

The allegations over NEET-UG 2024 | Explained

Why has the Union government told the Supreme Court that it will cancel the score cards of candidates who have been awarded grace marks? How did the National Testing Agency respond to the various charges against the conduct of the exams?

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Several student groups protesting at freedom park against alleged irregularities in NEET-UG, 2024, in Bengaluru on June 11. | Photo Credit: MURALI KUMAR. K

The story so far: On June 13, the Union government submitted to the Supreme Court that the score cards of 1,563 candidates who were given compensatory marks in the common undergraduate medical entrance examination, NEET-UG 2024, held on May 5, will be cancelled. Another test will be held for them, likely on June 23. Results would be out by June 30 and the counselling for seats can begin by July 6. These candidates will be informed of the actual score, without the grace marks, and they can choose to take another test. If they opt not to sit for the re-test, their scores, without the grace marks will be the final score.

What happened?

The court was hearing petitions challenging the award of grace marks to the 1,563 candidates from six NEET centres in the country, using a “normalisation formula”, on the grounds that they were not allowed the full period of 3.2 hours to write the exam, due to technical issues. Based on a Court order, the compensatory marks were awarded to these candidates on the recommendation of a committee constituted by the National Testing Agency (NTA), the body which conducts NEET. It was charged that the grant of grace marks was arbitrary and not transparent.

What are charges against NEET 2024?

In NEET, students have to answer 180 questions, (MCQ type), totalling 720 marks. For every right answer, the student will score four marks, with one mark deducted for a wrong answer. Hence, only certain marks can be scored by candidates. It was the grace marks that caused confusion, the NTA admitted.

However, this is not the only charge or case in court against NEET 2024. This year there has been a **litany of charges that go beyond a question paper leak**, including the slow distribution of question papers; providing the wrong question paper; wrong OMR sheets; and technical delays.

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Post evaluation, there have been complaints about the unusually high number of students (67) who hit the perfect score, 720/720, and about students who scored “statistically impossible” marks, while some cases of cheating by proxy were also unearthed. Other cases pertaining to the question paper leak are still to be heard by the Supreme Court.

In the past, the exam has been dogged by charges of poor organisation and inadequate planning, besides inconsiderate rules on what candidates are allowed to wear to the exam hall.

All these charges sparked protests from students and political parties across the country. Political parties called for a fair investigation of the charges and called on the government to conduct a fresh NEET exam. Students had the same demand, to re-conduct the test, on the grounds that the **question paper leak** had facilitated some students scoring full marks, or, giving them an unfair advantage. Experts and students

pointed to how the very idea of starting NEET as a common entrance exam to regulate medical admissions in the country and ensure quality-control of the process would be defeated in the light of all the reported violations.

In response, the **NTA had appointed a four-member committee to go into allegations** made against the conduct of the NEET exam in 2024. This panel's recommendations have now found their way into the court also.

What was the NTA's response?

NTA officials attributed an 'easy paper' to the unusual number of full scores this year. But the NTA still constituted a four-member committee to go into the truth behind the allegations made this year. The panel found that the compensatory marks awarded to the 1,563 students, resulted in a "skewed situation". Grace marks had to be limited to the attempted questions alone, and while the panel did not comment further on how many marks were granted in compensation, it concluded that it would be best to cancel the test for these students alone.

What next?

Students and education experts have already expressed dissatisfaction with the cancellation of the exam only for a few students. Arguing that if the exam can be cancelled for 1,500 students, then that is an admission of error and therefore, they claim that the logical thing would be to cancel the May 5 exam for all candidates and conduct a re-test. It indicates a failure of the system and loss of faith, students complained on social media.

Instead of rendering the pitch even, as a measure of ensuring the quality of candidates entering the medical profession, the way NEET is being conducted has created several additional layers of privilege. For an exam of its size and scale, where over 23 lakh students take the test in about 4,500 centres across the country, in multiple languages, small issues may crop up.

However, the test has been around for nearly a decade, and it is reasonable to assume that its teething troubles are over. Preventing fraud and application of mind (on the part of the invigilators to give extra time to students who did not have adequate time) should be eminently possible, certainly by the government agencies.