

When will CUET admission process begin?

Who is eligible to take the Common University Entrance Test? What are some challenges to UGC's proposal?

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The story so far: On Monday, the University Grants Commission (UGC) made it mandatory for all 45 Central universities to admit students to undergraduate programmes from 2022-23 based on scores obtained in the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA).

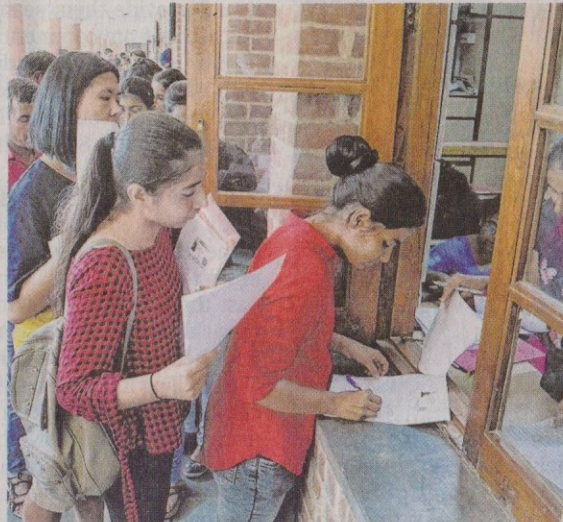
What is the CUET and who will use it?

■ The CUET is a computer-based test that will be conducted by the NTA in the first week of July based on the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) syllabus for Class 12. All admissions into undergraduate courses at Central universities funded by UGC will mandatorily be based on CUET scores from 2022-23, replacing institution-specific entrance examinations or the ranking policy using Class 12 scores for admission. Other universities – whether State-owned, private or deemed – are also free to use CUET scores for their own admissions as well. Technical courses already using the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) are exempt, but skill-based professional courses like Music, Art, Theatre and Fine Arts can use a combination of the CUET score along with an interview or practical test, the UGC said.

CUET scores will be needed for admission to general category as well as reserved seats, but each university's reservation policy or seat quota for local students will not be changed. Class 12 board examination scores can still be used as a minimum qualifying mark, depending on the policies of individual universities. Application forms will be available on the NTA website from the first week of April.

What is the need for a common entrance test?

■ The National Education Policy, 2020 proposed a common university entrance test as a way of ensuring uniform quality while reducing the cost and efforts of all stakeholders. "The high quality, range, and flexibility of the NTA testing services will enable most universities to use these common entrance exams – rather than having hundreds of universities each devising their own entrance exams – thereby drastically reducing the burden on students, universities and colleges, and the entire



In anticipation: The UGC claims its common university entrance test will ensure uniform quality. ■ FILE PHOTO

education system," it said. UGC chairman M. Jagadesh Kumar added that CUET would provide an equal opportunity to students from across the country that seek admission from different boards, especially those from remote and rural areas. Since students will not have to sit for multiple entrance examinations, it will also cut their financial costs. In 2019-20, according to the All India Survey on Higher Education, undergraduate courses in Central universities saw an enrolment of 5,40,270 students.

Why are some people opposed to CUET?

■ One of the major complaints about mass entrance examinations such as JEE or NEET is that they spur a large-scale coaching industry. "Admission through CUET will make the terrain even more unequal. Such a filter will result in an additional expenditure of parents and students towards coaching and therefore, marginalise those coming from disadvantageous backgrounds," said a dissent note from some members of the Delhi University's Academic Council who opposed the decision to use CUET.

They pointed to the Madras High Court's recent observations that NEET has only benefited students who

spend lakhs of rupees on coaching classes, putting rural students at a disadvantage. They also warned that CUET would curb the autonomy and unique characteristics of universities.

The other worry is CUET's impact on school education. "Already, entrance tests like JEE and NEET encourage students to enrol in coaching centres and totally disregard their Class 11 and 12 classes. CUET's impact will be similar, on a much vaster scale," warned former NCERT director Krishna Kumar.

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"Entrance tests in this country have really badly designed questions, which do not assess a student's understanding or creativity. They use only multiple choice questions, so there is none of the space for expression allowed in board exams. The coaching industry prepares students simply by drilling them over and over," added Prof. Kumar, adding that it would take at least a year to prepare, test and validate questions for a high quality test. He

also dismissed the stereotype of Class 12 board examinations which only encourage rote memorisation, saying that the CBSE as well as some State boards have undertaken examination reforms.

What is the format?

■ The test will be conducted in two shifts. The compulsory first section will be conducted in 13 languages – Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Urdu, Assamese, Bengali, Punjabi, Odia and English. Section 2 will offer 27 domain-specific subjects, of which a candidate can choose up to six, depending on the specific undergraduate programmes they are applying for.

For instance, an applicant for a BA Economics programme would have to sit for the economics paper. The optional third section will be an aptitude test, which universities could require for their applicants.