



PRESS RELEASE ON the 382nd REPORT OF The Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports on "Reforms and Strengthening of the National Testing Agency (NTA)"

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The Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports headed by Shri Mukul Wasnik, M.P., Rajya Sabha presented the 382nd Report on "Reforms and Strengthening of the National Testing Agency (NTA)" pertaining to the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education to the Hon'ble Chairman, Rajya Sabha on 9th October, 2026.

2. The Committee during the course of preparation of the 382nd Report, heard the views of Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education; Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare; Chairperson, National Testing Agency; Director General, National Testing Agency; Dr. K. Radhakrishnan, Former Secretary, Department of Space & Chairman, High-Level Committee of Experts and other representatives of the Department, and examined the subject in detail.

3. The Report was considered and adopted by the Committee at its meeting held on 25th August, 2026. The Observations/Recommendations made by the Committee in the Report are enclosed herewith.

4. The Report is also available on the following link:- <https://sansad.in/rs/committees/16?departmentally-related-standing-committees>

382nd Report

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

10.1 The Committee notes that under the National Education Policy 2020, the National Testing Agency has been vested with very important responsibilities. It conducts all of India's most significant public examinations such as JEE-Mains, NEET-UG, UGC-NET, and CUET, among others and therefore acts as the gateway for the higher education system. In total, the NTA conducts examinations for which about 1.2 crore students sit annually. Moreover, the successful conduct of an all India exam like NEET requires a whole-of-

government mobilization across departments at the Union, State, and local government level. Thus, the NTA has extremely significant responsibilities and also faces the task of coordination with multiple stakeholders.

The NTA is in a continually evolving state and its organizing structure may be finalized such that the resources and accountability structures of the NTA are in correspondence with the responsibilities which it has been vested with. In doing so, the Department may introduce appropriate Parliamentary framework that ensures NTA's accountability to Parliament.

10.2 The Committee notes that investment in question banks is the most viable defense against paper leaks in the long-run. The repeated use of the same question sets or the practice of having examiners set new question papers every year can be a risk to the integrity of the examination process. The Committee, therefore, is of the view that NTA should invest in building a large, diverse, and continuously updated question bank which can be drawn on to set papers without the advance knowledge of the question-setters. The Committee notes that in the CBT format, question papers no longer have to be printed and transported to examination centers. Therefore, there is no compulsion to set question papers long in advance. Accordingly, the final question papers should be set very close to the examination, with questions drawn from the question bank using digital tools and only vetted by experts. Finally, the Committee emphasizes strict quarantine and sequestering of the final paper-vetters until the conclusion of the examination.

The Committee further recommends that the NTA must rely on bona fide experts from our most renowned educational institutions – including IITs, AIIMs, IIMs, etc. - to develop its question banks and for translation. The NTA must also develop a system to check the track record of said experts to establish their integrity and to rule out any conflict of interest (e.g., owners or faculty of private coaching centers, family members giving the exam, etc.) before recruiting them.

10.3 The institutional culture matters as much as the procedures. The Committee, therefore, is of the view that National Testing Agency needs to cultivate a culture where every official from the Director General to the centre invigilator sees themselves as a guardian of examination integrity, not just as a jobholder in an administrative system.

The Committee notes that recent challenges have affected the public trust in the National Testing Agency, and that rebuilding this trust will require consistent, transparent, and two-way communication with stakeholders. The Committee notes that the NTA's present engagement with candidates is largely confined to one-way communication through portals and notifications. It notes that the NTA's channels for feedback from students and educational institutions need greater public awareness. The Committee recommends that such channels be built into the ordinary functioning of the NTA and be widely dispersed across students, parents, and instructors, so as to enable the agency to be more responsive to stakeholder concerns.

10.4 The Committee notes the measures taken by National Testing Agency since 2024. The institutional framework including SLCCs, DLCCs, Biometric authentication, mobile jammers, AI-based CCTV analysis is welcome. However, the cancellation of NEET (UG) 2026 despite all these measures shows the need for greater procedural and institutional reforms.

