Report No
382

सत्यमेव जयते

PARLIAMENT OF INDIA
RAJYA SABHA

DEPARTMENT-RELATED PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, WOMEN, CHILDREN, YOUTH AND SPORTS

THREE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY SECOND REPORT
ON
Reforms and Strengthening of the National Testing Agency (NTA)

(Presented to Hon'ble Chairman, Rajya Sabha on 9th October, 2026)
(Forwarded to Hon'ble Speaker, Lok Sabha on 9th October, 2026)

भारतीय संसद, राज्य सभा

PARLIAMENT OF INDIA,
RAJYA SABHA

Rajya Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi
October, 2026 / Ashwin, 1948, (Saka)

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COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE
(Constituted *w.e.f.* 26th September, 2025)

1. **Shri Mukul Wasnik - Chairman**

RAJYA SABHA

2. Dr. Sikander Kumar
3. Shri C. Sadanandan Master
4. Shrimati Rekha Sharma
5. Dr. Bhim Singh
6. Shri Ghanshyam Tiwari
7. Ms. Swati Maliwal
8. Shri Babul Supriya Baral
9. Shri Constandine Ravindran
10. Shri Nathwani Parimal

LOK SABHA

11. Shri Brijmohan Agrawal
12. Dr. Angomcha Bimol Akoijam
13. Shrimati Rachna Banerjee
14. Shrimati Shobhanaben Mahendrasinh Baraiya
15. Shri Darshan Singh Choudhary
16. Shri Jitendra Kumar Dohare
17. Prof. Varsha Eknath Gaikwad
18. Shri Abhijit Gangopadhyay
19. Dr. Hemang Joshi
20. Shri Amar Sharadrao Kale
21. Shri Kalipada Saren Kherwal
22. Adv Dean Kuriakose
23. Dr. Sambit Patra
24. Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad
25. Dr. D Purandeswari
26. Shri Rajeev Rai
27. Shri Zia Ur Rehman
28. Shri Karan Bhushan Singh
29. Ms. Bansuri Swaraj
30. Shri Kamakhya Prasad Tasa
31. Dr. T Sumathy alias Thamizhachi Thangapandian

SECRETARIAT

Dr. K.S. Somashekhar, Secretary
Shri Vimal Kumar, Joint Secretary
Shri Jayanta Kumar Mallick, Director
Shri Devashish Sen, Deputy Secretary
Shri Dhananjay Singh Yadav, Assistant Committee Officer

PREFACE

I, the Chairman of the Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports, having been authorised by the Committee to present the Report on its behalf, do hereby present this Three Hundred and Eighty Second Report of the Committee on "Reforms and Strengthening of the National Testing Agency (NTA)".

2. The Committee at its meetings held on 21st May, 2026, 1st June, 2026 & 1st July, 2026 heard the Director General, National Testing Agency (NTA) and Secretary, Department of Higher Education along with other officials of the NTA and the Ministry of Education.

3. While drafting this Report, the Committee has relied on detailed background note on the subject and the deposition made by the Secretary along with the officials of the Department of Higher Education and the representatives of NTA on 21st May, 2026, 1st June, 2026 & 1st July, 2026.

4. For the facility of reference and convenience, the recommendations of the Committee have been presented in bold letters in the body of the Report.

5. The Committee considered the draft Report and adopted the same in its meeting held on 25th August, 2026.

NEW DELHI
9th October, 2026
Ashwin 17,*1948 (Saka)*

Shri Mukul Wasnik
Chairman
Department-related Parliamentary
Standing Committee on Education, Women,
Children, Youth and Sports

ACRONYMS

AIIMS	*All India Institute of Medical Sciences*
BDS	*Bachelor of Dental Surgery*
CBSE	*Central Board of Secondary Education*
CBT	*Computer Based Test*
CSIR NET	*Council of Scientific and Industrial Research - National Eligibility Test*
CUET	*Common University Entrance Test*
DLCCs	*District Level Coordination Committees*
HEI	*Higher Education Institutions*
HLCE	*High-Level Committee of Experts*
HPSC	*High-Powered Steering Committee*
IITs	*Indian Institute of Technology*
JEE	*Joint Entrance Examination*
MBBS	*Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery*
NEET	*National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test*
NITs	*National Institute of Technology*
NTA	*National Testing Agency*
OMR	*Optical Mark Recognition*
PPT	*Pen-and-Paper Test*
QP	*Question Paper*
SLCCs	*State Level Coordination Committees*
SOP	*Standard Operating procedure*
UGC NET	*University Grants Commission - National Eligibility Test*

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Education is the most powerful lever for social mobility and national development. At the heart of India's education system are the entrance examinations that determine access to its premier institutions such as the IITs, NITs, AIIMS, and hundreds of Medical, Engineering and other Colleges. For millions of young Indians, these examinations represent the culmination of years of effort and aspiration.

1.2 The Ministry of Education, Government of India established the National Testing Agency (NTA) in November 2017 as an independent, autonomous, and self-sustained testing organization under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860 for admission to higher education institutions (HEIs) with a mission to improve equity and quality in education by developing and administering research-based valid, reliable, efficient, transparent, fair and international level assessments. It was envisaged as a world-class testing body comparable to any other body in the world capable of designing, administering, and evaluating examinations at scale while ensuring absolute fairness and security.

1.3 Between the years 2018 and 2026, NTA has conducted over 270 examinations involving more than 6.6 crore candidates.

1.4 The developments surrounding the NEET (UG), UGC-NET, CSIR-NET, CUET-UG, and NCET in 2024, and the cancellation of the NEET (UG) in 2026 have raised legitimate concerns among students and parents. Restoring and further strengthening public trust in the examination system will require sustained, structural attention that goes beyond incremental administrative measures. Therefore, examination of this subject is driven by the conviction that the students of this country deserve better, and that a national testing agency capable of delivering best standard, is both necessary and achievable.

