

## QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Quality assurance and accreditation in higher education is defined as systematic management and assessment of procedures adopted by higher education institution or system to monitor performance and to ensure achievement of quality improvement. Quality assurance aims to give stakeholders confidence about the management of quality and the outcome achieved. The provision for education is mainly the responsibility of the government, which is interested in educational quality assessment because (i) the govt. has constitutional obligation to assure quality of education (ii) accountability in use of public resources is to be assured and (iii) provision of quality education for all the eligible aspirants is a political decision, which enjoys a strong social support. It is imperative therefore to identify the characteristics of quality, evolve strategies for fostering it, identify the factors affecting it, examine the relationship between quality and resources, and explore the measures of monitoring changes over time. To do this, a common framework is needed for gathering qualitative and quantitative data and for analyzing them, to assess quality and to assure the stakeholders of their quality. As the responsibility of maintenance of standards of higher education is vested with UGC, the UGC has established NAAC for assessment and accreditation of universities and colleges. A three stage procedure is followed, which involves (i) preparation of the self-study report by the institutions based on the defined parameters (ii) validation of the self-study report by a team of peers through on-sight visit and interaction with the functionaries of the institutions and (iii) the final decision on assessment and accreditation by the NAAC. The outcome of accreditation exercises undertaken by the agencies like NAAC and NBA have significant impact on improvement of quality of higher education, the strengths and shortcomings of the institutions are detected for initiating appropriate action. The stakeholders- the government, students and employers- duly benefit from information and analysis of institutional performance. In the globalised environment, the emergence of trans-national institutions and use of electronic media for delivery of programmes through distance mode, pose a greater challenge to quality assurance agencies for (i) clarifying issues pertaining to the procedures for quality assurance (ii) evolving acceptable criteria for assessment of learning attainments. A joint effort between the institutions and the accreditation bodies would be needed to ensure good coordination and communication, so that they can adhere to an ethical code of good practice and be objective, fair and rigorous in the task of accomplishing quality assessment and accreditation.*

*Key words used: NAAC, UGC, NBA, QAA, AICTE*

### INTRODUCTION

The need for quality assurance and accreditation has been established especially in the context of globalization and financial constraints impinging on higher education. This article provides an introduction to the twin and the integrated issues of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education. There are over 300 university level institutions and over 15000 colleges, which offer various types and levels of programmes. These institutions widely differ in terms of the mandate to offer programmes and courses, student enrolment, infrastructure, delivery systems, sources of funds and governance. They are established by the centre and state governments and therefore, the power to award degrees/diplomas/certificates is vested in them by the respective governments. The higher

learning institutions have its own internal and external procedures for assuring and enhancing quality of its programmes and maintain standards. In the recent times, several developments have taken place which has changed the perceived requirements for quality assurance in higher education.

### **What is quality assurance and accreditation?**

Quality assurance refers to the policies, attitudes, actions and procedures necessary to ensure that quality is being maintained and enhanced. Accreditation refers to an evaluation of whether an institution qualifies for a certificate status. The status may have implications for the institution itself and/or its students qualified for certain employment. In fact the underlying purpose of accreditation is to determine the extent to which institutions are discharging their responsibilities for realising their goals and for the quality of education provided to enable the students to attain standards. Thus accreditation is the process of examining institutional procedure for assuring quality and assessing the arrangements for effective implementation of strategies for achieving stated objectives.

There are two major purposes which accreditation serves:

- Quality assurance, which determining standards of quality and performance for minimum acceptability in the interest of public.
- Quality improvement, which provides the service that is designed to improve institutions and programmes through an external review process.

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### **Current criteria and procedures for QAA (Quality Assurance and Accreditation)**

Universities are established by the state under legislation with authority to accredit their own programmes and are primarily responsible for their quality assurance. The centre and state governments are responsible for establishment of institutions or for approving new applications from institutions wishing to operate as universities within a well defined jurisdiction. The govt. bodies like University Grants Commission (UGC), and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) have evolved norms and guidelines for establishment and operationalization of higher education institutions. Universities have internal process to assess new course proposals and promote staff development, and most have entered into relationship with other universities to facilitate staff exchange, collaboration in research, and benchmarking of standards of course delivery. For various reasons, it has become a common practice to arrange programme reviews carried out by external assessors to compare the quality of academic activities with other leading institutions. The quality assurance mechanism as evolved by external reviewers, depend on one or a combination of a number of methodologies, the most important of which are self studies or self-evaluation, peer review by panels of experts, use of relevant statistical information and performance indicators and service of key groups, such as students, graduates and employers.

