

IMPORTANCE OF NAAC AND UGC IN QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

Higher education is generally understood to cover teaching, research and extension. Higher education is the source or feeder system in all walks of life and therefore supplies the much-needed human resources in management, planning, design, teaching and research. Scientific and technological advancement and economic growth of a country are as dependent on the higher education system as they are on the working class. Development of indigenous technology and capabilities in agriculture, food security and other industrial areas are possible because of our world-class higher education infrastructure. Higher education also provides opportunities for lifelong learning, allowing people to upgrade their knowledge and skills from time to time based on the societal needs.

In India Higher Education sector has witnessed a tremendous increase in the number of Universities/University level Institutions & Colleges since Independence. The number of Universities has increased 34 times from 20 in 1950 to 677 in 2014. The sector boasts of 45 Central Universities of which 40 are under the purview of Ministry of Human Resource Development, 318 State Universities, 185 State Private universities, 129 Deemed to be Universities, 51 Institutions of National Importance (established under Acts of Parliament) under MHRD (IITs - 16, NITs – 30 and IISERs – 5) and four Institutions (established under various State legislations). The number of colleges has also registered manifold increase of 74 times with just 500 in 1950 growing to 37,204, as on 31st March, 2013. The quantum growth in the Higher Education sector is spear-headed by Universities, which are the highest seats of learning.

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

According to the report of the UNESCO International Commission on Education in the 21st Century titled “Learning: The Treasure Within” (popularly known as Delors Commission) emphasized four pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. While, higher education intends to inculcate all these four in individuals and the society, the report highlighted the following specific functions of higher education:

- To prepare students for research and teaching;
- To provide highly specialized training courses adapted to the needs of economic and social life;
- To be open to all, so as to cater to the many aspects of lifelong education in the widest sense;
- To promote international cooperation through internationalization of research, technology, networking, and free movement of persons and scientific ideas (UNESCO, 1996).

Quality assurance is the responsibility of everyone in an educational institution, though the top management sets the policies and priorities. Thus, assuring quality should be a continuous and ongoing process. It should not be considered as a onetime activity for accreditation alone. However, accreditation as external quality monitoring (EQM) can be found in all types of higher education systems (Harvey, 1998). In spite of the importance of EQM and the credibility attached with the impartial and objective system, developing an internal quality assurance mechanism in every educational institution is highly important. It is in fact, this unit within the higher education institution that will prepare the base for EQM. Thus, understanding the criteria of quality assurance and adhering to the best practices become highly significant.

Across the world quality assurance is done in the following ways:

- Self-evaluation;
- Peer review by a panel of experts, usually including at least some external panel members and one or more site visits;
- Analysis of statistical information and/or use of performance indicators or the best practices benchmarking;
- Surveys of students, graduates, employers, professional bodies; • Testing the knowledge, skills and competencies of students (Harman, 1998)

University Grants commission

The UGC was formally established in November 1956 as a statutory body of the Government of India through an Act of Parliament for the coordination, determination and maintenance of standards of university education in India. The head office of the UGC is located in New Delhi. The University Grants Commission (UGC) with its statutory powers is expected to maintain quality in Indian higher education institutions. Section 12 of the UGC Act of 1956 requires UGC to be responsible for “the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examinations and research in universities”. To fulfill this mandate, the UGC has been continuously developing mechanisms to monitor quality in colleges and universities directly or indirectly. In order to improve quality, it has established national research facilities, and Academic Staff Colleges to re-orient teachers and provide refresher courses in subject areas. The UGC also conducts the National Eligibility Test (NET) for setting high standards of teaching.

National Assessment and Accreditation Council

It is an autonomous body established by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India to assess and accredit institutions of higher education in the country. It is an outcome of the recommendations of the National Policy in Education (1986) which laid special emphasis on upholding the quality of higher education in India

The main objectives of NAAC as envisaged in the Memorandum of Association (MoA) are to:

- Grade institutions of higher education and their programmes;
- Stimulate the academic environment and quality of teaching and research in these institutions;
- Help institutions realize their academic objectives;
- Promote necessary changes, innovations and reforms in all aspects of the institutions working for the above purpose;
- Encourage innovations, self-evaluation and accountability in higher education.
- Other statutory bodies in India to assure quality in professional education are:
- All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)
- National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)
- Medical Council of India (MCI)
- Indian Nursing Council (INC)
- Bar Council of India (BCI)
- Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI)
- Distance Education Council (DEC)
- Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR)

National Assessment and Accreditation Council 22 Black Red 22 the AICTE established the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) in 1994 to accredit programmes offered by technical institutions. The NBA accredits programmes and it is a voluntary process like that of NAAC. Other professional statutory bodies mostly undertake review exercises to recognize or de-recognize the institutions on the basis of their quality audit. Thus, quality issue is on the top of the agenda of Indian higher education.

Quality Assessment NAAC Model

In India, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has identified seven criteria to serve as the basis for the assessment of higher education institutions in the country. Assessment is a voluntary process. However, some State Governments have made it mandatory for their colleges. It follows a four-phase process of assessment of a unit (Institution or Programme/Department) covering - Nationally evolved criteria for assessment, Self-study by the institution, Peer team visit, Final decision by Executive Committee of NAAC.

Criteria for Assessment: NAAC has identified through national consultations and consensus the following seven criteria to serve as the basis for its assessment procedure:

- Curricular Aspects
- Teaching-Learning and Evaluation
- Research, Consultancy and Evaluation
- Infrastructure and Learning Resources
- Student Support and Progression
- Organisation and Management
- Healthy Practices

The self-study report is expected to highlight the functioning of the institution with reference to these

Self-Study: The Institution seeking assessment prepares a self-study report as per the guidelines formulated by NAAC. The report consists of two parts – data about the organisation on various parameters; and a critical self-analysis based on the available data. The self-study is supposed to be a tool for critical reflection on institutional practices and facilities to identify its own strengths and weaknesses. The self-study report enables the NAAC and the peer team to understand the institution better.

Peer Team Visit: Based on the self-study report, NAAC constitutes a team of peers in consultation with the institution. The peer team visits the institution and looks for “pattern of evidences” to validate the claims in the self-study report through interaction with the senior management, heads of the departments, teachers, staff and students of the institution. The institution is provided an opportunity for withdrawal at the end by the peer team, before finalizing the draft report. The draft assessment report of the peer team is shared with the institution at the end of the visit. The peer team makes the assessment of the institution based on a suggested scoring pattern. This is submitted to NAAC as a confidential score.

NAAC Decision: The Executive Committee of NAAC after reviewing the report takes a decision on the grade of the institution based on the nine-point grading system. Institutions receiving equal or more than National Assessment and Accreditation Council 56 Black Red 56 55% receive “Accredited Status” and institutions which do not attain the minimum 55% point for accreditation are intimated that the institution is “Assessed and Found Not Qualified for Accreditation”. NAAC grading is valid for a period of 5 years. Institutions that complete five-year accredited period may volunteer for re-accreditation.

Conclusion

Higher education is the backbone of any society. It is the quality of higher education that decides the quality of human resources in a country. Higher education, as we see today, is a complex system facilitating teaching, research, extension and international cooperation and understanding. The two premier institutions at the national level; University Grants Commission (UGC) and National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is striving to achieve excellence in quality.

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