# Shifting entrance exams online

Mercer | Mettl's intervention enabled CHRIST deemed-to-be-University to offer the entrance exam online, to over 43,000 students globally, in four days, amid the COVID-19 disruption.

welcome to brighter

# About the
# Deemed-to-be-University

CHRIST is a premier educational institute based in Bengaluru. It was established in 1969 as CHRIST College and declared a deemed-to-be-University in 2008 for adopting global higher education practices and offering a holistic education.

CHRIST is a multi-disciplinary center for learning with harmonious multiculturalism. It offers programs in various disciplines, such as humanities, social sciences, science, commerce, management, engineering, education and law, to over 25000 students. These programs range from bachelor's to master's to doctoral and are spread across the deemed-to-be-University's five plush campuses.

## A leading educational center

## CHRIST hosts upward of **25,000** students.
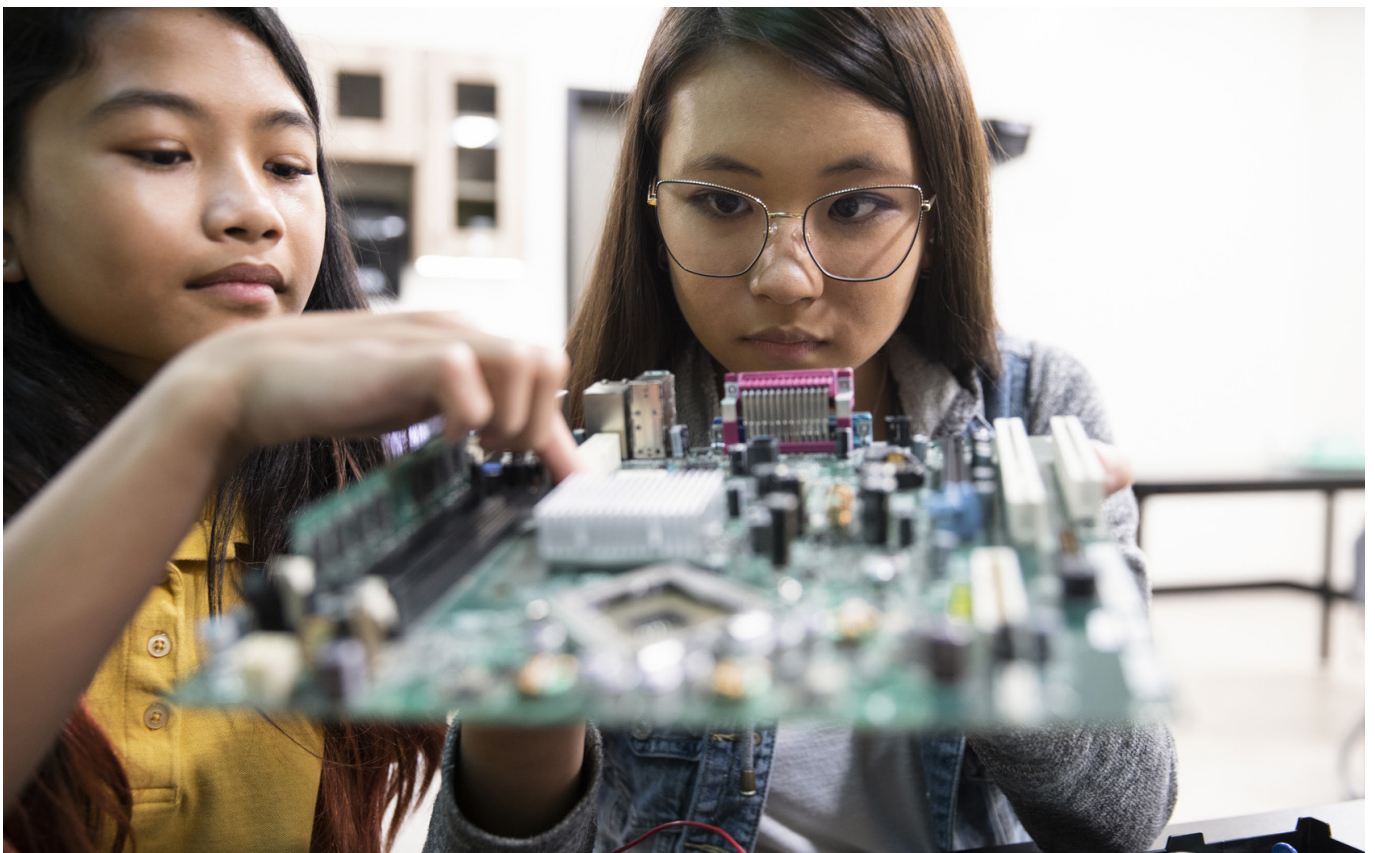
# Challenges and requirements in conducting the entrance exam

CHRIST rolled out its yearly admissions process for the batch of 2020 at the beginning of last year. The deemed-to-be-University's five massive campuses were preparing to host a new batch of students from over 60 countries, based on the traditional, center-based entrance exam results.