1.5 Scope of this Report:

This Report covers the following areas in detail:

- Establishment of the National Testing Agency;
- Structure and functions of NTA;
- Issues that have arisen in functioning of NTA *viz.* structural, operational, and governance-related;
- High-Level Committee of Experts (HLCE) constituted under Dr. K. Radhakrishnan - Mandate and Key recommendations;
- Measures taken by NTA to implement the HLCE's recommendations;
- A comparative assessment of Pen-and-Paper Testing vs. Computer-Based Testing;
- The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024; and
- Observations and Recommendations of the Committee.

CHAPTER 2
ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL TESTING AGENCY

2.1 Need for a dedicated Testing Body:

The Committee was informed by the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education that prior to the establishment of the National Testing Agency (NTA), entrance examinations for India's premier institutions were conducted by multiple agencies such as the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), various IITs, and other bodies often with overlapping mandates and inconsistent standards. Students frequently appeared in multiple examinations with similar syllabi. The quality of examination administration varied considerably, and there was no single body with the expertise, infrastructure, or resources to conduct critical national examinations to world-class standards.

2.2 As a result, the Committee was informed by the Department of Higher Education that the practical consequences of this system were countered the most by the students. In 2017, a medical aspirant could find himself sitting multiple State-level entrance examinations, each with its own syllabus, its own schedule, its own application process, and its own fee. An engineering aspirant faced a similar ordeal with Joint Entrance Examination (JEE), State engineering examinations, and various institution-specific tests, all demanding simultaneous preparation. In this regard, families spent considerable money on multiple application fees and travel to different examination centers across the country, and the psychological burden on young students was enormous. Beyond the student experience, the lack of a unified system also meant that there was no shared pool of expertise in psychometrics, examination security, or large-scale logistics, leaving each body to define its own system independently, and the quality of the system varied enormously from one organisation to the other.

2.3 Further, the Committee was informed that several expert committees have flagged these gaps over the years. The Programme of Action (1992), framed in pursuance of the National Policy on Education 1986, first recommended an independent testing body. Subsequently, the National Knowledge Commission (2006-2009) reiterated this need. Further, the Ashok Mishra Committee on the JEE System (2015) made a similar recommendation. As a result, by 2017, there was near-universal agreement among education policy experts that India needed a dedicated, professional testing organisation.

2.4 Establishment of the NTA:

Consequently, the Union Cabinet approved the establishment of the National Testing Agency (NTA) in November 2017. NTA was formally registered as a Society in May 2018 under the Societies Registration Act, 1860. It was set up as a self-sustained, autonomous body of the Government of India under the Ministry of Education (Department of Higher Education). Thus, NTA is not a statutory body created by an Act of Parliament. It is a society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860. It is

the same legislation under which non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and cultural societies are registered. This has significant implications in terms of accountability and parliamentary oversight.

2.5 Objectives of NTA:

The NTA was established with the following stated objectives:

- To conduct efficient, transparent, and internationally benchmarked tests in order to assess the competency of candidates for admission to higher educational institutions.

- To undertake research on educational, professional, and testing systems and to identify gaps in knowledge and take steps to bridge them.

- To identify experts and institutions capable of setting high-quality examination questions.

- To produce and disseminate information and research on education and professional development standards.

2.6 Funding and Financial Structure:

The Committee was informed by the Ministry that NTA was designed to be a self-sustaining body, funded primarily through examination fees collected from candidates. Between 2018 and 2024, the NTA collected an estimated Rs. 4,791 crores in examination fees, while spending Rs. 4,142 crores on examination conduct, resulting in a surplus of approximately Rs. 649 crores.

Table 1

Revenue and Expenditure incurred by NTA (till 2024)

Financial Year (FY)	Income (in Rupees)	Expenditure (in Rupees)
2018-19	1,19,10,98,484	1,18,42,57,513
2019-20	5,04,16,04,176	3,90,00,57,067
2020-21	5,15,15,97,544	4,27,93,83,981
2021-22	5,08,46,52,908	4,26,52,32,581
2022-23	9,00,56,19,679	6,81,52,00,280
2023-24	11,16,84,39,078	10,40,95,88,274
2024-25	11,27,55,52,999	10,56,98,58,558

2.7 The Committee was apprised about the major heads under which expenditure is incurred by the NTA since 2018-19, the data provided is given below:

Table 2

(Amount in lakh)

Sl No.	Head	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
1.	Staff Payment	285.58	762.44	833.91	819.78	1031.71	1528.49	2327.41
2.	Academic/ Exam expenses	11246.72	37012.23	40728.07	40669.15	62921.79	99805.67	100596.88
3.	Administrative Expenses	288.31	1151.58	1137.99	1077.83	1893.10	2343.78	2395.52
4.	Finance Cost	0.27	10.95	22.29	32.24	0.10	0.41	110.27
5.	Depreciation	21.69	63.37	71.59	53.33	73.05	76.99	161.02
6.	Prior Period Expenses	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2232.25	340.54	107.49
7.	Provision of Income Tax	-	5000	-	-	-	-	-
8.	Payment of Earlier Year Taxes	-	19.61	831.38	-	-	-	-
	Total	11842.58	44020.18	43625.22	42652.33	68152.00	104095.88	105698.59

CHAPTER 3
STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS OF NATIONAL TESTING AGENCY

3.1 Administration:

The administration of NTA is entrusted to the General Body headed by the Chairperson. It is pertinent to mention that the day-to-day functioning of NTA is managed by the Director General, who acts as its Chief Executive Officer. The Director General is appointed by the Government of India, from an officer of the rank of Secretary. The composition of the General Body of NTA is given as below:

