

Widening the Scope of National Testing Agency (NTA)

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Abstract

“The National Testing Agency (NTA) will work to offer a high-quality common aptitude test, as well as specialised common subject exams in the sciences, humanities, languages, arts, and vocational subjects, at least twice every year. It will serve as a premier, expert, autonomous testing organisation to conduct entrance examinations for undergraduate and graduate admissions and fellowships in higher educational institutions” (National Education policy, 2020 (P.54)). The assessment and evaluation is done for different purposes including shortlisting the candidate for admissions. It is essential to shortlist the best students from the bulk of applicants for the purpose of admission of the most deserving students in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). NTA, an autonomous body, has been created by the Government of India for the purpose of conducting examinations or tests for admission and for professional certification. At present, the responsibility of the agency is to conduct centralised testing for admission to various courses offered by the HEIs. International experiences demonstrate that centralisation of examinations help nations in improving the overall performance of education. This paper attempts to analyse different international experiences and suggest pathways to enhance the scope of NTA and also make it a statutory body that will provide teeth to it in terms of providing it financial and administrative autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

The roots of NTA can be traced back to the Programme of Action, 1992 for the National Policy on Education

1986. It mentions that ‘A National Testing Service will be established and developed as a quality control mechanism to organise nationwide

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tests on a voluntary basis so that the norms can be evolved for comparability of performance and for conducting independent tests. In 2010, a committee was constituted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) for setting up of NTA under the Chairmanship of Professor D. Acharya of IIT Kharagpur. This committee was responsible for exploring the possible alternatives to the then IIT-JEE, AIEEE and other State Joint Entrance Examinations for admission to the nationwide engineering programmes. The major decision of the committee was that 'A NTA is to be created by an Act of Parliament. Only a statutory agency can ensure independence and transparency in testing of the magnitude that is being envisaged. It will have the necessary credibility and acquire confidence of the people.' (Ramasami, 2010) Following the recommendation of the 61st Central Advisory Board on Education in the year 2013, wherein it was decided that 'the proposal to set up the NTA will be taken forward in consultation with all the stakeholders (MHRD, 2015)', MHRD constituted a seven member task force under the Chairmanship of Professor Sanjay Dhande, for preparing a blueprint to create a Special Purpose Vehicle for taking forward the concept of NTA. Thereafter, an announcement about the establishment of NTA was made by the Finance Minister in the budget speech of 2017. A cabinet decision in November 2017 resulted in the creation of NTA as a

society registered under the Indian Societies Registration Act, 1860, as an autonomous and self-sustained premier testing organisation to conduct entrance examinations for higher educational institutions.

ABOUT NTA

NTA was established as a premier, specialist, autonomous and self-sustaining organisation with the aim to conduct entrance examinations for admission or fellowship in HEIs. The NTA has been entrusted the job of assessment of competence of the candidates to make them eligible for future recruitment in schools as well as HEIs. The agency has the objectives of undertaking research on the educational and professional testing systems and disseminating the information thus generated for the improvement of the education system. For the purpose of conducting the examination, the agency—

- (i) identifies partner institutions having adequate infrastructure amidst the existing schools and HEIs;
- (ii) uses updated techniques and blueprints for the purpose of formulation of question banks for all the subjects;
- (iii) establishes a system of strengthened R&D culture, and creates a pool of experts for taking care of all the aspects of testing; and
- (iv) supports colleges and universities for their own capacity building in testing. Further, the agency is committed to provide quality testing services to the academic institutions of India with the utilisation of domestic and international expertise. It will

also undertake other examinations entrusted to it by the Ministries or Departments of the Government of India, State Governments and UTs. The agency also intends to undertake reforms and training of school boards and other bodies where the testing standards (board examinations) are comparable with the entrance examinations.

Main Examinations conducted by NTA

Initially the entrance examinations conducted by NTA were— (i) JEE (Mains); (ii) NEET-UG; (iii) CMAT; (iv) GPAT; and (v) UGC-NET. In addition to the above entrance examinations, Jawaharlal Nehru University Entrance Examination (JNUEE), IGNOU Entrance Examination and CSIR-NET and UGC-NET for assessment for fellowship and lectureship, and Delhi University Entrance Test (DUET) 2019 were also conducted by NTA besides some other examinations.