However, a growing number of students also posed unique challenges, including high infrastructural and operational costs in conducting the examination. CHRIST administration realized it was accruing exorbitant sums in conducting center-based entrance exams. Hence, it explored online solutions on the market to rationalize its expenditure without compromising its global applications. Its requirements further included meeting its existing benchmarks of integrity, quality, security and accuracy to offer a superlative examination experience for all stakeholders.

However, CHRIST was not pleased with the proposed solutions, given the uniqueness of its exam requirements. Its administration was doubtful of employing online solutions for its exam as they did not offer the desired flexibility. Amid the contemplation, COVID-19 caused massive disruption, threatening to derail its academic calendar. The government-extended lockdown halted its entrance examination plans. The issue snowballed as CHRIST understood the inevitability of online migration, despite its unpleasant experience and reservations. It needed urgent intervention, considering the uncertainty of the situation amid the dreaded COVID-19.

## What choice did CHRIST have?

Before we delve into how CHRIST overcame the headwinds with an optimal solution, here is a list of its unique and difficult-to-address requirements for various online vendors.

### A dynamic examination platform

When CHRIST was exploring online solutions, it intended to automate every aspect of the examination process - exam creation, uploading the question papers for various exam types and a reliable and speedy evaluation. Additionally, it sought vendors' assistance in operations and delivery to simplify and improve its admission process's efficiency. However, every online vendor with which it engaged was unable to eliminate logistical challenges and administrative hurdles.

### A vast scale

CHRIST intended to leverage an online solution to expand its capacity to host exam-takers and offer the exam from any location. However, its erstwhile online vendor's inability to scale up during the examination process had stranded multiple students. Thus, the administration doubted whether it could find a reliable and scalable platform robust enough to match its scale, of hosting more than 43000 applicants, simultaneously offering credible, secure and swift assessments, with no errors or drawbacks.

## High integrity

Data, academic integrity, security and confidentiality were significantly rigid and high-security prerequisites to administering the entrance exam online. Hence, its desired platform had to offer the same quality and rigor as an exam conducted at a physical examination center. However, a suitable solution offering a secure and reliable environment, with robust monitoring and anti-cheating mechanisms, was missing.

## Global accessibility

CHRIST mandated a seamless internet environment and a glitch-free exam for applicants the world over. But it couldn't find a vendor that could iron out connectivity issues, considering the unpredictability and intermittence of internet coverage. Thus, its requirement for a platform, accessible with minimal bandwidth but maximum technical prowess, remained unaddressed.

## Flexibility in proctoring

CHRIST, like any other preeminent center for learning, had a strict focus on its entrance exams. Therefore, stringent invigilation to preserve transparency and fairness and ensuring only deserving applicants were admitted was critical. However, it did not desire external professionals for proctoring. It sought to deploy its staff and faculty members to live proctor applicants and supervise tests in real-time in a secure environment. Thus, the deemed-to-be-University administration was scouting a solution partner that could accommodate its special request and train over 600 faculty, staff and admin members on using the proctoring software to ensure a smooth remote proctored drive.

## Custom slotting

The administration did not want to restrict applicants' flexibility in taking the examination online. It did not want to be rigid with the examination's time and date, as at a center-based exam. Hence, it entreated an extended examination window and scouted for a preferential resource that could consider and offer such an arrangement.

## Discovering Mercer | Mettl's offerings

Despite a disappointing experience, the CHRIST administration explored possible partnerships with vendors that could draw a clear roadmap and provide the desired solutions. Additionally, it sought a vendor committed to its people, integrity and core values, being an academic fraternity dedicated to the motto of 'EXCELLENCE AND SERVICE.' Amid the anxiety, hard-pressed for time, CHRIST connected with Mercer | Mettl, thanks to positive feedback from the latter's existing client. However, the feedback was not enough.

A successful history of delivering uninterrupted exams at scale could not adequately assure CHRIST of Mercer | Mettl's prowess in seamlessly hosting such large-scale exams. It wanted multiple verifications of the claim.

