

# How to make CUET a success

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By replacing multiple entrance exams with a single-window CUET, students can now concentrate their energy and attention on one exam, thus reducing mental stress and enabling them to perform better. (Express File Photo)

**Written by Shilpi Banerjee**

The dilemma between exit and entry exams is a perennial issue in the Indian education system. It leads to multiple problems including teaching to the test, perpetuating inequality, and causing undue stress and anxiety. This dilemma is further exacerbated when students are compelled to prepare and appear for multiple entrance examinations while exploring admission opportunities in various universities across the country. The introduction of the Common University Entrance Test (CUET), then, is seen as a silver bullet to resolve this issue. The CUET 2024 is scheduled from May 15-31 and aims to establish a common entrance examination for undergraduate and postgraduate admissions in all central universities and affiliated colleges.

By replacing multiple entrance exams with a single-window CUET, students can now concentrate their energy and attention on one exam, thus reducing mental stress and enabling them to perform better. Furthermore, the CUET intends to provide equal opportunities to students from diverse backgrounds, including rural and urban areas, as well as students from national, international, and state boards by providing better access to higher educational institutes.

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This ensures standardisation and fairness in the selection process for higher education. However, the CUET also poses a potential threat to the higher education system. It may add to the already rampant coaching class culture and dummy schools in the country. Students from privileged and urban backgrounds who have access to coaching centres and dummy schools may have an advantage in terms of exam preparation and familiarity with the exam format, resulting in higher success rates. On the other hand, students from marginalised backgrounds who cannot afford coaching may be at a disadvantage. Similar to other entrance exams like the IIT-JEE and NEET, CUET too will face the challenge of inclusivity due to an uneven social structure and the digital divide in India.

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Additionally, since the CUET is a multiple-choice question (MCQ) exam, it may have limitations in terms of the types of competencies that can be assessed. This may influence the teaching-learning process, with teachers prioritising what will be tested in the exam over focusing on the core material of subjects. In such a scenario, the educational focus may shift from being holistic and well-rounded to solely preparing students for an objective exam, which inherently has a limited scope for creativity and expression.

An advertisement for 'UPSC Essentials' magazine. On the left, a spiral-bound notebook with a red cover has the text 'Prepare for UPSC prelims with the Express Edge.' written on it. In the center, the text 'Now get with monthly UPSC Essentials magazine' is displayed. To the right, there is a smartphone showing a mobile app interface. Further right is a red button with the white text 'BUY NOW'. A small red logo is visible in the top left corner of the ad area.

Also Read | Common University Entrance Test: How many students will it impact, and in which courses? Most importantly, in a country as diverse as India, each state possesses unique social, cultural, and political characteristics that also influence the learning process. Different state boards consider this when designing curricula, textbooks, and examination systems. But given the diversity of state board curricula, students from such boards may find themselves at a disadvantage. It may be unfair to evaluate their learning using a single benchmark like CUET, which is based on a national-level curriculum.

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So far in India, central universities have had autonomy in matters related to their administration, academic decision-making, curriculum design, admissions, faculty appointments, and overall functioning. Since every state university offers specialisation in a variety of courses, these universities were earlier given absolute autonomy in designing selection tests for their courses by taking into account the desired prerequisite knowledge, skills and dispositions for each of the courses. Thus, the move towards a centralised single-window entrance to the higher education world undermines the crucial role of ensuring equity in the process of designing selection tests.

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CUET has been introduced to address grave issues within the education system, and it can only be successful if certain larger principles and quality considerations are kept in mind. Key stakeholders, including teachers across the country, practitioners working in the area of education and policymakers,

should be involved in the design and review of the examination. This collaborative approach will ensure a more comprehensive and well-informed assessment that will accommodate the diversity of state board curricula.

Also, each of these stakeholders should be well-informed about subject-specific competencies. The classroom pedagogy and assessment need to be well-aligned with subject-specific competencies, equipping students to critically apply their subject knowledge as required, irrespective of the examination format — and without requiring additional coaching to perform well in the CUET entrance examination. In conclusion, the implementation of the CUET must be carefully navigated to mitigate potential challenges by engaging all stakeholders in the design and review process, prioritising subject-specific competencies, and ensuring alignment with diverse state board curricula.

***The writer is faculty, Azim Premji University. Views are personal***

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