F.No. 39020/14/2023-Estt.(B)
Government of India
Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions
Department of Personnel & Training
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North Block, New Delhi
Dated the 18th October, 2023

ORDER

Subject:Normative Standards and Guidelines for conduct of Computer Based Tests (CBT) by Central Government and its agencies for recruitment to various posts and admission to Under Graduate /Post Graduate Courses.

Recruitment agencies, including Staff Selection Commission (SSC), Railway Recruitment Boards (RRBs) and Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS), conduct Computer Based Tests (CBT) for recruitment to various posts in Central Government. Similarly, National Testing Agency (NTA) conducts examinations for combined entrance to Engineering, Medical and other Graduate / Post Graduate Courses. Multiple entities, in addition to the above-mentioned Examination Conducting Agencies (ECAs), include market based Service Providers- digital and physical infrastructure (Examination Centers), and software solutions, that are key stakeholders in ensuring transparent, fair and foolproof conduct of CBTs across the Country.

2. Past experience in conduct of CBTs by these ECAs, as also by various State ECAs indicates certain digital and physical vulnerabilities that have been exploited through unfair means by unscrupulous elements. While these malpractices are aimed at benefitting a few candidates, it adversely impacts the overall credibility of the Examination and also put to peril success of genuine and sincere candidates and their opportunities.

3. Based on a detailed analysis of these vulnerabilities and factors that contribute to such vulnerabilities, there is an urgent need for a significant revamp in the current approach including,

(i)   Desiloed working of ECAs to a more coordinated and unified shared systems of both planning and conduct of examinations;

(ii)   Normative and Standardized protocols and guidelines that are adopted across ECAs and its Service providers;

(iii)   Model Request for Proposals (RFPs) and Service Levels for procurement of both, i.e., physical examination centers and software solution related services;

(iv)   Access control policy aimed mainly at impersonations and use of appropriate technology;

(v)   Cyber Security Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that are shared and enforced across ECAs and all its Centers and sharing of critical information;

(vi)   Devise Policies that encourage and nurture competitive ecosystem of Service Providers in the Market;

(vii)   Develop and optimize strategies for use of the national pool of resources so developed across the Central ECAs and also make it available to States as and when requested.

4.   Accordingly, it has been decided, that the National Recruitment Agency (NRA) shall formulate normative standards and guidelines, as required from time to time, which shall be notified. NRA shall develop protocols and policy frameworks to address issues some of which are listed above. NRA shall also evolve effective means for ensuring compliance of Guidelines and standards by the Central ECAs and Service providers.

5.   Broad indicative areas to be covered under the head 'Normative and Standardized Protocols and Guidelines to be adopted across ECAs and its Service Providers' are listed at Annexure.

6.   These guidelines/ standards, unless otherwise provided, shall apply to Staff Selection Commission (SSC), Railway Recruitment Boards (RRBs), Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS), National Testing Agency (NTA) and such Central Agencies as are conducting examination for recruitment to various posts and admission to Under Graduate /Post Graduate Courses. State Examination Conducting Agencies may also adhere to these guidelines and standards, so as to curb malpractices and ensure leak proof conduct of CBT mode of examinations.

(Jasmine)
Under Secretary to the Government of India
Tel: 23092508

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2. Cabinet Secretariat (Ms.Smita Sarangi, Director)
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5. Chairman, Staff Selection Commission.
6. Chairman, Railway Recruitment Boards.
7. Chairman, National Testing Agency (NTA).
8. Chairman, National Recruitment Agency (NRA).
9. Chairman, Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS).
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Broad Areas to be covered under the head 'Normative and Standardized protocols and guidelines to be adopted across ECAs and its Service providers'

1. **Normative and Standardized protocols and Guidelines for Question Banks and its Management/Operation**

   The guidelines shall cover the following areas:

   a) Process of Question Bank creation.
   b) Ensuring confidentiality of the entire activity of content development, i.e., setting questions, translation and finalization.
   c) Setting up of exclusive question bank.

2. **Normative and Standardized protocols and Guidelines for Electronic platform for conducting CBT**

   The electronic platform on which the CBT is held forms the heart of the CBT. This is an electronic software system which serves as the platform for the entire conduct of the examination. The following aspects related to the electronic platform should be covered through guidelines/standards: -

   a) Developing service level specifications/ standards for the electronic platform.
   b) Developing/ procuring electronic platforms/ software application & related services.
   c) Insulating the platform from malpractices such as hacking.
   d) Transmission of question papers and collection of responses.
   e) Ensuring compatibility and security of the electronic platform.
   f) Architecture of the electronic platform.
   g) Certification and audit of the system/ electronic platform.
   h) Any other aspect connected with development and use of electronic platform.

   CBT labs should be controlled centrally and should follow cyber security norms to be formulated by NRA keeping in view the cyber security guidelines prescribed by MeiTY.

3. **Normative and Standardized protocols and Guidelines for Registration Process of the candidates**

   Areas to be addressed:

   a) Standardizing and ensuring interoperability of all application/registration software and processes.
   b) Preventing impersonation.
   c) Capturing biometric data of the applicants.
   d) Usage of One Time Registration (OTR).

4. **Normative and Standardized protocols and Guidelines for Examination Centres and Proctoring for CBT**

The Examination Centres for conducting CBT is the most critical element in the examination system. At present most of the Government Bodies do not own any examination infrastructure dedicated to the conduct of CBT for recruitment/ admissions. The examination centres are arranged by the service providers. These examination centres are generally hired from third parties. These centres are not standard exam centres. Also, the manpower employed in these centres for invigilation, management of IT infrastructure including server rooms are generally outsourced from third parties. These gaps make them prone to various malpractices. Therefore, the following areas may be addressed: -

a) Setting up of CBT centres.
b) Criteria for locating CBTs and separately for remote areas.
c) Identifying building and developing them as CBT centres.
d) Ensuring easy accessibility to CBT centres.
e) Space requirement within the CBT centres.
f) Facilities to be provided within the CBT centres.
g) Coordination with state enforcement agencies.
h) Management, operation and supervision of CBTs.
i) Deployment of human resources at the CBT centres.
j) Provision of hardware facilities and their management.
k) Conduct and supervision of examination.
l) Auditing during the conduct of examination process through external agency.
m) Electronic surveillance of the examination process.
n) Sanitizing the exam centres.
o) Handling emergencies and unforeseen incidents during examination.
p) Protocols for support and cooperation from State Government in conduct of Computer Based Test.
q) Any other area related to the conduct of the examination as decided by NRA.

5. **Normative and Standardized protocols and Guidelines for Evaluation and Analysis Process**

Once the exam is conducted and the answers transmitted to the central data centre, evaluation of the responses would be carried out. The following areas may be addressed through comprehensive guidelines and service level standards:

a) Inviting and addressing the challenges to the question paper and the answer keys.
b) Dealing with multiple language questions and answers.
c) Record keeping of the responses of the candidates.

6. **Normative and Standardized protocols and Guidelines for Robust oversight mechanism to curb malpractices**

The following areas to be addressed:

    a. Defining malpractices.
    b. Identifying malpractices.
    c. Curbing malpractices.
    d. Dealing with occurrences of malpractices.
    e. Use of modern technologies- Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine. Learning for detecting and curbing malpractices.
    f. Information sharing regarding debarred candidates and blacklisted service providers, centres, scribes, etc.