Table 3

Sl. No.	Member Name	Designation
1.	Chairman (Renowned academician appointed by GoI)	Chairperson
2.	Director General, NTA	Member Secretary
3.	Three Directors of IITs in their *ex-officio* capacity as the present, preceding and succeeding Chairpersons of JEE (advance)	Member
4.	Two Directors of NITs in their *ex-officio* capacity as the present and preceding Chairpersons of CSAB	Member
5.	Two Directors of the IIMs in their *ex-officio* capacity as the present and preceding Chairpersons of CAT	Member
6.	Director, IISER (Representing IISERs, on rotation basis)	Member
7.	Vice Chancellor (Representing Central Universities, on rotation basis)	Member
8.	Vice Chancellor, IGNOU	Member
9.	Two Experts from the field of testing appointed by MoE	Member

3.2 The Committee was informed by the Ministry that at present there are 39 permanent sanctioned posts in the NTA, which are filled through deputations. Of these, 16 posts were created by the Department of Expenditure in last 3 years. Additionally, NTA also recruits staff/officials as per requirements on a short-term basis. The details of sanctioned posts in the NTA are as under:

Table 4

Sanctioned Posts	In place	Vacancy
39	23	16 (41 %)

3.3 Further, the table below provides the data on number of contractual staff or outsourced staff who were engaged by the NTA during the last 3 years:

Table 5

Year	Regular/Deputation	Contractual (NTA payroll)	Outsourced (including MTS/ House)
2023-24	22	39	121
2024-25	26	46	150
2025-26	24	76	136

3.4 Examinations Conducted by NTA:

The Committee was apprised that NTA conducts various examinations for admission to various HEIs that can be broadly classified into major examinations and minor examinations based on the number of candidates appearing for such examinations. The examinations where number of candidates appearing is more than 10 lakhs are classified as major examinations, this includes NEET(UG), JEE(Main), CUET(UG) and UGC-NET.

3.5 Further, NTA conducts examinations in Pen-and-Paper Test (PPT) mode, Computer Based Test (CBT) mode and Hybrid Mode (Computer Assisted Pen & Paper Test). Presently, NEET (UG) is the only largest single-session examination conducted by NTA in PPT mode. NTA's examination portfolio spans engineering, medicine, law, arts and humanities, teaching eligibility, and university admissions. Some of the major examinations conducted by the agency in 2025 are as follows:

Table 6

Sl. No.	Examination	Month	Mode	Registered Candidates
1.	JEE (Main) - January 2025	Jan 2025	CBT	13.10 Lakh
2.	CUET (PG) - March 2025	Mar 2025	CBT	6.54 Lakh
3.	JEE (Main) - April 2025	Apr 2025	CBT	12.58 Lakh
4.	NEET (UG) - May 2025	May 2025	Pen & Paper	22.76 Lakh
5.	CUET (UG) - May 2025	May 2025	CBT	13.54 Lakh
6.	UGC-NET - June 2025	Jun 2025	CBT	10.19 Lakh
7.	CSIR-NET-December 2025	Dec 2025	CBT	2.12 Lakh

Combined 2025 registrations across above seven exams are 80+ Lakh candidates. In 2026, NTA has already conducted 12 exams, witnessing over 65 Lakh registrations.

3.6 The Committee was informed by the Ministry that JEE (Main), NEET (UG), and CUET (UG) examinations are conducted in 13 languages *viz.* Assamese, Bengali, English, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu that reflect the Government's commitment to multilingual access.

3.7 Scale of Operations:
The Committee was informed that since its inception in 2018 and as of early 2026, the National Testing Agency (NTA) has conducted over 270 examinations, involving more than 6.6 crore candidates. The recently conducted NEET (UG) 2026 examination had over 22.7 lakh candidates registered, conducted across 5,432 centres in 565 cities, including 14 cities abroad.

3.8 Further, the lead for each examination conducted is provided by the Director, NTA who in turn is assisted by Joint Director and the supporting staff. The State Coordinators are appointed within the NTA who liaises with the State Governments for smooth conduct of examination. Each city has a City Coordinator who supervises all the test centres in that city. In addition, there are thousands of invigilators and support staff who assist during the whole examination process.

3.9 The Committee was given to understand that managing examinations at this scale is an extraordinary logistical challenge. It requires the coordination of printing presses, transport fleets, examination centers, invigilators, translators, observers, district administrators, and technology platforms all simultaneously and within tight time windows. The Committee acknowledges the extraordinary complexity involved in the examination process at this scale. It is of the view that the gaps that have been identified from time to time must be addressed in a systematic and time-bound manner.

CHAPTER 4
ISSUES PERTAINING TO NATIONAL TESTING AGENCY

4.1 Based on the submissions of the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders, the Committee has identified several categories of concern relating to the functioning of National Testing Agency, which are broadly categorised as: examination integrity, structural and staffing issues, governance and accountability issues, and others.

4.2 Examination Integrity:
The Committee was apprised that the most visible issue relates to the maintenance of integrity of examinations. The NEET (UG) 2024 faced allegations of breach of confidentiality and an FIR was registered by the Bihar Police in this regard. The case is now under investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Similarly, the Department of Higher Education informed the Committee that in UGC-NET 2024 examination, inputs were received by NTA which *prima facie* indicated that integrity of the aforesaid examination has been compromised and the case is under investigation.

4.3 Recently, in 2026, NEET (UG) examination was conducted on 3rd May 2026 across 5,432 centers, but the National Testing Agency received inputs about alleged malpractice regarding the exam on 7th May 2026. After investigation by central agencies, it was decided to cancel the examination entirely and it was re-conducted on 21st June 2026. Presently, CBI is conducting a comprehensive inquiry into the matter.

4.4 The Committee notes that the cancellation of NEET (UG) 2026 is the second major NEET examination related controversy in three years which demonstrates that further reforms are necessary.