### **National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and issues of QAA**

NAAC is an autonomous institution, established by the UGC in 1994. The primary objective of NAAC is to assess and accredit institutions of higher learning with an objective of helping them to work continuously to improve the quality of education. The process of accreditation is as under:

NAAC has formulated a three stage process for assessment and accreditation as given below:

- ❖ Preparation of the self study report by the institution to be submitted to NAAC.
- ❖ Validation of the self study report by peers visiting the institution and
- ❖ The final decision of NAAC based on the self study report and the recommendations of the team of peers.

### **STAGE-I, Preparation of the self-study report**

The first and the most important step in the process of assessment and accreditation is the preparation of the self-study report by the institution along the guidelines formulated by NAAC. The institution has to prepare the self-study reports in two parts, where part-I is the organization of data and part-II is the self analysis based on part-I. Its aim at providing an opportunity for the institution to measure its effectiveness and efficiency, and to identify areas of its strengths and weaknesses. Self-study is thus envisaged as the backbone of the process of assessment and accreditation. It is through the self-study report that NAAC understands the institution. In fact, the self-study informs and orients the peer team to assess the institution during the visit.

### **STAGE-II, Visit to the institution**

On receiving the self study report from the institution, NAAC will decide on the panel of peers and inform the institution. If the institution has any reservation against any of the members, it can record its objection, without suggesting alternatives. Choosing from among the other panel members, NAAC will constitute the peer team. The team will visit the institution and look for patterns of evidences to validate the self study reports. The peer will interact with the various constituents of the institution and also check documentary evidence to understand the functioning of the institutions. At the end the visit the chairperson of the team will present a detail report on the quality of education offered by the institution to the head of the institution and a copy of the report with the acceptance of the head of the institutions will be forwarded to NAAC.

### **STAGE-III, Final decision of NAAC**

The executive committee of NAAC will review the report and take a decision about the grade of the institution. The grade will be valid for a period of five years.

### **Units of assessment**

There are two types of accreditation – Institutional and Departmental. In the institutional accreditation both the Universities and the Colleges are included. In the Universities, University Central Governance structure along with all the undergraduate and post graduate departments. In the colleges, any college- affiliated, autonomous or constituent – with all its departments of studies.

In the Departmental Accreditation, any department/school/centre of the university (e.g. Department of Education, Physics etc). Separate instruments (manuals) have been developed to suit units of higher education such as the universities, autonomous colleges, medical institutions, distance education institutions, Department accreditation and self-appraisal of Teacher Education Institutions.

### **Criteria for Assessment**

NAAC has identified the following seven criteria to serve as the basis of its assessment procedures:

- ❖ Curricular aspect
- ❖ Teaching-learning and evaluation
- ❖ Research, consultancy and extension
- ❖ Infrastructure and learning resources
- ❖ Student support and progression
- ❖ Organization and management
- ❖ Healthy practices

### **Curricular Aspect**

This aspect deals with the mission of the institution, its relevance and translation to the programmes offered. It requires information on how the curriculum design of the institutions offers diversity and flexibility to learners. It also seeks information on the practices of the institution in initiating and redesigning courses that are relevant to the regional and national needs.

### **Teaching-Learning and Evaluation**

This criteria deals with the efforts of the institution in providing appropriate teaching-learning experiences to learners. It also looks at the adequacy and competency of the faculty who handle the various programmes of study as well as the efficiency of the evaluation methodology of the institution.

### **Research, Consultancy and Extension**

This part of the format deals with the activities of the institution with reference to research, consultancy and extension. It also deals with the facilitating aspects of the institutions to promote the same and their outcome.

### **Infrastructure and Learning Resources**

This aspect requires data on the adequacy and optimal use of the facilities available in the institution to maintain the quality of the academic and other aspects of the campus life. It also seeks information on how every constituent of the institution – students, teachers and staff, benefit from these facilities.

### **Student Support and Progress:**

The highlights of this criterion are the efforts of the institution to provide the necessary assistance for good student experiences in the campus and facilitate their progress. It also seeks information on the student and alumni profiles.

### **Organization and Management**

This criterion requires data on the policies and practices of the institution in the matter of planning, human power requirement, recruitment, training, performance appraisal and finance management.

### **Healthy Practices**

This criterion should focus on the Innovative and unique practices of the institution that add to its academic ambience. It varies institutions to institutions like-

- ❖ Educational innovations
- ❖ Working with specific mission and goals
- ❖ Master plan for the institutional growth
- ❖ Feedback from the stakeholders for improvement of the institutional functions.
- ❖ Innovations in management and communication.
- ❖ Quality enhancement strategies.

