



# Students Islamic Organisation of India

To,  
Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal,  
Minister of Education, Government of India  
Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi

Date: 11 June 2021

Sir,

Sub: Recommendations regarding conducting Entrance and other Examinations during pandemic

In the middle of the debilitating Covid-19 pandemic, the issue of conducting examinations for various levels of students has acquired a level of urgency that must be dealt with as quickly as possible. Conducting regular exams in the middle of a global pandemic would put thousands of students teachers and other staff and people involved in such a massive exercise at serious risk of contracting the virus. It is also bound to have serious repercussions for the mental health of students who are having to live through the anxiety of giving their examinations with the added pressure of a potential health risk.

In view of the seriousness of the situation, unprecedented measures must be considered to ensure that the important task of education and assessment can be carried out without posing a serious risk to the mental and physical well being of a whole generation of students in their formative years. In this regard, we would like to put forth the following suggestions:

## **Entrance Examinations**

Entrance examinations to universities and professional institutes are slated to be held in the coming weeks. In this context, we suggest that:

- With the waning of the second wave in many parts of the country, a fixed timeframe of conducting all exams in the next 3-4 months should be notified.
- Apart from ensuring strict adherence to Covid-19 protocols in all exam centers, it is also necessary to vastly increase the number of examination centres all over the



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country. The aim should be to reduce the number of students at each center, as well as reducing the distance traveled by students to reach the center.

- For examinations taken by large number of students, the option of staggering the exam in different shifts (similar to the JEE format) should also be considered.
- As an added measuring of reducing anxiety and the “high-stakes” nature of some of these examinations, students should be allowed more than one attempt in the current academic year, with the best of all their attempts being considered for admissions. This will require the examining authorities to conduct more than one exam in the current year, but it will mitigate the all important and “make it or break it” nature of an individual attempt.

It is heartening to see that the National Testing Authority will be conducting the JEE for Engineering institutions four times this year, giving each student multiple attempts to give their best possible performance, and also allowing for students impacted by health and other concerns to skip a test without having to drop a whole year. A similar decision must be taken for other “high-stakes” exams, including at least NEET and CLAT for medical and law colleges respectively.

## End Semester Evaluations

- All end semester evaluations being held online must be conducted in the open book mode, allowing sufficient time for students to complete their answers and submit their copies.
- Online exams requiring the mandatory use of webcams and submission of answer sheets in a short time frame have proven to be disastrous, especially for students with limited access to high speed internet and latest phones and laptops.
- Online exams conducted in a limited 3-4 hour window must be discouraged in favour of open book exams. Additionally, educational institutions must be mandated to ensure that all students have access to adequate tools, devices and training to enable them to appear in online examinations. Educational institutions must be encouraged to take the help of student organisations and formal and informal collectives to supplement institutional efforts in this regard.



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## National Dialogue on Examinations

The current crisis has once again highlighted how our entire educational system is dangerously dependent on high stakes annual exams and tests. Multiple studies have shown how such a system encourages rote-learning and mastering the performance of examinations, rather than conceptual learning and substantial learning.

Many of these exams, like the IIT-JEE or NEET have unfortunately become “high-stakes” events in students lives, with years of preparation and studying condensed into a few pressure filled hours of examination. Due to these exams often being built up as “make or break” moments in the lives of students, they have become the cause of considerable anxiety and mental health issues, and deserve a fundamental rethink of our approach to higher education.

It is high time for us to have a frank conversation on the kind of evaluation system we want for education of our future generations. We request the Education Ministry to initiate a national dialogue on the issue of examinations with students, teachers, parents, policy makers and all relevant stakeholders.

Thank You,

Salman Ahmad

(President, SIO of India)