4.5 The Committee further notes that the annual report 2024-2025 of NTA mentions that there were a total of 474 cases registered in various courts across the country in which NTA was either respondent or petitioner. Of which, 69 cases are filed in the Supreme Court alone and the remaining in various High Courts. Further, of these, 356 cases filed were regarding the NEET (UG) 2024 alone. Examination-wise number of cases during the FY 2024-25 is as under:

Table 7

Sl. No.	Name of Exam	No. of Cases
1.	NEET (UG)	356
2.	JEE (Main)	31
3.	UGC NET	26
4.	CUET (UG)	14
5.	AISSEE	7
6.	AIAPGET	4

7.	CUET (PG)	3
8.	Joint CSIR UGC NET	3
9.	BET	1
10.	ICAR	1
11.	SHRESHTA	1
12.	IGNOU Recruitment	6
13.	JNU Recruitment	3
14.	UKHC Recruitment	3
15.	DPIIT Recruitment	2
16.	EPFO Recruitment	2
17.	Recruitment Exams of Allahabad High Court (RO/ARO/APS)	2
18.	DU Recruitment	1
19.	Gujarat High Court Recruitment	1
20.	Others	7
Grand Total		474

4.6 Structural and Staffing Issues:

The Committee was informed that the National Testing Agency was established with a lean staffing structure. However, several key concerns have been raised, which are as under:

- NTA overstretched itself by taking on end-to-end operations for multiple examinations across several client ministries and agencies. The High –Level Committee of Experts (HLCE) noted that this dispersion of resources contributed to operational vulnerabilities.
- The agency needed senior domain expertise in examination security, technology, psychometrics, and logistics. Further, of the 39 permanent posts in the agency only 23 persons are in place at present that amounts to 41% vacancy in an agency that is entrusted with the very important task of testing country's future talent.
- The Committee notes that filling these posts through the Central Staffing Scheme, while useful, do not constitute the kind of deep institutional capacity-building required for the proper functioning of the National Testing Agency. Therefore, there is a greater need for specialists in examination technology, psychometrics, and secure logistics.

4.7 Governance and Accountability Issues:

A recurring concern brought before the Committee is the question of accountability. Being registered as a Society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, the National Testing Agency is not directly accountable to the Parliament in the way a statutory body

would be. The registration certificate of the National Testing Agency itself states that it is governed by a society, raising questions about the use of the National Emblem and parliamentary oversight.

4.8 The Committee notes that the National Testing Agency does function as a government body in practice as it is funded by the Government, operates under the Ministry of Education, and implements government policy. However, its legal structure means it is not subject to the same level of parliamentary scrutiny as a statutory body, and it does not, for instance, lay an Annual Report before the Parliament. The Committee had previously flagged this issue in its 371st report on the Autonomous Bodies of the Department of Higher Education.

4.9 The Coaching Centre Problem:

The Committee also expressed concern about the rapid expansion of the private coaching industry that has grown up around the National Testing Agency-conducted examinations. This coaching industry effectively creates a parallel curriculum that is optimised for examination success rather than genuine learning. It also creates severe socioeconomic inequality: students from wealthier families can afford expensive coaching, while those from modest backgrounds cannot.

4.10 The Committee is of the view that the coaching industry has grown because of the examination system. When national entrance examinations consistently reward familiarity with specific question patterns, shortcut techniques, and repeated practice of previous years' papers over genuine conceptual understanding, they create a market for exactly the kind of intensive drilling that coaching centers provide. Only a student from a well-resourced family can spend two years in any of the coaching institutions, paying anywhere between two to five lakhs a year, essentially preparing for one examination. While a equally talented and hardworking student, belonging to a poor or lower middle class family simply does not have that option *i.e.* access to money, to infrastructure, and to a coaching ecosystem that the school system cannot offer.

4.11 Blacklisted Vendors:

The Committee has noted the specific problem of examination-related firms that are involved in paper-setting, logistics, administration etc. The firms which have been blacklisted by one State or organisation continue to secure contracts from other States and organisations. There is no national registry of blacklisted firms, which essentially means that a vendor disqualified in one state can obtain a contract in another state. The Committee had previously flagged this concern in its 371st report on the Autonomous Bodies of the Department of Higher Education.

4.12 The Committee was also apprised that when a firm is blacklisted by one State or organisation, it means that the blacklisting authority found concrete grounds of either

fraud, negligence, breach of contract, or active involvement in malpractice to disqualify it. That finding does not disappear simply because the firm crosses a State border or approaches a different public body. Therefore, absence of a centralised, shared registry means that every State government and every examination body is essentially working without knowing background of the vendor. They have no way of knowing that the logistics vendor they are about to hire was removed from a contract in one state for suspected paper tampering, or that the printing firm they are considering was found to have leaked question papers in some other state. This information exists somewhere in the government records but it is simply not shared, not compiled, and not searchable. The result is that disqualified firms effectively get a fresh start every time they walk into a new tender. In some cases, the same individuals who were associated with a blacklisted firm simply register a new company under a different name and continue operating. Until there is a single, publicly accessible, regularly updated national registry that captures the firm name, its associated individuals, the nature of the disqualification and the authority that imposed it, this gap will continue to be exploited by those with a financial interest in subverting examination integrity.

However, NTA has clarified that it takes undertaking from vendors that they are not blacklisted by any Govt organisations.

CHAPTER 5
HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS (HLCE)

5.1 Constitution of High-Level Committee of Experts (HLCE):

The Committee was informed that consequent to the public concern on the integrity of entrance tests conducted by the National Testing Agency, the Ministry of Education constituted the High-Level Committee of Experts (HLCE) on 22nd June 2024 under the chairmanship of Dr. K. Radhakrishnan, Former Chairman of ISRO and Chairman of the Board of Governors, IIT Kanpur. The mandate of the Committee was to make recommendations on:

- Reforms in the mechanism of the examination process
- Improvement in data security protocols
- Structural and functional changes in the National Testing Agency (NTA)

5.2 The Committee was also apprised that the Hon'ble Supreme Court in its judgment (2024 INSC 568) dated 2nd August 2024, expanded the remit of HLCE and assigned additional tasks in the areas of Examination Security and Administration, Data Security and Technological Enhancements, Policy and Stakeholder Engagement, and Support and Training.