10.5 The Committee notes that of the 39 sanctioned positions in the NTA, only 23 officers are currently in position and on deputation to the NTA – a vacancy of 41%. The Committee notes that the hiring of manpower to strengthen the NTA was among the key recommendations of the High-Level Expert Committee chaired by Dr. K Radhakrishnan. The Committee notes the shortage of manpower in the NTA and urges the agency to expedite the recruitment to all sanctioned positions.

The Committee notes that all the 39 permanent posts that exist in the NTA are currently filled through a deputation mode. Officers on deputation generally serve for a limited tenure of two to three years before returning to their parent cadres. However, the conduct of national-level entrance examinations requires considerably expertise which is generally built over several years of experience. Accordingly, a dedicated cadre of professional staff is required for this purpose. The Committee recommends that the NTA should therefore hire its own officers on a permanent basis, with a particular emphasis on specialists in psychometrics, examination security, digital infrastructure, data analytics, and examination logistics. The 16 posts under the Central Staffing Scheme should be treated as a supplementary layer of senior leadership, not as a substitute for domain expertise.

10.6 The Committee observes that for CBT examinations conducted by NTA a concrete implementation plan for secure government CBT centers, including budgetary provisioning and a current mapping of existing government-owned facilities, needs to be finalized expeditiously. The Committee is of the view that adequate government-owned infrastructure must be in place so that reliance on private centers is avoided.

10.7 The Committee notes the recommendations made by the High-Level Committee of Experts (HLCE) for a phased transition to CBT mode, and broadly concurs with this approach. The Committee notes that most entrance examinations conducted by the NTA are already run on Computer-Based-Testing, including the JEE-Mains, UGC-NET, and CUET. The Committee notes that digital literacy constitutes a critically important academic and professional skill that is increasingly prevalent among the student population. The Committee notes that the NEET-UG is an outlier in its reliance on pen-and-paper testing. The Committee therefore recommends that NEET should also be moved to a CBT approach.

The Committee however continues to have concerns about the accessibility of CBT to students from remote regions and from marginalized backgrounds. Therefore, the Committee recommends that the transition to CBT be accompanied by a concerted national testing strategy to maximize digital accessibility. Some features of the strategy may be as follows:

1. For NEET (UG), any transition to CBT must be preceded by significant investment in government-owned CBT infrastructure across the country, particularly in Tier-2, Tier-3 cities and rural areas. The HLCE's recommendation of 1,000 secure government CBT centers must be implemented with a clear and phased timeline to facilitate the examinations. The Committee suggests that the NTA itself to financially support the establishment of mid-sized IT labs (100-200 nodes) in schools and colleges across the country. As long as the school/college administration provide the space for the IT lab, the NTA can invest in the hardware

equipment needed on the condition that the facilities be given up to the NTA for the conduct of any examination required.

2. The Committee emphasizes that there must be at least 1 test center in each district to offer all exams to minimize the stress and financial burden of transport and accommodation on students.
3. The Committee notes that private institutions engaged as examination centres on a sub-contracted basis have often proved to be a weak link in examination security. Therefore, all centers must be owned and operated by the Union and/or State Governments.
4. Students must also be offered opportunities to give CBT mock exams to enable them to familiarize themselves with the format and with a digital interface.
5. The Ministry of Education may consider including CBT-based exams at the school level as well, to build familiarity with digital testing among students.
6. Before rolling out the CBT mode, in places where infrastructure for CBT is inadequate due to the absence of computers and/or connectivity, the National Testing Agency should consider a hybrid model where the encrypted questions may be delivered to the exam centre directly and then printed there itself, which the Committee has been informed is feasible, until full CBT readiness is achieved.
7. The multi-session nature of CBT-based NEET (UG) examination would require a robust, transparent, and independently audited normalisation methodology. This normalisation methodology should be developed and explained to the public before any transition to CBT.
8. Switching over the NEET (UG) to CBT mode should involve consultations with the stakeholders viz. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, medical education regulators, students and their families.

10.8 The Committee takes note of two procedural concerns raised before it:

1. Invigilators completing signing and checking formalities during the course of the examination disturbs the focus of students who are already racing against time; the Committee, therefore, is of the view that a separate 15 minutes window, before or after the test, be kept exclusively for such formalities and not in between the exam duration.
2. Candidates arriving a few minutes late at the exam centers are mostly denied entry altogether resulting in wasting their year-long hard work over a minor delay. The Committee observes that there are some genuine reasons due to which a candidate may arrive late at the examination centre. The Committee is of the view that some mechanism be evolved such that students be allowed entry into the exam hall after signing an undertaking recording their late arrival and be allowed to attempt the exam only for the remaining time, with no extra time granted under any circumstances.