### **The Grading System**

The weightages attached to different parameters for different types of the institutions are as under:

Table 1. Parameters and weightages adopted by NAAC

S.N.	Criteria	University	Affiliated/Continuing Colleges	Autonomous Colleges
1	Curricular aspects	15	10	15
2	Teaching-learning and evaluation	25	35	30
3	Research consultancy and extension	15	05	10
4	Infrastructure and learning resources	15	15	15
5	Student support and progress	10	15	10
6	Organization and Management	10	10	10
7	Healthy practices	10	10	10

On the basis of these weightage, if the overall score is more than 55 per cent, the institution gets the Accreditation status” and any score less than that will lead to Not Accredited status. The accredited institutions are graded on a nine point scale with the following rate values.

Table 2. NAAC grade with correspondence score

Grade	Institutional Score (Upper limit exclusive)
A++	95-100
A+	90-95
A	85-90
B++	80-85
B+	75-80
B	70-75
C++	65-70
C+	60-65
C	55-60

The grade is also supplemented by a qualitative report by the team that would highlight the strength and weakness of the institution under various criteria. Institution which do not attain the minimum 55% point for accreditation are also intimated and notified indicating that the institution is “ASSESSED AND FOUND NOT QUALIFIED FOR ACCREDITATION.” The range of marks of each letter grade, and actual total marks obtained as well as criteria wise marks are intimated to the institutions and notified.

### The Approach of NBA (AICTE)

The approach adopted by National Board of Accreditation (AICTE) for accreditation of technical, professional, and management institutions is similar to that NAAC, discussed above. The criteria for assessing institutional performance and the weightages attached to the undergraduate and post graduate programmes are as under.

Table 3. Parameters and weightages adopted by NBA

Criteria	Weightage	
	Under-graduate	Post-graduate
Human Resources Faculty	200	200
Students	100	100
Finance and Physical Resource	100	100
Mission & Goals	100	70
Research and Development	30	150
Industry-Institute Interaction	70	100
Supplementary Process	50	50

Teaching Learning Process	350	250
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The extent to which an institution meets the infrastructure requirements as stipulated by NBA for different types of institutions and levels of programmes, and qualitative assessment by the peer groups determine the grade awarded by the NBA.

### Recent Progress and Benefits of QAA

There has been a dramatic progress in establishment of HEIs both under the public and private sectors. Higher Education Institutions offer a variety of programmes through on and off-campus, adopt different strategies of teaching and learning, enrol heterogeneous group of learners in diverse discipline and engage themselves in multifarious activities of teaching, research and extension services. NPE-1986 and the Programme of Action-1986 suggested and encouraged the colleges and the universities to make a voluntary self-assessment of their performance.

The following major benefits, as identified by NAAC are derived from the process of quality assessment and accreditation:

- ❖ Helps the institution to know its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities through an informed review.
- ❖ Helps in identifying internal areas of planning and resource allocation
- ❖ Enhances collegiality on the campus
- ❖ The outcome of the process provides the funding agencies with objective and systematic database for performance funding.
- ❖ Initiate institution into innovative and modern methods of pedagogy
- ❖ Gives the institution a new sense of direction and identity.
- ❖ Provides the society with reliable information on the quality of education offered by the institution.
- ❖ Employers have access to information on standards in recruitment
- ❖ Promote intra institutional and inter institutional interactions

### Challenges ahead

The recent developments mainly globalisation of education and the extensive use of educational technology have made the issue of quality measurement even more complex. The quality assurance systems have to constantly modify their procedure to address a growing variety of open and distance learning opportunities, which is stimulated by the use of information technologies. The review procedures developed for conventional system are hardly sufficient for electronic delivery methods, which has a wider reach.

A large number of institutions are offering distance education programmes. They use multimedia strategies, enrol higher number of students of heterogeneous backgrounds and differ considerably in their capacities to use electronic media and delivery infrastructure. The development has serious implications for quality assurance agencies.

A similar concern arises in the context of international students' mobility due to globalization of education. When student enrol in other countries of foreign universities offering programmes in the students home country, the study plans must be evaluated to establish equivalence of their degree programmes. While there may be a mutual understanding between some countries and institutions for

student transfer and credit recognition, there is much to be desired in so far as acceptable methods of maintains and determination of standards are concerned.

The emergence of private higher education institution is also a greater concern to maintain quality and standard. Privatisation creates little problem but the commercialization of self financing institutions create lot of problems for maintaining quality as making profit is their main concern. They run the institution without well qualified staff, needed infrastructure, student facilities, research etc. In such type of institutions, the relationship between the capacity to offer quality programmes and the scale of delivery of services is hard to establish. Because of the internationalization of education, the solution to the major issues and problems concerning quality assurance should be sought through co-operation among institutions and countries. Therefore, global effort is needed to deal with the challenge to quality assurance.

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