National admission and certification examinations conducted by agencies other than NTA

The IIT Council conducts examinations for JEE Advanced; Joint Admission Test (JAM) for M.Sc., Ph.D. and Post B.Sc. programmes, Common Entrance Examination for Design (CEED), admission to Master of Design (MDes) and Ph.D. in Design in IISC, Bangalore and in IITs. Similarly, the Indian Institute of Sciences (IISc) of Bangalore, and Indian Institutes of Technology at

Bombay, Delhi, Guwahati, Kanpur, Kharagpur, Madras and Roorkee, jointly administer GATE. The Humanities and Social Sciences Entrance Examination (HSEE) is a national level entrance test conducted annually by the Indian Institute of Technology for admission to the Masters and Ph.D. integrated course programme offered by the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS).

The National Board of Examinations (NBE) conducts NEET-SS (Super Specialist), NEET-PG (Post Graduation), NEET-MDS (Master of Dental Surgery), etc., NEET National Eligibility Test for admission to post graduate courses in Medical Sciences. National Entrance Screening Test (NEST) conducts entrance test for admission to 5-year Integrated M.Sc. Programme in basic sciences, Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics and Physics at National Institute of Science Education and Research (NISER), Bhubaneswar and University of Mumbai – Department of Atomic Energy Centre for Excellence in Basic Sciences (UM-DAE CEBS), Mumbai. Central University Common Entrance Test (CUCET) conducts examinations for admissions in UG and PG. A total of 15 Central Universities took part in that examination in 2019. More than thirty-five remaining Central Universities possess their own provisions of screening the students for admissions. Common Entrance Examination (CEE) of NCERT conducts examination for admission to a variety of courses,

such as integrated B.Sc. B.Ed. and M.Sc. M. Ed. and B.A. B.Ed., B.Ed., M.Ed. and B.Ed. M.Ed. admissions in Regional Institutes of Education (RIEs), Bhubaneswar, Ajmer, Bhopal, Mysore and Shillong and in Prarambh School, Jhajjar. The CEE for the year 2018-19 was conducted by RIE-Ajmer, and for the year 2019-20, it was conducted by RIE Mysore.

Bar Council of India (BCI) is the exam conducting authority for All India Bar Examination (AIBE). BCI conducts AIBE to evaluate law graduates for the required aptitude for practicing law in the country. AIBE came into existence in 2010 through a notification passed by the Legal Education Committee and BCI regarding this examination.

The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) conducts examination for UGC-NET in Chemical Sciences; Physical Sciences; Life Sciences; Mathematical Sciences; Earth, Atmospheric, Ocean and Planetary Sciences. Online applications for JRF/NET are invited twice a year on all India basis through press notification. However, the examination in December 2019 onwards has been conducted by the NTA. The Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) conducts the All India Entrance Examinations to fill 15 per cent admission for UG programme (AIEEA-UG) seats in State Universities and 100 per cent seats in NDRI, Karnal, Haryana, and two other Central Universities (RLB CAU Jhansi and Dr. RP, CAU, Pusa). The CAR also conduct AIEE-PG for 25 per cent seats for PG admissions with

15 per cent of seats in State Agricultural Universities and 100 per cent ICAR Deemed-to-be and Central Universities. However, the examination was conducted by NTA from 2019 onwards. All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and Jawaharlal Nehru Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research conduct their own examinations for admission in their institution or for various degrees and diploma programmes offered in medical and allied subjects. However, from the year 2020, the AIIMS and JIPMER (Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research) has started taking students for MBBS Course based on the NEET scores which is conducted by NTA. Apart from the National level examinations, all the State and deemed-to-be-Universities of centre and state conduct their own admission entrance examinations.

Critical observation of NTA

Establishment of NTA is seen as a great achievement of the Government of India which will be a milestone in bringing revolution in improving the quality of education. A long pending dream of NPE 1986- POA 1992 could only be realised by the creation of NTA. However, there is a need to bring some changes in the NTA for transforming it into a more specialised and powerful body for conducting admission tests in HEIs across the country. Further, it can also conduct professional examinations for supplying quality workforce to our system.

If we critically examine the creation of NTA, then it has been observed that the NTA was created by the Union Cabinet's decision. It is not a statutory body. Larger autonomy and powers can be conferred upon this agency if it becomes a statutory organisation by enacting an Act of the Parliament as envisioned by the Task Force chaired by Professor Sanjay Dhande. Also currently, there are no provisions to establish regional offices of the agency. Pan-India control of conducting admission and professional certification examination for millions of students by a centralised agency is a herculean task. Wings and tentacles are required to be inserted in the agency for better control in a decentralised manner and smooth functioning. This can be ensured only by making it a statutory body. Also at present, the NTA does not have any elaborate procedure, strategy, and capacity for undertaking reforms and training of school boards and other bodies where testing standards are expected to be at par with the entrance examinations for HEIs.