10.9 The Committee notes that public rallies, processions, or large gatherings on the day of examination can delay candidates and cause them to miss their reporting time. The Committee recommends that the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 be amended to direct District Administration to withhold permission for any rally,

procession, or any other public gathering on examination days, and to ensure that smooth traffic and law-and-order arrangements are in place well in advance, so that no candidate is affected by an avoidable, external disturbance.

10.10 The Committee notes that presently NEET (UG) qualifies far more candidates than the seats available across MBBS, BDS, AYUSH, and nursing courses put together. A reasonably wide qualifying pool gives students a fair chance through counseling rounds and private or deemed seats, but an excessively wide gap creates needless stress for lakhs of students. The Committee, therefore, is of the view that NTA and the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare should undertake a data-based, year-wise review of the qualifying percentile and cut-off methodology, keeping the number of qualified candidates reasonably aligned to actual seat availability, without compromising merit.

10.11 The Committee notes that, contrary to the Civil Services Examination that follows a multi-stage format for filtration of candidates, NEET (UG) examination remains a single-stage test that covers MBBS, BDS, nursing, and AYUSH admissions together handling more than 22 lakh students. The Committee is of the view that NTA should examine the feasibility of a two-stage format for its large examinations, such as having a common prelims examination for all medical streams while conducting specialized mains stage for specific courses, so that a candidate seeking nursing or AYUSH is tested and ranked apart from one seeking admission to MBBS, reducing avoidable competition.

10.12 The Committee notes that firms involved in examination-related services such as paper setting, logistics, printing, administration etc. that have been blacklisted by one or more State government(s) or organisation(s) have continued to secure contracts with other States and organisations. There is currently no preventive mechanism to counter this malpractice.

The Committee recommends that NTA should create and maintain a National Registry of Blacklisted Examination Vendors. This registry should include the names of firms, their associated individuals and entities, the nature of the disqualification, and the authority that imposed it. It should be publicly accessible online. Contracting with any entity on this list by NTA, any State Government(s), or any other public examination authority should be considered under the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024. The Committee notes that it has previously made the same recommendation in its 371st report on the Autonomous Bodies of the Higher Education Department.

10.13 The Committee notes that the coaching industry has effectively created a parallel curriculum that often matters more than the official school curriculum. It is a direct consequence of examination design choices. When examination papers tests beyond the NCERT or state board syllabus, or test rapid recall and pattern-recognition developed through repetitive practice rather than genuine conceptual understanding, they inevitably reward coaching over learning. This design has fostered a large, largely unregulated private coaching industry that displaced school-level learning as the primary site of preparation for these examinations. Moreover, it creates a barrier to socio-economic mobility by privileging students who can afford coaching have a structural advantage over equally talented students who cannot.

The Committee is of the view that the Ministry of Education should ensure that there should be specific, measurable standards for ensuring that NEET (UG), JEE (Main), and CUET papers test conceptual understanding based on the official school curriculum, rather than rewarding techniques specific to coaching. Further, there should be a regulatory framework for the coaching industry, with attention to fee transparency, safety standards, and the mental health of students in coaching centers.

10.14 The Committee was informed, during the course of its meetings, that the NTA only has data on the number of candidates registered from different States for various examinations and no data on whether those students succeeded or not. Participation data and success data are very different things. A State may have high registration numbers but poor pass rates, pointing to a quality or access problem.

The Committee recommends that NTA should conduct an annual Equity Audit examining, for each major examination, the participation rates, pass rates, and cutoff achievement rates of candidates disaggregated by State, gender, school board type (government, aided, private), medium of instruction, and social category (OBC, SC, ST, EWS, general). The audit findings should be published in NTA's Annual Report and submitted to the Ministry of Education for policy consideration. The Ministry of Education may utilise the data for policy consideration.