5.3 Consultation Process:

The High-Level Committee of Experts (HLCE) engaged in an extensive stakeholder consultation process that included both physical sittings and online consultations through *MyGov* portal to reform the NTA and to overhaul the examination system. It held multiple rounds of deliberations with the stakeholders such as:

- Examination conducting agencies
- Members of Parliament
- Representatives from States and Union Territories
- Police officials from Centre and State forces and investigating agencies
- Regulatory bodies and academic institutions
- Technology solution advisors
- Student groups and parent organisations
- Media groups
- Central and State investigation teams
- Global testing agencies

5.4 The Committee was informed that, in response to the consultation process, the High-Level Committee of Experts (HLCE) received 37,144 responses through the MyGov portal from students, parents, teachers, academicians and other stakeholders. These large-scale inputs helped the Committee to pinpoint recurring bottlenecks and understand

ground level student needs etc. The Department of Higher Education noted that this broad-based consultation lends the Committee's recommendations considerable authority. The HLCE under Dr. K. Radhakrishnan submitted its report titled 'Reformation of National Common Entrance Testing' to the Ministry of Education on 21st October 2024 with 101 recommendations including 60 recommendations on short-term actions, 35 recommendations on long-term actions, and 6 recommendations to monitor the implementation of these recommendations. The Committee was informed that majority of the 60 reforms have been implemented as most of them relate to the year 2025 and 2026. The key recommendations of the HLCE are

5.5 Structural Reforms to National Testing Agency:

- NTA should strengthen its internal capacity by creating specialised positions in examination security, technology, psychometrics, and logistics.
- NTA should focus on its core mandate *i.e.* conducting entrance examinations for Higher Education Institutions and not overextend itself with examinations that can be conducted by other bodies.
- NTA should develop institutional linkages with State and District authorities through a formal Secure Test Administration Apparatus.
- 16 new posts should be created for NTA through the Central Staffing Scheme.

5.6 State and District Level Coordination:

- State Level Coordination Committees (SLCCs) and District Level Coordination Committees (DLCCs) should be established in all States and UTs.
- DLCCs, headed by the District Collector, should be responsible for examination centre audit and on-ground coordination.
- The District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police should serve as key members of DLCCs.

5.7 Examination Centre Policy:

- All examination centers should be in Government or Government-controlled buildings and no private centers.
- For Computer Based Tests (CBT), centers should only be in government or government-controlled facilities.
- A formal Testing Centre Allocation Policy should be developed to prevent unusual patterns of centre allocation.
- Examination centers should be verified by the District Level Coordination Committees and independently by Higher Education Institutions under the Ministry of Education.

5.8 Technology and Data Security:

- Introduction of the '*Digi-Exam*' system on the lines of *Digi Yatra* with multi-stage Aadhaar-based biometric authentication to ensure only genuine candidates appear in examinations.
- CCTV monitoring at all examination centres with central oversight and AI-based analysis for malpractice detection.
- Mobile jammers to be installed at all examination centres.
- Specialised assistance from CERT-In and the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) for monitoring CBT examinations.
- Encrypted and auditable delivery of question papers for CBT.

5.9 Question Paper Setting:

- Comprehensive guidelines for question paper setting and vetting as per defined protocols.
- Greater involvement of Test Indenting Agencies as Knowledge and Examination partners.
- Multi-layer vetting of question papers before examination.

5.10 Examination Mode:

- Transition from Pen-and-Paper Testing (PPT) to Computer-Based Testing (CBT) in the medium to long term, with multi-stage and multi-session testing and rationalisation of the number of attempts.
- For NEET (UG) specifically, the transition to CBT is to be considered in consultation with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Development of 1,000 secure government-owned CBT testing centers by 2030.

5.11 Standard Operating Procedures:

- Detailed SOPs for both PPT and CBT to prevent security breaches at every stage of the examination cycle.
- Rigorous training for all examination functionaries including city coordinators, invigilators, observers, and NTA officials.
- Mock drills before each examination for seamless execution.

5.12 Long-Term Recommendations:

- Harmonisation and unification of entrance tests for undergraduate admissions.
- Gradual migration towards Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT), where the difficulty of questions adapts to the candidate's performance.
- Creation of an NTA Public Test Platform and Infrastructure.
- Development of a large, secure question bank with regular updates.

5.13 In order to implement the recommendations of the HLCE**,** the Committee was apprised that the Ministry of Education, on 14th November, 2024, constituted a High-Powered Steering Committee (HPSC) to monitor the implementation of HLCE

recommendations. The Steering Committee is chaired by Dr. K. Radhakrishnan and includes Prof. K. Ramamurthy (IIT Madras), Prof. Aditya Mittal (IIT Delhi), and one *ex-officio*, Additional Secretary/Joint Secretary, Ministry of Education (Member Secretary).

5.14 The Committee was informed, during the course of meetings, that the High-Powered Steering Committee (HPSC) continuously monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the High Level Committee of Experts (HLCE) through in-person meetings, presentations, and periodic review of the measures and steps taken by the National Testing Agency from time to time with Director General, NTA, thereby regularly apprising the HPSC on the progress made so far.

CHAPTER 6
MEASURES TAKEN BY NTA

6.1 During the course of meetings, the Committee was apprised that, following the High Level Committee of Experts (HLCE) report and the directions of the High-Powered Steering Committee (HPSC), National Testing Agency have taken a range of measures to strengthen examination conduct. The measures taken by NTA are as under:

6.2 Pre-Examination Measures:

6.2.1 Institutional Linkage with States

Within one month of the submission of the HLCE Report, the Ministry of Education informed to all States and Union Territories to establish institutional mechanisms between NTA and State/District authorities. Consequently, State Level Coordination Committees (SLCCs) and District Level Coordination Committees (DLCCs) have been constituted in all States. These Committees include officials from the State Education Department, Home Department, and Police. For conducting NEET (UG) 2025 and 2026 examinations, the Department of Higher Education informed that these Committees played a key role in centre verification and on-ground coordination.

