

Sub-Theme 2: Innovative approaches to external QA in tertiary education: not a single approach towards excellence.

Topic:

Innovation within the external QA agencies: How are agencies dealing with the changes in higher education? Have these changes impacted in their organization, their procedures or the standards they apply?

Accelerating Quality Improvement and Innovations in Higher Education – The New Framework of NAAC

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Abstract:

Improving quality and relevance of education continues to be the principal challenge for India. In overcoming this challenge various strategies were evolved especially during the 11th plan period. National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) as an evolving and growing EQA has responded to the changing needs of the higher education of India by adopting a multifaceted approach.

In this paper while discussing the chronological development in Quality Assurance in Higher Education in India and the evolution of the processes of A&A, we will also review the development taking across the sector nationally and globally. In the process we would touch upon the challenges from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in achieving the Quality Education mandate and the impact of the Teacher Quality, Governance and Management, Student Learning and Innovations in HEIs. Also we would review on how in the process the NAAC has facilitated the Quality improvement through various tools and instruments developed in the last decade.

Introduction:

Improving quality and relevance of education continues to be the principal challenge for India. In overcoming this challenge various strategies were evolved especially during the 11th plan period. National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) as an evolving and growing EQA has responded to the changing needs of the higher education of India by adopting a multifaceted approach.

The constant efforts of NAAC in maintaining the A&A processes at internationally acceptable levels and to align with the reforms taking place globally and nationally are expected to contribute for an “inclusive and qualitative expansion of higher education” in India. To strengthen the elements of objectivity and transparency in the process of assessment, NAAC revised its framework making it more robust and objective and introduced more quantifiable parameters. The revised version focuses on three prioritized areas – institutional social responsibility (ISR), fostering a climate of innovation and experimentation and learning impact. These as detailed below are expected to inculcate values critical for social and economic development and revitalize HEIs for contributing to the national goals and social development.

New frame work of NAAC

Working on the belief that educational institutions are an integral part of the communities they serve, NAAC introduced “Institutional Social Responsibility (ISR) “as one of the key aspect for evaluation. It would help in ensuring that institutions contribute to the society by preparing the youth to be valued citizens with the appropriate life skills and social values and evaluate the professional and social commitment of the HEIs and their work with communities in making education central to society and society central to education. The ISR will enable institutions to make connections with stakeholders and community and synergize activities around common priorities.

The other major area of focus is on the support for innovation. Through introduction of this criterion - “innovations and best practices”, NAAC intends HEIs to tap the potential of the students and local knowledge base, foster a climate of experimentation and support innovation and their transfer to practice and dissemination. These are critical areas for the HEIs to evolve into knowledge generation and transfer systems contributing to the development of human power with right values and skills for social and economic development. Adoption of global issues such as environment, water conservation, climate change and technological developments and their integration have been extensively covered under this criterion are expected to facilitate institutions to shift from the traditional approaches and incorporate best practices which would bring in positive change.

Various curriculum reforms and the new combination of subject being offered are expected to instil confidence among the students and coax them to find opportunities in newer areas and occupations. The HEIs have initiated measures to bridge the gap between industry requirement and the quality of the talent coming out of them by supplementing the existing curriculum with value added courses to suit to the market needs and student requirements.. Taking cognizance of these initiatives the revised manual lays stress in assessing the institution on the areas like curriculum planning and implementation, curriculum enrichment, academic flexibility, student performance and learning outcomes.

Transformational change towards enhanced quality education will depend upon a holistic, coherent and interrelated approach. Further the internal efficiency of any HEIs depends on the degree of autonomy, decentralisation, trust and faith put in the institutions administration

and academicians. To this effect the current changes in NAAC assessment under criterion “governance, leadership and management” focus on the key dimensions of HE which interact and interrelate with each other and places strong emphasis on the institutional initiatives in establishing cross functional relationships supported by enabling frameworks for planning, monitoring and evaluation, capacity development, governance structures, decentralisation, effective communication, partnerships, stakeholder involvement, etc.

NAAC evolved quality assurance tools which emphasized institutional level initiatives for quality improvement and enhancement. Establishment of Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) was one of the main instruments for encouraging institution wide cooperation in all the key areas of a HEI. The IQAC initiative makes quality assurance, planning and continuous improvement the unifying factor. The current revision brought in the internal quality assurance system (IQAS) under the governance, leadership and management criterion so that it can be evaluated along with planning, policy making, monitoring and evaluation. Also the mandatory inclusion of submission and evaluation of the annual quality assurance reports and their posting online is expected to bring in seriousness and commitment of the institution for strengthening the internal quality assurance system (IQAS).

Underpinning all interventions towards effective, quality, relevant and efficient education system is knowledge and understanding of challenges, opportunities and learning impact. The introduction of submission of a SWOC analysis as a part of the SSR and also the need to post the SSR on the institutional website will help institutions response to challenges and conceptualize and realize change in a strategically determined manner.

Further with accreditation being made mandatory and increasing number of institutions moving to second and third cycles and increasing awareness among stakeholders, NAAC had to work more on the micro details to ensure transparency and accountability of the processes. NAAC plans for optimizing the use of IT infrastructure ensure transparency making HEIs accountable and encourage participation for stakeholders. Towards this end NAAC is already in the process of developing online processes for most part of A& A activities and post and re-accreditation accountability frameworks. NAAC is piloting the submission of the annual quality assurance reports online and mandated institutions for posting SSRs on the institutions website for public access.

Through the above new innovative approaches and continuing its earlier initiatives NAAC envisages at infusing quality perspectives into the day to day operation of HEIs. Such an institutional environment would result in development of the new generation with potential to contribute to the knowledge society and the socio-economic development of the nation. Overall the revised framework is developed in response to the reform initiatives and new direction provided and addresses the various challenges of HEIs thereby accelerating the quality improvement of the Indian Higher Education system.