## Winning CHRIST's trust

Mercer | Mettl's team knew it had to communicate about delivering its solutions unambiguously. Therefore, it began corroborating the platform's abilities by sharing an internal and confidential load testing report, assuring the deemed-to-be-University administration of its scale and volume proficiency of delivering four times the number for which it had tested its system. This assuaged the administration's concerns. Mercer | Mettl's team also created pilot tests for faculty and students to reinforce its assertions on assessment integrity and software reliability. It received positive feedback from everyone. Concurrently, continual consultations on foreseeable problems proffered enhanced assurance, giving the administration the confidence to seamlessly host its entrance exam. The collaboration was set in motion.

We sought an efficient platform for our entrance and end-semester examinations when faced with the pandemic and lockdown. Mercer | Mettl, with its host of solutions and openness to adapt to our requirements, met our expectations that smoothened the transition to online examinations.

**Dr. Anil Joseph Pinto**

Registrar, CHRIST (Deemed-to-be-University)

# Solution

## Mercer | Mettl EXAMIN - The online proctoring and examination system

Mercer | Mettl was significantly well-versed with the administration's concerns. Its team was equally aware of its unique requirements and various adjustments needed to ensure a smooth transition from a human and center-based admission process to an automated online process. However, Mercer | Mettl's team had negligible time to make the desired transition. It had to expand its course, create, train and deliver a robust solution with all the desired benefits in just four days.

Therefore, Mercer | Mettl advocated its most viable value proposition- the futuristic online proctoring and examination solution – to solve the deemed-to-be-University's multiple challenges in conducting the online exam.

Mercer | Mettl's EXAMIN, a proficient and end-to-end online exam management system, offered a systematic alternative to CHRIST's center-based exams.
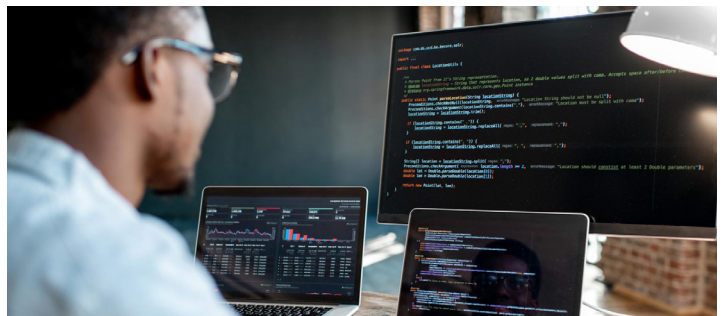
This comprehensive end-to-end exam management platform automated faculty's humanly-undertaken tasks and offered a secure and seamless user experience to the test-takers attending their exams remotely. The minimal internet bandwidth requirement supported a large number of exam-takers simultaneously. A combination of auto and live proctoring further negated all instances of online cheating.

## Here's how Mercer| Mettl's online exam management system met CHRIST's unique and diverse requirements.

### Operational assistance in setting up the exam

Mercer | Mettl's team substituted as the administrator and coordinator, helping faculty automate its pre-exam planning process within four days. Here is how:

• Created around a thousand question bank for every hundred assessments in the required format of MCQs and MCQs embedded with images.

• Uploaded exam papers in the desired format on the platform and shared test links with the students.

• Offered continual assistance on the exam days.

• The faculty witnessed a considerable reduction in the exam setup time, with increased cost efficiency than offline exams.

• The administration team's time management and productivity enhanced visibly, with lowered staffing tasks.

## Scalable global platform

Mercer | Mettl's team effortlessly managed the deemed-to-be-University's need for a platform that could scale as per the load generated. Here's how:

- Mercer | Mettl and CHRIST collaboratively created slots and schedules over three days. Test-takers could choose the most appropriate exam slot. This provision enabled balancing the load and improving exam management.

- The platform continued to scale even when thousands of exam-takers from distributed geographical locations worldwide logged in simultaneously.

- Approximately ten thousand registered applicants could take the exam on a single day without a glitch. This improved test-takers' experience and ensured a lower utilization of resources compared to center-based exams.

## The flexibility to proctor the exam live

Mercer | Mettl's team worked tirelessly for three days to meet the administration's mandate of employing its faculty and staff to proctor the entrance exam. It helped train over 700 CHRIST personnel to proctor efficiently. Here's how the transition occurred:

- Mercer | Mettl's team detailed the entire proctoring session, including preparing faculty about what to expect during the exam sessions.

- The team also shared some best practices concerning AI-based proctoring to smoothen the learning curve. This included assistance in understanding the flags and anomalies.

- In a matter of three days, the proctors were well-versed at validating test-takers' identities to clamp down on impersonation and integrity-related issues. They also granularly verified the test-taking environment for any anomaly.