The NTA is an autonomous and financially self-sustained body. As per the Cabinet decision, the agency was given a one-time sanction of ₹ 25 crore by the GoI to start its operation in the first year. Thereafter, it had to be made financially self-sustainable. The agency has even better scope of expansion and more potential in playing a bigger role in terms of becoming financially self-sustained by conducting more Central and State level admissions and

professional certification examinations, and also by playing a professional role in capacity building. The NTA has requisite infrastructure as per its present needs, however for a futuristic vision it has to device its expansion plans. It may attempt to facilitate improvement of evaluation system of school boards, universities and other academic evaluation agencies at different educational levels. Thus, it can become an engine of national growth by improving the quality of education. Further, it may act as a rating or ranking agency for the State Boards, Universities and other HEIs for inculcating an inter-institutional competence for improvement.

One of the functions of NTA is to develop a state-of-the-art culture of testing in India by using domestic and international expertise and collaborating with international organisations. In this regard, this agency has to device suitable strategies for national and international collaborations. The agency may also adopt the best international practices of testing for admission in HEIs and for professional certification. At the central level, several admission examinations are outside the purview of NTA. There is no concrete mechanism of centralisation of all the entrance examinations at different levels of education. This increases the finances to help the students and their parents in troubleshooting the mental issues. Therefore, the agency may chalk out some suitable strategy for making a common uniform examination with

subject specific variations for different levels of education.

Further, the country is in a dire need of having a centralised agency for the purpose of counselling for admission at different levels of education. Therefore, another department within NTA may take care of this process. This method will save energy and money of the students across the country, and eradicate the chronic problem of vacant seats in the HEIs.

Analysis of international practices of entrance examinations

The National College Entrance Examination commonly called 'Gaokao' of China is treated as a standard benchmark for college admissions. The modern College Entrance Examination takes place from 7 June to 9 June every year. Usually, it is conducted in the last year of school. The examination content consists of Chinese, Mathematics, English, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Politics, History and Geography. The evaluation for ranking is done by calculating the overall marks obtained by the student, which is a weighted sum of marks obtained in different subjects. and differ from one province to another on an annual basis. In the year 2006, a total of 9.5 million students applied for entry into the tertiary education, of which 8.8 million (93%) took the national entrance exam. Total 27,600 (0.28%) were exempted due to exceptional or special talent.

In the year 2017, a total of 9.4 million students attended Gaokao, of which 7 million were admitted to

colleges and universities. A total of 9.75 million students attended Gaokao on 7 June and 8 June in 2018.

Similarly, Australia has a centralised system called Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) which is primarily required for entry into most of the undergraduate university programmes in Australia. It was introduced gradually during 2009 and 2010 to replace different examinations, like Universities Admission Index, Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank, Tertiary Entrance Rank and Queensland Core Skill Test. International Student Admission Test (ISAT) is conducted in Australia for admission of international students in Australian higher education system. In Hong Kong, the admission processes differ in different institutes. However, the secondary school students seeking degree level programmes offered by UGC can only apply only through the Joint University programme Admission System.

The Australian practice has been adopted by Japan where there is a 'National Centre Test for University Admissions', which conducts national examination for admission in universities and also a separate examination for foreign students for taking admission in Japanese universities. This is the primary examination conducted by the Centre with the objective of assessing the level of fundamental academic achievement attained by the applicant at their high school stage. Similar primary examination can be conducted by universities where qualified students

can be ranked as per their specific needs. Similarly, other countries have their own common admission entrance systems for filtration of students for admission in their tertiary education system.

Internalisation of International practices of entrance examinations as way forward for long terms goals

The Chinese Gaokao and the Australian ATAR examinations are single window tests for generating a national rank for students for admissions in all the undergraduate courses. This system has reduced unnecessary burden on students for taking multiple examinations for admissions. The NTA in India can also conduct a common examination for ranking students for admission in post-graduation and PG-Ph.D. integrated Course in different streams. The framework for the same may be prepared after having wider consultations by NTA involving UGC, CUs (Central university), INIs, IGNOU, NCTE, AICTE, other statutory regulatory councils, State universities, State open universities, technical institutions, industries, etc. The examinations may be computer based or online mode and may be taken twice or thrice in a year with an option given to the students to take part in different attempts as per their convenience. The rank can be generated based on the best attempt of the student.