6.2.2 Government Examination Centers

The Committee was informed that the Ministry has set a target of 100 per cent government examination centers. So far, the Ministry has achieved this to the extent of 99.5 per cent for NEET (UG) 2026 with more than 99.5 per cent of the 5,440+ centers being Government center. Further, every city coordinator in each of the exam cities was a principal of Kendriya Vidyalaya (KV) or Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) or of a government school/college, which in turn provided institutional accountability at the city level. Each examination centre for NEET (UG) 2026 was duly audited/recommended by the respective DLCCs and independently verified by HEIs under the Ministry of Education, GoI. The Committee notes that the remaining private centers should be replaced by Government centers as a matter of priority.

6.2.3 Testing Centre Allocation Policy

The Committee was informed that NTA has formulated a Testing Centre Allocation Policy under which candidates are, as far as possible, allotted a centre in their own district of residence. Further, it was informed that unusual patterns in center choice are detected through data analytics and remedial action is taken before the examination. This measure is a direct response to the 2024 examination irregularities where certain candidates from distant States had opted for centers in cities far from their homes which is a pattern associated with organised malpractice.

6.2.4 Strengthening of NTA

The Committee was apprised by the Ministry that the current Director General is an officer in the rank of Secretary to Government of India. Two Additional Director Generals (in the rank of Joint Secretary) are also in place. In this regard, the Committee was apprised that sixteen new posts have been created for NTA under the Central Staffing Scheme. These include 8 Director-level posts and 8 Joint Director-level posts. Domain-specific manpower has also been deployed on an examination-wise basis, drawing expertise from bodies such as IITs, UGC, Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, and others.

6.2.5 Examination Integrity

The Committee, during the course of its meetings, was briefed regarding the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for setting of Question Papers (QP) and also its vetting, printing, transportation and storage. The Committee was informed that NTA has institutionalized SOPs for Question Papers setting and vetting that involve multi-layer integrity protocols set-out. Some of which include Question Papers being chosen from multiple sets; the questions and answer options being shuffled; printing protocols in place with a Senior Officer overseeing the entire process of verification, monitoring and guarding; prohibition of electronic devices; transportation of Question Papers with chain of custody protocols that involve the movement of sealed Question Papers trunks through India Post with escort from Central Armed Police Force; strict guidelines followed for receipt, storage, distribution and opening of Question Papers trunks till administered.

6.2.6 Review Meetings by Union Home Secretary

Further, the Committee was informed that Coordination meetings chaired by the Union Home Secretary with Chief Secretaries and Directors Generals of Police have been institutionalised as part of the standard practice before major examinations. These meetings focus on law-and-order planning, crowd control, surveillance of gangs previously involved in malpractice, and monitoring of coaching institutions.

6.3 During Examination Measures:

6.3.1 Aadhaar-Based Biometric Authentication

The Committee was also apprised that NTA has introduced Aadhaar-based biometric authentication '*Digi-Exam'* for candidates appearing in NEET (UG). This multi-stage authentication system, modeled on the lines of '*Digi-Yatra'* framework, ensures that only the genuine registered candidate writes the examination. The Committee notes this measure.

6.3.2 Multi-Layer Frisking

A multi-layer frisking mechanism has been put in place. The first layer is carried out by State Police Forces at the entrance to examination centers, while the second layer is conducted by NTA officials within the centre. This reduces the risk of candidates carrying impermissible materials which could be utilised in the examinations.

6.3.3 CCTV Monitoring with AI Analysis

The Committee was also apprised that CCTV cameras have been installed in all examination rooms across all 5,440+ centers. The live feed is centrally monitored by NTA and is also shared with District Administration, the Ministry of Education, and participating Higher Education Institutions. AI-based tools are being used to analyse the feed for signs of malpractice or unfair means.

6.3.4 Mobile Jammers

Further, it was informed that Mobile jammers were installed at all examination centers for NEET (UG) 2026. This activity was carried out by Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL), both government-owned enterprises ensuring reliability and preventing any conflict of interest.

6.3.5 Parallel Control Rooms

Besides, the Committee was informed by the Ministry that Parallel Control Rooms have been set up in selected Higher Education Institutions under the Ministry of Education, on a State-wise basis, to monitor CCTV feeds and report suspicious activity. Accordingly, for NEET (UG) 2026, 34 such Control Rooms were set up across Higher Education Institutions, in addition to an inter-departmental Control Room in the Ministry and an overall Control Room at NTA headquarters to monitor the examination process.

6.4 Post-Examination Measures:

6.4.1 Data Analytics for Irregularity Detection

The Committee was apprised that NTA has implemented data analytics tools to identify suspicious patterns, aberrations, and malpractice indicators in candidate responses. Analysis of unusual score distributions, identical answer patterns, and anomalous centre-level performances allow NTA to flag irregularities before results are declared and take remedial action.

6.4.2 CERT-In and I4C Assistance

It was also informed that for CBT examinations, NTA has sought specialised assistance from the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) and the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) to monitor digital security, detect intrusions, and respond to cyber threats for the smooth conduct of various examinations.

6.4.3 Grievance Redressal and Mental Health Support

The Committee was informed that NTA has set up a dedicated Grievance Reporting and Redressal Cell (GRCC) to look into complaints, queries, and grievances raised by candidates, and that a dedicated committee is in place to examine and address these grievances. The Committee was further informed that NTA has also established a

dedicated MANAS helpline to provide mental health support to candidates preparing for high-stakes examinations.