10.15 The Committee notes that the intense pressure of a single high-stakes examination affects the mental health of lakhs of young candidates, before, during, and after the declaration of results. The Committee is of the view that NTA partners with mental health professionals to offer free, accessible counseling helplines, circulate simple stress-management material well ahead of each examination, and ensure that examination centers maintain a calm, supportive environment, particularly during the sensitive period surrounding results.

10.16 During the course of its meetings, the Committee was apprised that presently NEET (UG) has no limit on how many times a candidate can attempt it, and no real upper age limit either. This has resulted in anomalies such as the participation of candidates above the age of 70 years in the NEET examinations. The Committee recommends that the Ministry explore, alongside the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and all other relevant stakeholders, possibilities of reasonable age limits and reasonable attempt limits to all major examinations including the NEET-UG. The Committee notes that an exception to this rule may be made only for the UGC-NET.

10.17 The Committee notes that the cooperation and expertise of the State Governments is critical to the success of the examinations. Therefore, it recommends that a revamped NTA must include adequate representation from State Governments on its Governing Body.

18. The Committee recommends that the NTA must be reimagined not just as a body to administer exams but as a think-tank for all matters and policies relating to examinations. The NTA must have a research wing staffed by academics with credentials in education research other than bureaucrats and officers. The absence of a research wing currently precludes the NTA from conducting critical tasks like longitudinal studies that gauge if the NEET, CUET, UGC-NET exams etc. actually fulfill their intended purpose. Similarly, a NTA with deep academic expertise can also be a resource for other educational institutions like the CBSE which are implementing

interventions like the introduction of an OnScreen Marking system in Board Examinations. The Committee thus recommends greater academic and research expertise in the NTA to help it better conduct its own examinations as well as eventually to facilitate non-NTA examinations.

19. The Committee notes that once the NTA's digital infrastructure has matured, examinations should be conducted on CBT basis with a Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT) model which is universally regarded as the gold standard for assessment. This will require the use of AI tools that can pull questions from a large question bank, modify them to the aptitude of the student, evaluate questions correctly, and normalize scores based on objective considerations such as the difficulty of the questions. Such a system will minimize the scope for malpractices. There will be no standard question paper that can be leaked. Further, no two candidates at the same center will receive an identical set of questions, reducing the scope for cheating. Accordingly, the NTA should set up a technical team with the proficiency to develop, monitor, and continuously strengthen these tools.
20. The Committee was informed by the NTA that the risk of a CBT examination would be that the computer system is vulnerable to hacking by malicious agents and that such hacks are also hard to track. The Committee was informed that such an attempt occurred and was investigated by the CBI during the IIT JEE-Mains Examination of 2021. The Committee notes that the transition to CBT therefore presents new challenges which the NTA must anticipate and be prepared for. In addition to live CCTV monitoring, the Committee recommends the establishment of a robust, in-house cybersecurity team within the NTA which can develop and implement secure examination software that prevents remote access, screen-recording, and the use of virtual machines. Further it must adopt AI-based analytical tools to detect and flag anomalous response patterns that may indicate malpractice.
21. The Committee notes that the Director General is the key executive officer in the NTA. However, between 23.06.2024 and 01.04.2026, the position was held as an additional charge by officers who had substantial primary responsibilities as CMD, ITPO and Commissioner, NVS. The Committee discourages the practice of appointing officers to key positions in the NTA as an additional charge.
22. While the number of sanctioned posts has increased since 2024, the Committee notes that even at full strength of 39 officers, the NTA will have to rely on third-party private contractors. The Committee recommends that the NTA must eventually grow its operations to be able to conduct the logistics of all examinations by itself. The use of non-NTA employees must be limited to the setting of papers and other academic functions for which reliance on outside academic expertise is critical.
23. The Committee notes that the NTA has a substantial annual revenue surplus, and in total has acquired a total revenue surplus of Rs. 590 crores between FY 2018-2019 and FY 2024-2025. The Committee was informed that the surplus funds available with NTA from time to time are being invested in Fixed Deposits for optimal utilization until they are required for operational purposes. The Committee notes that this corpus can be used for investment and upgradation in government-owned CBT centers and the conduct of the mock examinations to familiarize students with the CBT interface.