The above mentioned international practices are for assessing the quality of students and for making the first segregation from the large number of students standing on the doorstep for admission in tertiary education. The NTA in India can take such an initiative to conduct national level examination for ranking students for admission at the undergraduate level also. The framework for the same may be developed by NTA by involving different stakeholders from institutions mentioned above and also by involving representatives from CBSE, NIOS, NCERT, School Boards, State Open Boards, recognised international boards, etc. This will pave the way for evolving a common curriculum with regional adaption beyond secondary stage in subjects like Science and Mathematics, Business and Commerce, Technology and Engineering and others which as has been in demand since long per the recommendations of various committees and commissions.

Proposed role of NTA to consolidate different admission and professional eligibility examinations

National College or University Entrance Examination may be called National Admission Rank Examination at UG level for school board pass-out students in India. National rank examination can be conducted by NTA similar to Chinese Gaokao for ranking the students to make them eligible for college or University admission to UG courses.

The rank can be made valid for three years. This will reduce the burden on students by offering them the choice for taking rank examination for admission in higher education system for the next three years. The pass out students from State boards, State open boards, CBSE, National open board and ICSE shall be considered for taking the national admission rank examination with a provision of providing exemption to some exceptionally talented students.

If we look at statistics, a total of 8.92 million students (3.88 million— Arts, 3.32 million— Science, 1.40 million— Commerce, 0.21 million— Vocational and 0.11 million— other streams) appeared for Class XII in the year 2015–16. The pass percentage was 82.64 per cent i.e., about 7.37 million students passing out of Class XII, which were available for taking the admission test if all opted for admission at the UG level.

The NTA is in a position to conduct online examination of more than one and a half million JEE Main aspirants, about one million for UGC-NET and for more than one and half million for NEET in offline mode. Examination can be conducted for about eight million pass out students as given above in offline or online mode through multiple choice question papers within one or two weeks by NTA by adequately increasing its capacity. The NTA may also examine the pattern of examination of National Council for Educational Research and Training's (NCERT's) National Talent Search Examination (NTSE)

and National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship (NMMS) Examination for the purpose of deciding on covering the interests of diverse students. There can be subject content of Class X or XII (Scholastic Aptitude Test), reasoning and current events (Mental Aptitude Test). Alternatively, there is a possibility of taking stream-wise examination for all the four streams of students appearing or passed out senior/higher secondary examinations. These different possibilities need to be explored.

National Admission Rank Examination at PG level for graduate pass out students in India

This exam shall cater to the needs of almost 4–5 million students across the country. There are around four million students (19.99 lakh in Arts, 10.41 lakh in Science and 9.65 lakh in commerce) who have completed general graduation degree course in the year 2018–19. Nearly one million students passed out from professional and technical courses at graduation level (5.08 lakh B.Ed., 4.27 lakh B. Tech. and 0.51 lakh MBBS) during 2018–19. NTA can take an option of taking common entrance examination by considering these students in two or three categories. Similarly, the admission tests for Integrated UG-PG and integrated UG and professional PG courses may also be conducted. This ranking examination can be made valid for two years so that multiple efforts of students to get admission in various streams can be prevented. The

leading experts of the concerned fields can decide the examination pattern.

National Rank Test for Admissions to M. Phil, Ph.D. and Integrated courses of PG-Ph.D. may also be introduced. About 1.1 million pass out students (5.96 lakh M.A., 2.78 lakh M.Sc., and 2.0 lakh MBA) were recorded in All India Survey of Higher Education in the year 2018–19, who may opt for taking examination for admission in M.Phil. and Ph.D. Programmes. This number can be easily catered to by the NTA in one go. There could be another possibility of widening the scope of UGC-NET for making it mandatory for admission in Ph.D. in State Universities and Private Universities, Which conduct their own entrance examinations other than UGC-JRF Scheme. The scope of UGC-NET may further be broadened for universalisation of admissions in M.Phil. courses across the country. This may be done through bringing in a regulatory framework by UGC as per the Section 12 (d) of UGC Act, 1956, which provides that 'the Commission may recommend to any University the measures necessary for the improvement of university education and advise the university on the action to be taken for the purpose of implementing such recommendation'.