CHAPTER 7
PEN-AND-PAPER TESTING *Vs.* COMPUTER-BASED TESTING

7.1 The Committee notes that one of the central debates around National Testing Agency's future concerns are the mode of examination, whether high-stakes national tests like NEET (UG) should continue in Pen-and-Paper Test (PPT) format or transition to Computer-Based Testing (CBT) format. The Committee has examined this issue in depth and presents the following**:**

7.2 During the course of its meetings, the Committee was informed that the National Testing Agency conducts examinations in both Pen-and-Paper Test & Computer-Based Testing (CBT) modes under a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) built around 4 governing principles:

i. End-to-end confidentiality
ii. Separation of roles - no single individual has access across stages
iii. Independent oversight at every handover
iv. Full chain-of-custody documentation from item development to result declaration

7.3 Further, it was informed that the Question items are developed and moderated by vetted Subject Matter Experts in secure, network-isolated premises under CCTV surveillance, with security cover where the sensitivity of the examination so warrants.

7.4 How Each Mode Works:

7.4.1 Pen-and-Paper Test (PPT)

In Pen-and-Paper Test mode, the Committee was informed that question papers are physically printed at secure printing facilities by NTA-empanelled confidential printers operating under security and continuous CCTV surveillance, sealed in tamper-evident packets, transported under guard, stored in secure vaults (often bank strong rooms), and distribution from strong rooms to examination centres on the day of the examination - is undertaken through secure logistics with documented receipt at every node and confirmation by District Officials and NTA Observers. Post examination, the OMR Answer Sheets are sealed in the candidates' presence and returned under chain-of-custody to NTA's secure evaluation facility. Therefore, the entire process involves a lengthy supply chain that includes printers, packers, transporters, bank storage, city coordinators, invigilators and OMR scanning centers, each link of which represents a potential vulnerability.

7.4.2 Computer-Based Test (CBT)

In Computer-Based Testing mode, candidates sit at individual computer terminals at designated examination centres. Questions are displayed on screen, and candidates respond using mouse clicks. The Committee was informed that in the process, QPs are encrypted and electronically distributed to the examination delivery infrastructure under strict access control at or near the time of examination, eliminating the physical distribution chain, which reduces the possibility of malpractices. Post-examination, Computer-Based Testing response files are securely retrieved from the delivery infrastructure. After examinations, results are processed and declared within days. In this regard, the Committee notes that CBT is already the standard for JEE (Main), CUET, UGC-NET, CSIR-NET, and most other NTA examinations.

7.5 In both modes, Centres are run under biometric authentication of candidates, AI-monitored CCTV surveillance, jammer and metal-detector deployment, and supervision by Centre Superintendents, City Coordinators & NTA Observers, with State Govt & district administrations providing law & order and centre-readiness support. Also, each stage during the examination is subject to independent audit, and the SOP is reviewed periodically in light of operational experience and emerging risks.

7.6 The Committee was also informed that all the experts and translators engaged by the NTA have to mandatorily sign Confidentiality and Undertaking Certificate, affirming that: They are not, either directly or indirectly, associated with any coaching centre or similar institution; None of their close relatives are appearing in the examination conducted by NTA; & they agree to abide by all other terms and conditions stipulated by the NTA.

7.7 A comparative analysis of both the patterns of examinations between the years 2019-2025 is as under:

Table 8

Key Statistics (2019-2025)

Examination Mode	**Examinations Conducted**	**Total Registrations**
Pen-and-Paper (PPT) Mode	20	1.6 crore+
Computer-Based Test (CBT) Mode	250	5 crore+
Total	270	6.6 crore+

Table 9

A Comparative Analysis

Dimension	Pen & Paper	CBT
Security weak point	Involvement of large number of Individuals	Cyber breach
Infrastructure need	Low - any exam hall	High - terminals, servers, network
Reach in remote areas	Easily Doable	Extra efforts needed
Result speed	Slower (OMR scanning)	Faster (digital capture)
Sessions	Single common paper	Multi-shift + normalisation
Paper Leak Risk	High Physical paper can be intercepted at any point in supply chain	Low Paper delivery encrypted
Question Variety	Limited to MCQs in practice	Supports varied question types; foundation for adaptive learning

7.8 Arguments in favour of staying with PPT:

- The argument for PPT is the existence of proven, leak-proof models. UPSC Civil Services examinations have been conducted in PPT mode for decades with a strong security record. The Committee is of the view that NTA, in the meantime, should study these models closely.

- In NEET (UG) 2026, 22+ lakh candidates had registered for writing the examination. Accordingly, conducting an examination in CBT mode for 22+ lakh examinees would require multiple sessions spread over days or weeks that require complex and disputed normalisation across sessions.

- A significant proportion of NEET candidates come from rural and low-income backgrounds or from government schools where computer literacy may be limited. Therefore, a sudden shift to CBT mode examination risks disadvantaging candidates from rural and low-income backgrounds or from government schools where computer literacy is not popular.
- CBT security is not foolproof either. Server breaches, impersonation at centers, and remote hacking are all documented risks. The Committee notes that 'difficult

to detect' cyber-attacks on CBT systems may actually be harder to investigate and prosecute than physical paper leaks.

7.9 Arguments in favour of adopting the CBT System:

- The physical supply chain of PPT system including printing, packing, transport, storage creates multiple opportunities for leakage and malpractices. On the other hand, digital delivery eliminates this chain and reduces the risk of leakage and malpractices.

- CBT system enables the creation of a large, secure question bank with thousands of questions, making it exponentially harder to leak the specific questions that will appear in any given examination and reduces the risk of leakage and malpractices.

- CBT system provides the foundation for Computer Adaptive Testing, which can provide more accurate assessment of a candidate’s ability by adjusting question difficulty to the candidate's performance level.

- CBT system results can be processed and declared quickly, eliminating the delays and issues associated with OMR scanning.

- JEE (Main) examination has been successfully conducted in CBT mode in multiple sessions since 2019, demonstrating that computer-based testing at scale is feasible and very much doable.

