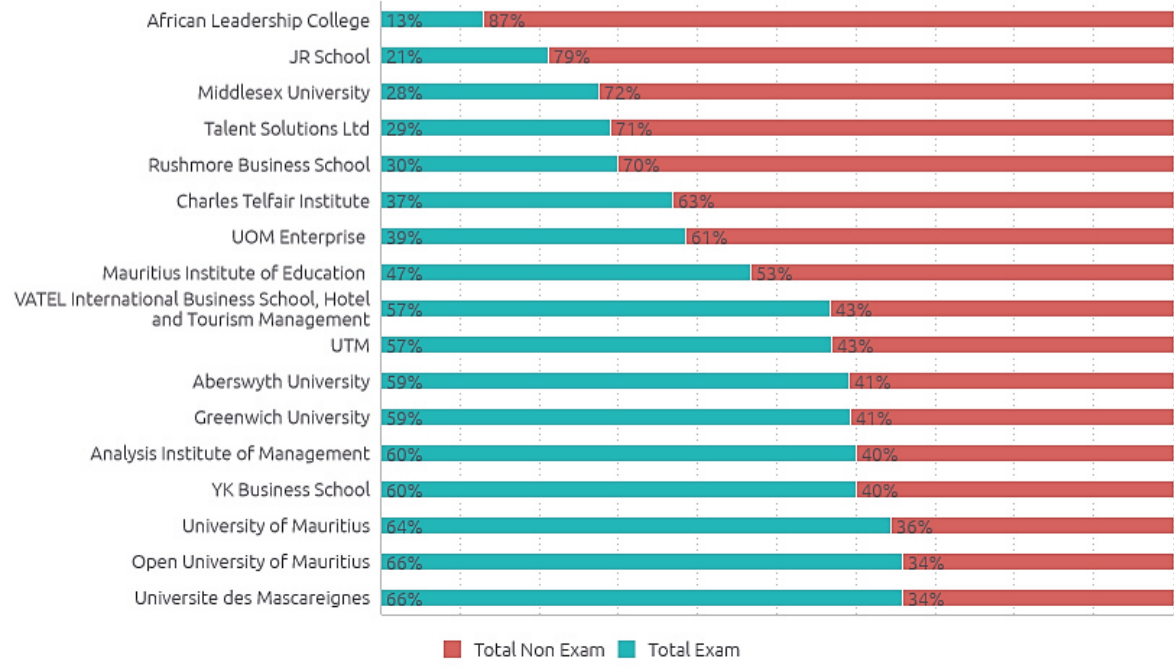


Visualisation from Business Intelligence platform of VERDE .

In respect of public institutions, undergraduate and postgraduate courses have an average examinations allocation of 65% and 56% respectively. Additional insights from the study reveal that undergraduate modules on offer from local institutions are mainly dominated by Business (30%), Engineering (19.5%) and Finance (14%). It is an interesting point to note that, at postgraduate level, Business (50%), Engineering (10%) and Social Sciences (7.2%) rank in the top tier. Finance is surprisingly in the bottom three with 3%.

Of the 21 institutions considered in this research, it is mentioned that only 5 work in collaboration with the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, representing only 24%. An analysis of the marking of some of the institutions considered in this exercise demonstrate the following:

Allocation exam to continuous assessment in some local institutions



The data is based on modules from the sample under consideration.

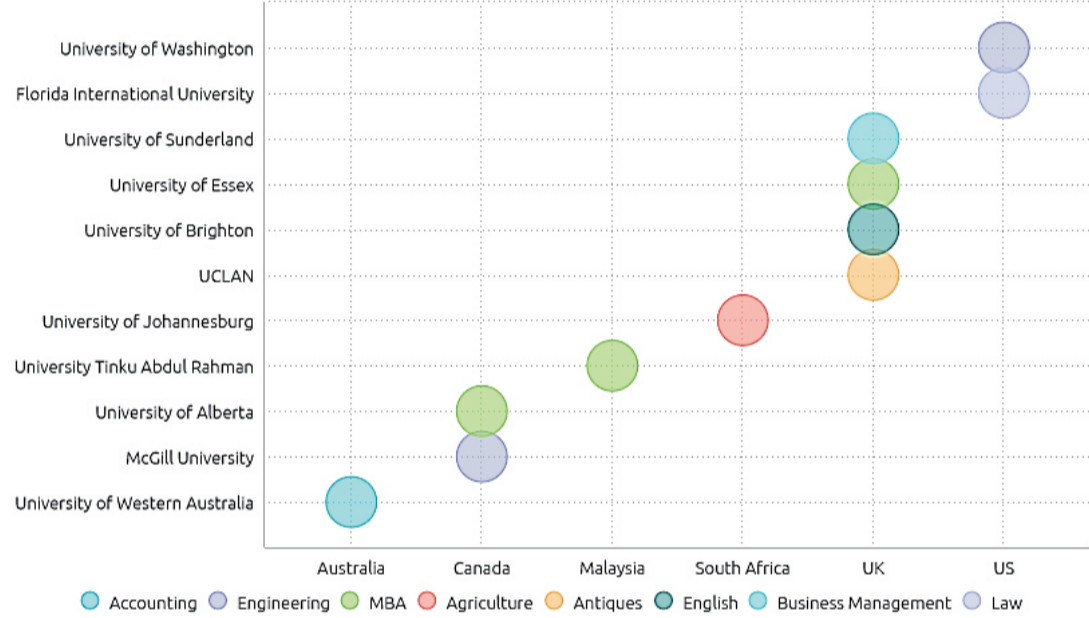
Venna Pavaday, Founding Partner of VERDE, speaks of global trends. “We are seeing a shift in higher education. Hundreds of courses ranging from Psychology to Business Management are not only moving away from exams towards continuous assessment, but universities are also finding wondrous ways to assess their students. Mauritius is today looking to transition from a middle income to a high income country, positioning itself as a services platform of excellence and an entrepreneurial hub. Education is without doubt the sector that will spearhead this transformation. Are we then moving in the right direction?”

