

# Business Standard

## What is NTA: The testing agency facing scrutiny over NEET-UG, UGC-NET exams

*The National Testing Agency was established in 2017 to oversee key entrance examinations for government and private higher education institutes, including medical, engineering, management, and more*

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UGC-NET Exam, NTA

The National Testing Agency (NTA) is presently under intense scrutiny due to alleged irregularities in its recent competitive examinations. Amid controversies surrounding the NEET-UG and UGC-NET exams, the NTA has experienced a change in leadership, and a high-level panel is currently reviewing its operations.

Here is a closer look at the testing agency.

### What is the NTA?

The National Testing Agency, or NTA, was established as an autonomous, self-sustained testing organisation dedicated to conducting entrance examinations for admission and fellowship in higher educational institutions in India. It aims to address the challenges of assessing candidates' competence by adhering to international standards, ensuring efficiency, transparency, and error-free delivery.

The aim of the institute was to do the following:

- Conducting efficient and transparent tests
- Research and development
- Expert collaboration
- Information dissemination

## Why and when was the NTA formed?

In 2010, a committee comprising directors of Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) recommended establishing the NTA through legislation to ensure its autonomy and transparency, modelled after the Educational Testing Service (ETS) of the United States. The formal announcement of the NTA's establishment came in 2017, followed by cabinet approval.

The NTA was set up in 2017 as an autonomous and self-sustained organisation under the Ministry of Education (previously known as the HRD Ministry). It is registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, and falls under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

Prior to the NTA's formation, various government bodies like the University Grants Commission (UGC), the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), and central universities such as Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) conducted their own entrance examinations.

## What examinations are conducted by the NTA?

**Joint Entrance Examination (Main) [JEE (Main)]:** This exam is conducted for admission to undergraduate engineering programs at National Institutes of Technology (NITs), Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs), and other centrally funded technical institutions. It is also the qualifying exam for JEE (Advanced), which is required for admission to the IITs.

**National Eligibility cum Entrance Test-Undergraduate (NEET-UG):** This is the entrance examination for admission to undergraduate medical and dental courses (MBBS/BDS) in government and private medical colleges in India.

**Common Management Admission Test (CMAT):** This exam is conducted for admission to management programmes (MBA/ PGDM) in various colleges and institutions across India.

**Graduate Pharmacy Aptitude Test (GPAT):** This is the entrance examination for admission to postgraduate pharmacy programmes (M Pharm) in institutions across India.

**University Grants Commission-National Eligibility Test (UGC-NET):** This test determines the eligibility for the role of assistant professor and the award of Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) in Indian universities and colleges. It is a qualifying exam for securing teaching positions and research grants.

## Who runs the NTA?

Vineet Joshi was appointed as the first Director General of the NTA. His successor, Subodh Kumar Singh, was recently removed from the post.

The core team of the NTA consists of test item writers, researchers, psychometricians, and education specialists.

The NTA operates six verticals, each focusing on different examinations. Each vertical employs about six researchers, including internationally recognised experts in psychometrics and statistics. Additionally, the NTA liaises with various state governments, universities, state education boards, and other educational bodies like UGC, AIU, NCTE, NCERT, CBSE, CISCE, and NIOS.

## NEET exam irregularities

The NTA faced severe criticism after it awarded grace marks to 1,563 candidates in the NEET exam due to delays at seven examination centres. This decision led to accusations of inflated marks, culminating in a record 67 candidates sharing the top rank. Legal challenges were filed in the Supreme Court, prompting the NTA to withdraw the grace marks and conduct a retest for the affected candidates.

The integrity of the NEET-UG was further compromised when the exam question paper was allegedly leaked, according to an investigation by the Bihar Police. Similarly, the **UGC-NET exam** was cancelled a day after being conducted, following reports that its integrity had been breached. The Education Ministry later confirmed that the exam paper had been leaked on the darknet. As a precaution, the CSIR UGC-NET exam was also postponed.

The NTA has faced scrutiny before, notably after technical glitches during the first edition of the Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-UG.

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