CHAPTER 8
PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS (PREVENTION OF UNFAIR MEANS) ACT, 2024

8.1 Background:

The Committee was informed by the Department of Higher Education and the NTA that repeated incidents of paper irregularities, impersonation, and other forms of malpractice in public examinations made clear that India needed a strong, dedicated legal framework to deter and punish examination fraud. Existing provisions under the Indian Penal Code (now *Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita*) were not sufficient and they were not specifically tailored to examination offences, carried relatively modest penalties, and did not address the organised criminal networks that orchestrate large-scale paper leaks.

8.2 The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 was enacted by Parliament to address the problems of examination offences. It came into force with effect from 21st June 2024, and the Rules under the Act were notified on 23rd June 2024.

8.3 Key Features of the Act:

8.3.1 Coverage

The Act covers public examinations conducted by specified Central examination authorities listed in its Schedule. Other authorities covered under the Act include UPSC, SSC, Railway Recruitment Boards, and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). The National Testing Agency is explicitly listed as a Public Examination Authority under the Act, bringing all examinations conducted by it within the Act's purview.

8.3.2 Offences Covered

The Act covers a wide range of unfair means, including:

- Leakage of question papers
- Possession of question papers or answer keys before the examination
- Impersonation of candidates
- Tampering with answer sheets or OMR sheets
- Use of electronic devices, communication equipment, or other prohibited materials
- Threatening or restraining candidates or examination officials
- Organised conspiracy to commit any of the above
- Using a service provider or third party to commit any of the above

8.3.3 Penalties

The Act provides for stringent penalties which are as under:

- For basic offences: imprisonment of 3 to 5 years and a fine of up to Rs. 10 lakhs.
- For organised crime or large-scale conspiracy: imprisonment of 5 to 10 years and a fine of up to Rs. 1 crore.

- For service providers found guilty: cancellation of contracts and a ban from participating in public examinations for up to 4 years, in addition to financial penalties.
- Property attached to the commission of offences is subject to attachment and forfeiture.

8.3.4 Investigation

The Committee was apprised that offences under the Act are cognisable and non-bailable. The Act mandates that investigations be concluded within 60 days of registration of the First Information Report (FIR). This time-bound provision is intended to prevent the lengthy delays in investigation that have characterised past examination fraud cases including the delayed arrest and premature bail of the alleged mastermind in the NEET (UG) 2024 paper leak case. The Committee was further informed about the number of FIRs lodged under the Public Examinations Act 2024, which is given as below:

Table 10

Sl. No.	Name of Examination	2024	2025	2026
1.	CSIR UGC-NET	-	1	-
2.	JEE (Main)	-	-	3
3.	NEET (UG)	14	1	-

8.3.5 Amendment

The Committee notes the amendments to the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act 2024 passed by the Indian Parliament in July 2026. The amendments increase the minimum jail term for convicted individuals (from 3 years to 5 years), with a minimum 7-year term (with a maximum of 10 year terms) for organized syndicates. It also increases the maximum fines payable for service providers from Rs 1 crore to Rs 5 crores and for individuals from Rs. 10 lakh to Rs 50 lakh. It also mandates the creation of special fast track courts to prosecute paper leaks and other unfair means. The amendments envisage investigation within two months, and the judicial proceedings to be concluded within three months of the filing of the chargesheet.

8.4 The Committee is of the view that the provisions of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 should be implemented proactively not just to prosecute offences after they occur, but to deter and discourage them. Therefore, this requires active surveillance, intelligence-sharing between NTA and law enforcement departments, and early interdiction of organised networks. The Committee is of the view that NTA should report annually to Parliament on the number of cases registered, investigated, and prosecuted under the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 Act.

CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSION

9.1 The National Testing Agency (NTA) bears unique and critical responsibilities in India's education architecture. Every year, it makes decisions that shape the future of millions of young people and their families. The trust that students and parents place in NTA is not merely an administrative concern but a trust that the examination they are sitting is fair, secure, and meritocratic. It is a matter of social justice and national integrity.

9.2 The Committee also recognises that NTA has made progress since the 2024 paper irregularities. The institutional linkages with State governments, the Aadhaar-based biometric authentication, the CCTV monitoring with AI analysis, the mobile jammers, and the government-only examination centers are improvements.

9.3 However, the cancellation of NEET (UG) 2026 implies that further improvement is necessary. On the contrary, the organised networks that profit from examination fraud are adaptive and resourceful, who will always seek the weakest link in the chain. The NTA therefore needs adequate staff, robust security protocols, clear accountability mechanisms, and digitalization of operations and examinations to ensure that it stays ahead of any challenges.

9.4 The Committee is aware of the creation of High-Powered Task Force under the Chairmanship of Shri Nandan Nilekani to overhaul the National Testing Agency (NTA) and reforming public examinations.

9.5 The student community in this country deserves an examination system that is fair, secure, transparent, and worthy of the effort they invest. Delivering that is NTA's fundamental obligation and the Committee supports that through its constitutional mandate of oversight and accountability.

CHAPTER 10
OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee examined the documents placed before it by the Ministry of Education (Department of Higher Education), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and the National Testing Agency (NTA) along with the findings of the High-Level Committee of Experts (HLCE) chaired by Dr. K. Radhakrishnan on the subject. On the basis of this examination, the Committee is of the view that a fair and secure national examination system is achievable. The observations and recommendations of the Committee are as under:

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, AIIMSs, 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:

i. **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.**

ii. **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.**

iii. **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.**

iv. **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.**

v. **The Ministry of Education may consider including CBT-based exams at the school level as well, to build familiarity with digital testing among students.**

vi. **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.**

vii. **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.**

viii. **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:

i. **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.**

ii. **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 prof1essionals 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.

10.18 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.

10.19 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.

10.20 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.

10.21 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.

10.22 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.

10.23 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.

10.24 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.

10.25 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.

10.26 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.

10.27 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."

10.28 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.

10.29 The Committee also recommends a secure channel for receipt of information and grievance redressal related to all aspects of examination.

10.30 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.

10.31 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.