

Public Examination Reform 2.0

Mains: GS II – Governance

Why in News?

Recent, recurring controversies in NEET, UGC-NET and other public examinations indicate vulnerabilities within the examination ecosystem.

What are the past irregularities happened in examinations?

- **IIT admissions** - Significant irregularities prompted observations by the Delhi High Court in 2014, which subsequently resulted in the implementation of transparency reforms.
- **NEET** - Allegations included paper leaks, errors in examination questions, impersonation, score inflation, and an unusual concentration of high scores.
- **NEET-2024** - The distribution of incorrect question papers, delays in OMR sheet collection, the awarding of grace marks, and unusually high scores raised significant concerns.
- **NEET-2026** - The alleged circulation of targeted question material prior to the examination, along with the purported involvement of individuals associated with question-setting, highlighted internal vulnerabilities.
- **UGC-NET 2026** - Examinations in three subjects were reconducted after errors were identified in the question papers.
- **UPSC CSE Prelims 2026** - Eight General Studies questions reportedly lacked a correct answer option, underscoring the importance of robust answer-key challenge mechanisms.

What is PER 1.0?

- **Public Examination Reform (PER 1.0)** denotes transparency-oriented reforms that

emerged primarily through the Right to Information (RTI) Act, litigation, and public debate between 2006 and **2015**.

- **Key safeguards**

- Selection criteria are disclosed prior to the examination.
- A formal mechanism exists to challenge examination questions and provisional answer keys.
- Candidates are granted access to Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) sheets for independent verification of scores.
- A unified counselling process is implemented to enhance preferential seat allocation and minimize seat wastage.
 - These reforms originated from the transparency requirements established by the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, especially the mandate for proactive disclosure by public authorities.
 - Many of these measures subsequently became de facto standards for major multiple-choice question (MCQ)-based examinations.

What are the key challenges in the existing exam ecosystem?

- **Internal vulnerabilities** - Risks may originate from question-setting, translation, digitisation, and logistics, in addition to external paper leaks.
- **Weak process accountability** - Critical stages often lack clearly defined ownership and independent oversight.
- **Inadequate implementation** - Committee recommendations are frequently not implemented as enforceable reforms.
- **Centre-level risks** - Malpractice, collusion, and insufficient centre management contribute to centre-level risks.
- **OMR/evaluation risks** - Errors may occur during collection, scanning, reconciliation, and result processing.

- **Lack of continuous auditing** - Existing systems typically respond to controversies instead of proactively identifying vulnerabilities.

What are the recommendations of committees and supreme court's view?

- **Supreme Court (2011)** - It emphasized that examinations and merit ranking must be transparent, accurate, and subject to regular updates.
- Examination reform should be regarded as a continuous process rather than a response to isolated crises.
- **Committee Recommendations**
 - **Acharyya, Kakodkar, and Ramasami Committees (2009-2014)** - These committees provided technical recommendations; however, their proposals did not culminate in a comprehensive, implemented reform framework.
 - **Dr. Radhakrishnan Committee** - This committee submitted comprehensive recommendations following the NEET-2024 controversy; however, an actionable Action Taken Report was not prepared.
 - **Nandan Nilekani Task Force (2026)** - Constituted in July 2026, this task force's agenda reportedly overlapped significantly with the earlier Radhakrishnan Committee recommendations.
 - **Core Concern** - The repeated constitution of committees without effective implementation may result in 'committee-hopping' rather than sustained institutional reform.

What is PER 2.0?

- PER 2.0 should advance beyond transparency by establishing a common, standardised, and independently auditable Public Examination Integrity Framework that encompasses the entire examination lifecycle.
- **Six pillars Of PER 2.0**
 - **Question Setting & Moderation**

- Engagement of qualified subject matter experts
- Implementation of conflict-of-interest and background checks
- Provision for independent moderation
- Clear separation of duties among personnel

- **Translation**

- Independent verification of translated materials
- Utilization of secure, technology-assisted translation processes
- Minimization of unnecessary manual intervention

- **Digitisation, Compilation & Logistics**

- Enforcement of restricted access protocols
- Implementation of robust authentication measures
- Maintenance of comprehensive activity logs
- Establishment of a secure chain of custody

- **Examination Centres**

- Adoption of risk-based selection criteria
- Application of randomisation and surveillance measures
- Establishment of accountable examination centre management
- Conduct of independent malpractice assessments

- **OMR, Evaluation & Results**

- Implementation of sealed collection and tracking procedures
- Execution of scanning and reconciliation processes
- Independent verification of evaluation outcomes
- Detection of anomalies prior to result publication

- **Post-Examination Accountability**

- Conduct of forensic audits
- Provision for independent complaint resolution
- Establishment of protected whistleblower mechanisms
- Publication of a public examination integrity report



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— SIX Pillars OF PER 2.0 —

1



QUESTION SETTING & MODERATION

- Expert involvement, conflict checks, independent moderation, clear role separation.

2



TRANSLATION

- Verified translations, secure tech processes, minimal manual handling.

3



DIGITISATION & LOGISTICS

- Restricted access, strong authentication, activity logs, secure custody chain.

4



EXAMINATION CENTRES

- Risk-based selection, randomisation & surveillance, accountable management, malpractice audits.

5



OMR & RESULTS

- Sealed collection, scanning & reconciliation, independent verification, anomaly detection.

6



POST-EXAM ACCOUNTABILITY

- Forensic audits, complaint resolution, whistleblower protection, public integrity report.

What steps to be taken?

- **Common Integrity Framework** - Develop a unified Public Examination Integrity

Framework applicable to the National Testing Agency (NTA) and all state and national examination authorities.

- **White Paper Documentation** - Produce a comprehensive white paper that documents recent failures and systematically identifies both successful and unimplemented best practices.
- **Standardised SOPs** - Translate validated safeguards into standardized and regularly updated Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).
- **Independent Audits** - Implement independent audits and oversight mechanisms at all critical stages of the examination process.
- **Accountability & Ownership** - Establish explicit ownership, accountability, and comprehensive audit trails for each process.
- **Continuous Risk Assessment** - Implement ongoing risk assessment protocols rather than relying solely on post-crisis security interventions.

What lies ahead?

- India should transition from a reactive approach of 'security after a breach' to a proactive model of 'integrity by design.'
- A robust examination system should integrate security, transparency, independent auditing, clear accountability, and continuous improvement to ensure that examination integrity and merit are upheld.

Reference

[The Hindu | India needs Public Examination Reform 2.0](#)



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