- With the availability of one-to-one and one-to-many proctoring views, in-house live proctors monitored applicants remotely, from start to finish, to negate unwanted incidents.

- It offered an added feature to pause /stop /resume the exam in real-time with a live chat option to interact with the exam-takers as desired.

- The recorded video footage was available offline to select authorized members for future references.

- The proctoring feature was user-friendly and easy to navigate. Thus, the management didn't need advanced technical knowledge or experience to understand its functionality.

- CHRIST could eliminate its reliance on third-party proctors, thanks to in-house live proctors.

## AI-powered proctoring

The examination platform's preconfigured AI proctoring technology ensured a stricter focus on monitoring, analysis and scrutiny to maintain CHRIST's exam integrity. It provided a wholesome remote view of applicants' actions, activities and environment in the following ways:

- Mercer | Mettl's futuristic AI algorithm trained with more than 2.8 million proctored assessments efficiently detected various digressions during the exam. Such heightened levels of reliability lent incredible ease and integrity to the invigilation process.

- With over 95 percent accuracy, the intelligent algorithm helped faculty flag various suspicious cases, such as the non-visibility of face/ presence, detection of mobile phone, the presence of an additional person, distracted movements, etc., enhancing live proctors' ability to detect cheating.

- AI-assisted proctoring generated recorded feed and flags for reviews, enabling examiners to filter out candidates who may have resorted to cheating. To date, Mercer | Mettl has AI proctored approximately 30 million-plus students successfully.

## Internet bandwidth

The exam's prerequisites for students included internet connection, a web-based browser and a functional laptop/desktop with webcam and microphone. These enabled Mercer | Mettl to:

- Fortify applicants' test-taking experience the world over.

- Students could take their exam with an internet operating speed of only 512kbps. Hence, every applicant, for whom high-speed internet connectivity was a bottleneck, had a consistent, equally reliable and secure testing experience from their home environment.

- A user-friendly process did not demand applicants' time for downloading software packages and tutorials. It ran seamlessly on the applicants' systems, irrespective of their location.

## Real-time report generation

Real-time examination evaluation was crucial for the deemed-to-be-University administration to understand incoming students' performance holistically. Hence:

- Automated reports were generated instantaneously, with optimum reliability and validity, immediately after applicants completed and submitted their test.

- These real-time and system-generated granular reports on candidates' performance streamlined and automated the otherwise humanly-undertaken tedious processes.

- Faculty could genuinely assess applicants' potential with actionable insights, which expedited the entrance exam's selection process. Such insights accelerated the timeline for admission offers and enrolments, ensuring adherence to the established schedule.

## 24x7 support

Mercer | Mettl's technical backend and customer support teams ensured 24*7 client and candidate support. The teams hand-held, trained and actively assuaged every online examination-related concern while working round the clock to keep the software up-to-date, compatible and error-free. They also mitigated candidates' concerns throughout the assessment drive.

# Impact

Successful and seamless execution of the end-to-end online entrance examination helped preserve academic continuity without disruptions, also building CHRIST's trust in online solutions' efficacy. It enabled the esteemed center for learning to roll out online examinations for its semester examinations, too, ensuring academic continuity for its existing batches.

## Here are some highlights:

CHRIST shifted over 43,000 students online, without worrying about test-takers' location or any technical glitches.

Mercer | Mettl's proctoring technology helped undertake over one lakh (a hundred thousand) hours of proctoring.

Mercer | Mettl's online platform and proctoring compliance enabled a comprehensively wider reach with significant applications.

The deemed-to-be-University incurred 50 percent lesser expenditure than center-based exams.

It took around 70 percent less time in the operational planning compared to center-based exams.

Trained by Mercer | Mettl, CHRIST's 600-plus in-house invigilators monitored the exams remotely, with a suite of proctoring features.

The auto-grading functionality helped conserve substantial time, spent otherwise, evaluating answer sheets.

# The way forward

Mercer | Mettl's platform and proctoring solutions were an easy fit for CHRIST's online entrance exam's ecosystem, why the deemed-to-be-University leveraged it to eliminate bottlenecks in its semester exams.

Mercer | Mettl's robust system offered much-needed ease and flexibility to our students in taking their exams. The platform evoked a sense of comfort, which is evident from the fact that students have started gravitating toward online exams.

**Dr. Anil Joseph Pinto**

Registrar, CHRIST (Deemed-to-be-University)

# About us

At Mercer I Mettl, our mission is to enable organizations to make better people decisions across two key areas: acquisition and development. Since our inception in 2010, we have partnered with more than 4,000 corporates, 31 sector skills councils/government departments and 15+ educational institutions across more than 90 countries.

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