Rethinking the entrance

Is searching for the rare research whiz going to be easier with the proposed ISEET? Prof P J Narayanan Dean (R&D), IIIT Hyderabad voices his thoughts on new engineering exam.

How will the new scheme be implemented at IIIT-H?
IIIT-H goes by AIEEE for our seats currently and will be happy with the new scheme in the future. We are happy to use the mix of board marks, the new main test and the new advanced test. We may go with the suggested weights, but have to decide after more details are available.

Will the new exam be suitable to find ideal students?
IIIT-H is looking for the truly research-minded students who will continue to be excited by the true science behind all the technology for the long run. No entrance exam of this kind can reliably identify the research aptitude or readiness of 18 year old students. IIIT-H would ideally like to interview youngsters individually and/or engage with them for longer terms before admitting them.

Unfortunately, the numbers make this impractical today. The serious dearth of top-class options is forcing students and parents to use only superficial factors like name of the institution, salary of outgoing students, closing ranks of the previous years' etc in selecting the institutions and courses in them. This puts enormous pressure on institutions perceived to be good on these criteria and makes it impossible to institute creative processes in selecting their students to match institutional goals.

I believe this would be the case with the IITs too. I don't think the new exam will bring more suitable students or less suitable students to the IITs or NITs or IIITs than the system today. I personally feel the IITs have no reason to be afraid of the new arrangement on this count.

Exams used by an institution should test the students on aspects that are most important to it and the course of study. A single exam for all of engineering may be OK.
However, the trend of institutions like the IISc and IISERs admitting students to their BS/MSc programs in science/maths based on the same exam is not good for the students or the institutions. Even within engineering, those focusing on CS/IT may like to use a logical reasoning component as an additional measure of aptitude in the computing areas.

**What about the pressure on students? Will phasing out the multiple exams reduce the impact of coaching?**

Having just a single exam for admission into all institutions increases its importance in the minds of prospective students. This can actually increase the pressure on the students instead of reducing it. When too much rides on one exam, the motivation to go for extreme coaching could be higher. One may actually see more coaching as a result.

If there is a single exam for all admissions, an individual should have the opportunity to attempt it multiple times for the same year of admission. What happens if one is a bit sick on the day of the exam? Too much is at stake on a single day for a young individual.

It is desirable for the exam to be divided into subjects that can be written independently. The subjects could be Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Logical Reasoning, etc.

A student should be able to write each test more than once in a time window. The institutions or programmes of study have the option of selecting the most suitable combination of subjects for their admission. Such choice can have a positive impact on reducing the pressure on the students. It can also diminish the role of coaching significantly.

— As told to Dipal Gala, Head, Education Times, Hyderabad