



# Low cut-offs mean NEET can't ensure merit-based admission

Experts: 1:3  
Ratio Enough  
To Fill Seats

Rema.Nagarajan  
@timesgroup.com

Though there were only about 61,000 seats to be filled through NEET 2019, as in the earlier years of NEET, ranks of those who got admission went down all the way to 8.4 lakh. That raises the question – If lakhs of students with much higher scores do not get admission but someone at the bottom does, can these admissions be called merit-based?

Not only in general category but in every category, students with abysmal ranks have got admission clearly usurping seats which in a system based on merit within each category ought to have gone to those with much higher scores.

How is this possible? In

Category	No. of candidates needed*	NEET rank at which this is met	NEET percentile at which this is met	Actual percentile cut-off
Open	1,18,000	1.18 lakh	91.6	50.0
OBC	37,260	87,000	93.8	40.0
SC	17,940	2.2 lakh	84.3	40.0
ST	9,660	3.5 lakh	75.1	40.0

\*Assuming quotas on all government seats and half of private college seats

many of the private colleges where students with very low scores have got admission, the annual fee ranges from Rs 17 lakh to Rs 23 lakh for regular seats. For NRI seats, it goes up to Rs 33 lakh per year. The cost of the MBBS course in such colleges would be well beyond a crore, once hostelfees, exam fees and various other charges are added. For a large number of students with high scores, this would be way beyond reach.

The quota is applicable to all seats in government colleges and about half of those in private colleges. That works out to about 12,500 seats (27%) for OBC category, 6,000 (12.5%) SC and 3,200 seats

(7%) for ST category leaving a little under 40,000 open seats. Experts feel a 1:3 ratio between seats and the number of candidates qualifying is more than enough to fill all the seats. To have three qualified candidates for every seat in the different categories, there would have to be about 37,300 in the OBC category, 18,000 in SC and 10,000 in ST.

TOI accessed data on NEET category ranks and found that 38,000 plus OBC candidates were available in the top 87,000 ranked candidates in NEET. That means a 93.8 percentile cut-off would be enough to fill OBC seats. For SC category, a cut-off at NEET rank 2.2 lakh or 84.3 percentile would

have the necessary 18,000 qualifying. For ST, NEET rank 3.5 lakh, equivalent to 75.1 percentile would suffice to have 10,000 qualified students. In the open category, for a 1:3 ratio there has to be about 1.2 lakh students. That would mean a cut off at 1.18 lakh NEET rank, equivalent to 91.6 percentile.

As against this, the actual cut-off ranks were about 7 lakh for the open quota, or 50 percentile, while for OBC, SC and ST, it was rank 8.45 lakh or 40 percentile. Thus, even within each quota, poorer students with much higher scores are being ousted from their seats by richer students.

This is possible because the percentile cut off being set abysmally low allows a ratio of 1:13, or 13 qualified students being available for each seat, helping colleges go down the list of 'qualified' NEET candidates till they find ones who can afford the fees they charge. Thus, instead of a merit-based selection, it becomes a money-based selection, at least for most private colleges.



# Low scorers still getting into MBBS

Rema.Nagarajan  
@timesgroup.com

Last year, TOI had exposed how candidates scoring single digit, zero and negative marks in the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) got admission in medical colleges in 2017. But are students with such low scores still getting in? Well, we can't be sure because this year the practice of giving the marks scored in individual subjects has been stopped with the National Testing Agency (NTA) releasing only percentile scores. But data accessed by TOI shows that there are hundreds, if not thousands, with single digit percentile scores in physics and chemistry who have got admission into MBBS.

For instance, a student whose score was 1.7 percentile in physics got admission in a private medical college. This means that 98.3% of stu-

## LOOK WHO ARE BECOMING DOCS

Approx. NEET rank (in lakh)	NEET marks (out of 720)	Percentile NEET scores		
		Phy	Chem	Bio
2.22	323	1.7	42.8	98.3
5.31	178	4.9	2.6	76.9
5.44	174	10.6	6.9	73.9
6.26	151	8.1	14.5	67.5
6.68	141	62.7	2.2	60.1
6.89	137	75.7	70.7	32.8
7.42	125	9.3	6.9	61.1
7.48	124	9.3	5	61.4
7.72	120	10.6	72.6	40.2
8.14	112	41.3	41.3	42.1



Exact rank being concealed to protect privacy of individual students

dents who wrote NEET scored higher than him in physics. Or that his marks fell among the bottom 1.7% scores of the 15.2 lakh students who took the test.

Earlier, NEET score cards

included marks scored in each subject as well as the total marks out of 720, overall percentile and NEET rank.

In 2018, colleges and state medical education administrators stopped putting out roll

numbers and dates of birth of candidates in the list of admitted students so that no one could check their marks. Despite this, TOI managed to get data from the 2018 admissions to show that yet again candidates with single digit, zero and negative marks were getting admission.

Instead of bringing in individual subject cut-offs, the NTA has now done away with individual subject marks altogether. Questions to the health ministry, MCI and NTA did not get any response beyond the MCI saying they should be addressed to the NTA. NTA officials said the decision to not give marks was because zero and negative marks gave a poor impression, especially if such students got admission.

Though there were less than 61,000 seats available in medical colleges in 2019, ranks of those who have got admission go down all the way up to 8.45 lakh.