Other professional examinations which may be conducted by NTA

Apart from professional examinations already being conducted by NTA, other examinations can also be conducted by the agency either in a combination

of subjects or as a standalone examination. The examinations like Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering (GATE), Central Teacher Eligibility Test (C TET), State Teacher Eligibility Tests (S TETs), State Lectureship Eligibility Tests (SLET), etc., may also be taken by the NTA.

The agency can also conduct assessment test for shortlisting of foreign students who are desirous of taking admission in HEIs in India. This ensures the entry of best students and filter out the average and below average foreign students, which is essential in improving quality outcomes. It will be a milestone achievement in image building of Indian Higher Education in the world and consequently boost our international ranking.

The other admission or professional examinations, like CEED, BCI's AIBE, NBE's NEET-SS, NEET-PG, NEET-MDS, etc., can also be taken by the NTA as per need and available resources. The NTSE and NMMS examinations may also be brought under the leadership of NTA. The Central and State Governments may also entrust other assignments related to academic assessment and professional certification.

Short-term Way Forward for widening the scope of NTA

- (i) There is an urgent need for utilisation of results of NTA examinations beyond their existing scope i.e., testing. These results can be utilised for ranking or rating of school education boards, universities and other concerned

institutions. The agency can attempt to devise mechanism for direct rating or ranking by using selective qualitative indicators including the result of its entrance examinations and professional certification tests. NTA may suggest suitable reforms in the examination pattern of school boards, universities and HEIs based on the results of their ranking or rating in order to prepare students for competitive examinations along with their conventional examinations.

- (ii) For the purpose of mentoring the school boards and similar examination conducting bodies, a separate department within NTA consisting of a strong team at the national level, and accordingly, a suitable mechanism at regional level is required to be in place.
- (iii) The NTA needs to strengthen its functioning by reforming examinations through comparing the testing patterns of international testing agencies. This step is required for the continuous evolution of thought process for setting test items and for attaining efficient quality goals through by NTA becoming the state-of-the-art agency in the field of conducting academic entrance examinations.
- (iv) The NTA may explore possibilities of analysis of other patterns of evaluation. It may suggest ways for utilisation of NTA data in accreditation of Universities or HEIs and link its results for estimating their learning outcomes. It may think upon conducting uniform

examination for the purpose of rank generation for the students aspiring to get admission at different levels in HEIs.

- (v) NTA can set up different Consultative/Advisory groups for each examination involving experts from different concerned areas. This will ensure democratisation of decisionmaking in examination conducted by the agency.

Long-term Way Forward for widening the scope of NTA

- (i) The statutory provision for the NTA is required since currently, it is non-statutory. Further, it does not have provisions of regional centres. NTA should not only expand its existing structure but also provide scope for having regional centres for the purpose of decentralised planning, control and execution of examination.
- (ii) It is possible for NTA to become a Mini Ratna like EdCIL, by generating additional resources and expanding its scope of conducting examinations for the fulfilment of the bigger national goals of quality higher education and providing better soft-power to the country. NTA may tread on the path to becoming a PSU considering the large number of examinees in various entrance examinations/ tests for the admissions in central and state universities. It may also take a view for consider conducting professional certification tests, fellowship examination similar to UGC-NET, and many more which

are presently out of the ambit of NTA.

- (iii) NTA can conduct admission tests for quality check of international students for admission in Indian Universities, as done by Australia's ATAR.
- (iv) NTA may conduct all the academic admission examinations or tests at the central level and generate central and state ranks for the students to make them eligible for admissions in all the HEIs across India. It can also conduct examinations of technical and professional bodies for screening of candidates.
- (v) NTA may act as a centralised agency for counselling for admissions in Central Institutions and devise a roadmap for the centralisation of counselling through a single agency in the State Governments.
- (vi) A roadmap is needed to bring all the private institutions and deemed to be universities in the procedural net of admissions, tests or counselling conducted by the NTA or some other single window Central or State agency.

Benefits of taking National Rank Examination for Tertiary Education Admissions

"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 education system. It will be left up to individual universities and colleges to use NTA assessments for their admissions" (National Education Policy 2020). If we look at the parental spending at present, about ₹20000–30000/- per annum per child are spent for ensuring appearance of their single child for admission related examinations in different professional courses and different institutions. In case of repetition for a year or two, these expenses grow exponentially. This unnecessary financial burden can be saved if common admission examination at each level, either standalone or in combination of subjects, are taken by NTA. It will also save the parental pain of running from pillar to post for the admission of their wards. The centralisation of counselling would be another milestone achievement for reducing the suffering of the parents and the students. The financial resources so saved by the parents could be invested in other areas which may boost the different areas of our economy.

