

Entrance test for central univs: how, why

The government has announced a common entrance test across central universities. Why was the need felt, and what will be the format of the exam?

SAKSHI SAROHA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

ON MONDAY, the University Grants Commission (UGC) announced the introduction of the Central University Entrance Test (CUET), which is now mandatory for undergraduate admission at any of the 45 central universities in the country.

Why a common entrance test?

Several governments, over the years, have made attempts to replace multiple entrance tests with a single one to reduce the burden on higher education aspirants. In fact, even CUET is not new. It had been launched as the Central Universities Common Entrance Test (CUCET) in 2010 under the UPA-II government, but had failed to gather steam since only 14 central universities had adopted it until last year.

CUET is a revamped version of CUCET and it's now compulsory for all 45 central universities to adopt it. This has come after the announcement of the new National Education Policy (NEP), which advocates the need for an entrance test for university admissions.

What does this mean for undergraduate admissions at a reputable central university such as, say, Delhi University?

As far as Delhi University is concerned, sky-high cut-off marks will now be history. A student's Board marks will have no role in determining her admission to a college or a programme. It will be based only on her CUET score. At best, colleges affiliated to Delhi University — or any central university for that matter — can use Board marks as the minimum eligibility criteria for admission.

For skill-based courses that have major practical components, such as music, painting, sculpture and theatre, universities will be allowed to conduct practical exams or interviews along with CUET. For professional programmes such as engineering and MBBS, central universities will admit through the entrance exams JEE (Main) and NEET respectively.

Why did the government decide against giving weightage to students' performance in Class 12 Board exams?

The government did not favour using Board marks for admission because of the "diversity" in evaluation methods adopted by different Boards. "Some Boards are more generous than

others in marking and this gives their students an unfair advantage over others," said a government official who spoke on anonymity.

So, who will conduct CUET and when?

The National Testing Agency (NTA), which conducts entrance tests such as JEE (Main) and UGC-NET, will also conduct CUET for all central universities in the first week of July. It is a computer-based test that will be held in two shifts and can be taken in 13 languages — Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Tamil, Telegu, Kannada, Malayalam, Urdu, Assamese, Bengali, Punjabi, Odia and English. However, it's not clear whether CUET will be conducted on a single day or multiple days.

The application window for the examination will open in the first week of April. But unlike JEE (Main), there will be no common counselling for admission to central universities based on the CUET score. Each university is free to define its admission process based on the merit list prepared by the NTA. However, UGC chairman M Jagadesh Kumar did not rule out joint counselling in future.

What will CUET test a candidate on?

The UGC chairman said that the three-

and-a-half-hour computer-based entrance test will only have multiple choice questions based on the content of NCERT textbooks. CUET will essentially have three parts.

The first part will test a candidate on a language of her choice. This will consist reading comprehension, questions on vocabulary, synonyms and antonyms, besides other things. There will be a choice of 13 languages. Apart from compulsorily appearing for one language test (out of 13 languages), a candidate will also have the option of taking another test in an additional language from a basket of 19 — French, Spanish, German, Nepali, Persian, Italian, Arabic, Sindhi, Kashmiri, Konkani, Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, Manipuri, Santhali, Tibetan, Japanese, Russian and Chinese.

The second part of CUET is focused on testing a candidate's domain-specific knowledge. This section offers a total of 27 domains, and a candidate can choose to have her knowledge tested in at least one and a maximum of six domains. Each central university will specify which domain-specific test a candidate has to take for which programme.

The 27 domains on offer in the second part of CUET are Accountancy/ Book Keeping,

Biology/ Biological Studies/ Biotechnology, Business Studies, Chemistry, Computer Science/ Informatics Practices, Economics/ Business Economics, Engineering Graphics, Entrepreneurship, Geography, History, Home Science, Knowledge Tradition-Practices India, Legal Studies, Commercial Arts, Mathematics, Physical Education/ NCC, Physics, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, Teaching Aptitude, Agriculture, Mass Media/ Mass Communication, Anthropology, Fine Arts/ Visual Arts (Sculpture/ Painting), Performing Arts and Sanskrit.

The third part of the entrance test will be a general test with questions on general knowledge, current affairs, general mental ability, numerical ability, quantitative reasoning (simple, application of basic mathematical concepts arithmetic/algebra geometry/mensuration/stat taught till class 8), logical and analytical reasoning. A candidate will appear for the general test only if it's desired by the programme and university of choice.

Apart from the compulsory language test, a candidate's participation in the domain-specific part of CUET and the general test will depend on whether a central university

wants it for the programme she is applying for. For instance, a university may ask a student to only appear for the language and general tests for admission to a programme. For another programme, it may ask for the candidate's score in the compulsory language test and a domain-specific test. The aspirant will have to first check a programme's requirements and appear for a combination of domain-specific tests, language test and general test (if required), accordingly.

Why is CUET only limited to central universities?

At this moment, CUET is compulsory for central universities but the government is open to other institutions, including private universities, adopting this examination instead of conducting their own.

What about postgraduate admissions in central universities?

Unlike undergraduate studies, conducting admissions to postgraduate programmes through CUET is not compulsory for central universities. Therefore, they are free to adopt CUET for PG admissions or stick to their own admission process for now.