The following innovative assessment methods have been cited in the study.

- (1) King’s College London, where assessment on a Conflict Simulation module requires students to design a fully-fledged simulation game of their own rather than writing conventional essays.
- (2) University of Gloucestershire where multimedia students share their graphic work anonymously on an intercatve virtual gallery and other students can view everyone’s work and comment in small group situations.
- (3) University of Cambridge’s School of Clinical Medicine where students are tested on their communication skills through role play, patients are played by actors and students have to break bad news to family members and explain the next stage of treatment.

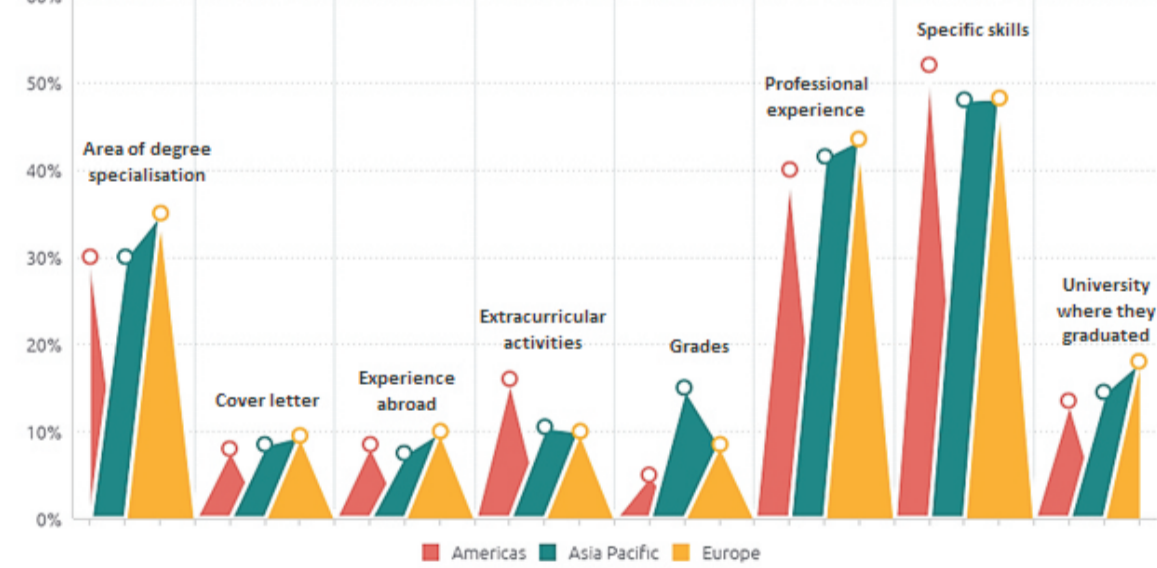
The below illustration from VERDE’s study provides a global snapshot of some of the courses with 100% continuous assessment.

Departments from international universities offering 100% continuous assessment



The VERDE study on the tertiary sector also provides insights from the results from The Global Employability University Survey 2015, which reveals that the university from which a candidate graduates is only the fourth most important piece of information for employers.

Employers’ criteria for selecting candidates



The shift of employers’ focus away from academic qualifications is a trend that is today prevalent. For example, a professional advisory services firm in London announced last year that it would remove degree classification from the entry criteria for its hiring programmes, and would focus more on a selection process that would be strength-based and identify future potential. Other global organisaotns are also starting to think about things like resilience, innovation and goal orientation in their recruitment process.

Venna adds that knowledge from book study and traditional examinations can become obsolete overnight and, for this reason, universities should prepare students to be agile and adaptable, with the right mindset of lifelong learning.

To have access to the full report from business intelligence firm VERDE, you may call 454 94 91 or e-mail info@verdefrontier.mu.