24. The Committee notes that the NEET-UG results are generally not published in a publicly accessible manner. However, in 2024, the NTA published the details on the instance of the Honourable Supreme Court and it sparked a larger public conversation on how student performance across cities and test centers varies. Consequently, the NTA cracked down on the ability of students to choose their own test centers. The Committee has noted that this is a progressive measure which has reduced scope for misuse. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that the NTA should follow the practices adopted by the UPSC of transparency in results. The Committee notes that such transparency can enable the NTA to identify any anomalous patterns in the performance of candidates and test centers and enhance the public trust in the NEET examination.
25. The Committee envisions that the NTA should have in-house capabilities that can detect, trace, and determine prima facie irregularities in the examination system. Such in-house capabilities can strengthen the NTA's ability to rapidly respond to crises. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that the Ministry consider building some of these abilities within the NTA.
26. The Committee notes that there is presently no official public record of paper leaks, the FIRs registered on paper leaks, and how these cases are being investigated and prosecuted by the CBI and other investigative agencies. The Department of Higher Education stated to the Committee that although examination malpractices/disruptions have occurred, no paper leak has occurred in an exam conducted by the NTA since its formation in 2017 till 2025. The Committee noted that the Ministry's assertion is at variance with the opinion of some Members of the Committee. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that the NTA work with the Department of Higher Education and other Government agencies and departments to issue a publicly-available report documenting all relevant details relating to the exams that have been conducted by the NTA and any investigations pertaining to them.
27. The Committee notes that the Expert Committee chaired by Dr. K Radhakrishnan had recommended that the NTA's mandate be confined to the conduct of entrance examinations, with the NTA taking on additional functions only after demonstrating expanded institutional capacity. The Committee notes that the NTA continues to conduct recruitment examinations that are not connected to admission into higher education institutions. The Committee recommends that the NTA immediately refocus its priorities to the conduct of admission tests to higher education institutions alone. The Committee notes that such a refocusing would be in line with the NTA's mission statement – "[T]o improve equity and quality in education by administering research based valid, reliable, efficient, transparent, fair and international level assessments."
28. The Committee recommends that the NTA should bring out a clear duty of care owed by it to candidates. It may include the provision of financial compensation for candidates affected by administrative cancellations and prescribe timelines for grievance redressal. This will reduce the financial and psychological burden that such events place on candidates.
29. The Committee also recommends a secure channel for receipt of information and grievance redressal related to all aspects of examination.

30. The Committee recommends the creation of an independent mechanism for Educational Examinations, functioning independently of the NTA, with powers to audit examination security protocols, investigate candidate grievances, and submit its report directly to the Ministry.
31. The Committee recommends that the NTA invest in the training and capacity-building of all relevant stakeholders – including those from State Governments and other agencies – who are actually responsible for the conduct of examinations at the district and test center-level, so that reforms are internalised rather than merely complied with.

10.32 The Committee notes that the implementation of the Dr. Radhakrishnan Committee's 101 recommendations to strengthen the examination process is ongoing. The Committee was informed that the majority of reforms have been implemented, since 60 of the 101 recommendations pertained to the year 2025 and 2026. The Committee recommends the expedited implementation of the pending reforms, including for any of the 60 reforms relating to 2025 and 2026 that are yet to be implemented.

10.33 The Committee recommends that the NTA also develop a protocol for exam administration for students with disabilities who have distinct requirements and needs. The NTA should strengthen support for students with disabilities by ensuring accessible examination centres, the possibility of adequate scribes and compensatory time, accessible digital platforms, and a dedicated grievance-redressal mechanism. Such a provision can help enhance the accessibility of higher education to students.

10.34 The Committee recommends that to the extent that any printing is required post the transition to CBT-exams, it should be conducted only in NTA-owned and operated printing presses. There must be no reliance on private printers for the same.

10.35 The Committee recognizes that education remains a fundamental pillar of national progress and social development, with the potential to empower individuals and strengthen the nation's future. The Committee believes that continued reforms in the examination system is now a national imperative, with a view to eliminating unfair means, reducing undue stress, and encouraging a more holistic assessment of students' abilities. The Committee resolves to stay apprised of the matter and encourages all stakeholders to contribute ideas for this shared national mission of a better examination and education system.

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