Many of the examinations can be merged and may be taken in one go. There can be categorisation of examinations like examination for the medical and paramedical courses, technical courses and for other courses, considering the type of courses and also based on numerical strength of students. In order to reduce the chances of students missing the opportunity, admission examinations or tests may be conducted twice or thrice every year, and the rank can

be generated based on their best performance. Vernacular percentile can also be generated for the final results. The rank so generated may be valid for admission for two years in case of PG and three for years for UG courses. The student may be given the liberty to improve their ranking in subsequent years. This will relieve students from taking multiple admission examinations annually.

Huge mobility is observed on roads, and enhanced burden on our transport system on the day of such examinations. This creates an unnecessary strain on our entire system. The traffic jams even are observed at various places and the common public suffers a lot during these events. This can be checked if the number of examinations is restricted to a minimum. This will save monetary and other resources of parents, students and government among others.

Taking National Rank Examination for Tertiary Education Admissions will reduce the unnecessary stress of multiple examinations taken by the students for ensuring their admission in tertiary education system. It will help in building confidence of our youth population by way of ensuring admission with certainty in one or the other institution or course. The centralised counselling for courses with similar academic eligibility condition will augment the efforts of resource saving. National Rank Examination will also help State boards and the HEIs for tracking their alumni and they can judge their own performance in the limited examination conducted by NTA.

The policymakers can formulate focused and appropriate policies for the improvement of academic atmosphere of the entire education ecosystem through the analysis of data that can be gained from various institutions depicting the student participation in the offered courses and their performance in the conducted examinations. Courses securing admissions of students based on the ranks or merits in higher education system, etc., thus, make NTA a specialised body in the field of conducting common examinations for admissions at different levels. It can also be specialised in conducting different common professional certification examinations.

The unnecessary criticisms and biases in the admission process will be checked by having a uniform and transparent system of admissions in our country. This may also contribute in environmental protection as thousands of tons of paper could be saved by collabrating the process of admission tests with professional certification examinations. Which is term will save a lot of petroleum products and fossil fuels by limiting the multiple trips made by parents and students for different admission examinations/tests, professional certification examinations and also for counselling for different courses and institutions.

Relevant Discussion and Conclusion

The demand for having a centralised agency for conducting common entrance examinations or testing for

admissions in HEIs across the country was pending for long before the creation of NTA in November, 2017. The agency was created by a cabinet resolution. It is an autonomous, self-financing body with multiple objectives of conducting centralised admission and professional certification examinations. The agency is also supposed to undertake reforms and training of school boards and other bodies where the testing standards (board examinations) are comparable with the entrance examinations; support colleges and universities in their capacity building in testing, and providing training and advisory services to the institutions in the country; and to provide quality testing services to the academic institutions across the country. In critical observation, it is observed that the agency is not a statutory body and not having branch offices across the country. Therefore, it is a felt need that creation of this body by the Act of the Parliament could provide it more strength and it could have branch offices at arms-length. This could pave the way for conducting the centralised examinations with decentralised control system.

There are various international best practices where conducting centralised screening tests or examinations for admission in higher education system is quite common. India can internalise such best practices with adaption as per its own needs and national priorities.

Also a lot of central admission examinations are still outside the purview of NTA. There is a dire need for bringing all such examinations under the ambit of the agency which may be conducted as standalone or in combination of subjects. Also, there is a need for bringing in a system of centralised counselling and the job may be entrusted to the agency at central level so that there could not be any vacant seat left in our HEIs. This will not only ensure the rational use of our valuable institutional infrastructure but also save a lot of efforts and energy of the students and their parents. The State university admissions, if they intend to do so, also need to be brought under the ambit of NTA. Further, the NTA has to increase its capacity to conduct other professional examinations than what it is currently conducting. It has to play a professional role in capacity building of educational Institutions for overall academic improvement including their curriculum reforms and implementation of their testing standards.

Strengthening NTA as per the aspirations of National Education Policy 2020, is the need of the hour, which envisages that the colleges and universities across the country will use the common entrance examinations conducted by NTA rather than having their own admission examinations. It will drastically reduce the burden of students, parents and also of our institutions to the level of bare minimum.

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