

## **SUSTAINING QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIS): AN EVERLASTING COVENANT**

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### **Abstract**

This paper proposes to discuss a model of ‘bond’ or ‘treaty’ (covenant) that exist between quality and institution in the context of academic and administrative audit which shall sustain its vision/mission for the sake of promoting and pursuing excellence among stake holders. Quality is necessary to ensure student satisfaction and maintaining stringent standards. For the sake of continuous Improvement, the institution must ensure heightened level of clarity and focus on institutional functioning towards quality enhancement. The paper explores possibilities of Developing strategies and resources for next generation quality assurance in age of Technology and resource mobilization for quality assurance. In this context, this paper, from the perspective of NAAC, will look for the areas that should be emphasized.

**Keywords:** Quality, Benchmarking, Attributes, Academic audit, ISR Quotient

### **Introduction**

This paper proposes to discuss a model of ‘bond’ or ‘treaty’ (covenant) that exist between *quality* and *institution* in the context of academic and administrative audit which shall sustain its vision/mission for the sake of promoting and pursuing excellence among stake holders. Any institution for the sake of survival has to reorient and reinvent itself so as to remain goal oriented and educationally in tune with times. The challenges that it face has to addressed by transforming from within rather than looking for ideas external to its domain. However, it should remain sensitive to the winds of change that sweep through the educational scenario. In this context, this paper, from the perspective of NAAC, will look for the areas that should be emphasized.

### **The concept of Quality**

Quality evokes different meanings to different people. The word ‘quality’ comes from the Latin word *qualis* meaning ‘what kind of’. It has been referred to as a ‘slippery concept’

(Pfeffer and Coote, 1991). Quality in higher education points to the fact that it is an educational process that ensures students achieve their goals and thereby satisfies the needs of the society and help in national development. Quality is necessary to ensure student satisfaction and maintaining stringent standards. Compromise is something unthinkable in the implementation of quality. Going by the concept of Deming, prevention rather than cure as the key to quality (Deming, 1986). Starting from 1990, the concept of TQM, the culture of continuous improvement, organization-wide quality management, has been acknowledged. The paradigm shift was from quality control to quality assurance. From the times of its inception, NAAC has stressed the following objectives: (Sanjaya Mishra: 2006)

- 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; and
- Encourage innovations, self-evaluation and accountability in higher education.

#### **Comparison of the situation in HEIs before/after 1994**

It may sound inappropriate to many when we make a comparison between the status of HEIs before and after 1994. The year 1994 is significant because that was the year in which UGC established NAAC at Bangalore as a registered autonomous body under the Societies Registration Act of 1860. The impact of NAAC has been tremendous. Jyoti S. Kawalekar (2015) has identified the following benefits to the institution:

- To know its strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities through an informed review process.
- To initiate innovative and modern methods of pedagogy.
- Intra and inter-institutional interactions.
- To realize their academic objectives.
- Helps the Institution in securing necessary funds from funding agencies for releasing grants for research as well as expansion etc.
- Improves student enrolment both in terms of quality and quantity

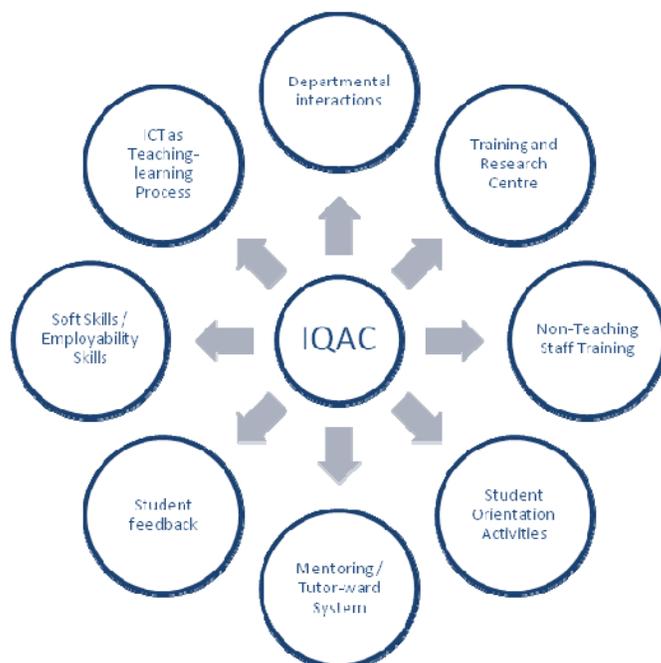
- Helps create sound and challenging academic environment in the Institution
- Facilitates global recognition of degrees and mobility of graduates and professionals
- Continuous Improvement
- Ensure heightened level of clarity and focuses on institutional functioning towards quality enhancement
- Ensure internalization of the quality culture.
- Ensure enhancement and coordination among various activities of the institution and institutionalize all good practices.
- Provide a sound basis for decision-making to improve institutional functioning.
- Jisha K. V (2015) identifies the following points based on her research in Kannur area;
- Initiates institution in to innovation and modern methods of pedagogy
- Assessment motivate the institute to provide world class education to students with the help of latest technology
- It helps in modifying the behaviour of the students, as they come closer to the communities, through extensional activities
- It will help students and parents make right decision regarding choice of educational institution so that they might receive proper return of the investment incurred on education
- It enhances collegiality on the campus
- It helps in identifying internal areas of planning
- It motivates higher education institutes to achieve excellence in all spheres of academic activity
- It establishes a new sense of direction and identity for institution
- The society gets reliable information on quality education offered

Over the period of time the educational institutions have dispensed with many old practices such as annual pattern of curriculum, annual exams, dependence on manual registers for attendance, rigid work timings and incredibly modest support system for students. Now

the HEIs have to concentrate on research, publications, digital classrooms, projects, resource sharing, socially useful extension work, digital libraries, better student support facilities.

### **New Benchmarking**

The Internal Quality Assurance Cell is one such body in the HEIs which can clearly designate the futuristic shape a college/university can develop into. Given below is one of the many roles/factors which the IQAC can play. It may be noted that the diagram is only indicative of the possible offshoots it needs to look into.



### **Higher Education Sector in India and the declaration in the Bengaluru Statement on higher education quality assurance**

It is important to note that the system of higher education in India is so vast and variegated. The facts presented here do not represent the intricate nature of its multifarious complexities. There are 712 central and state universities, 36,671 colleges and 11,445 stand-alone diploma-level institutions. The GER of higher education has increased from 12% in 2004 to 23.6% in 2014.

Regarding APQN, Stella, A notes, “In new small systems such as those in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Laos, Myanmar and Pakistan, capacity development efforts aim to help the countries establish quality assurance agencies. Representatives from these countries are

invited to participate in APQN meetings, and consultancy services to these countries to help establish quality assurance agencies are considered. Countries such as Cambodia, China, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam – which have emerging quality assurance system – are helped to train their agency staff in good quality assurance practices, and to train the trainers for external reviews. In India, Indonesia and the Philippines – where quality assurance agencies are already functioning – the goal is to introduce reforms and new elements to their practices. This is being done through staff exchanges, workshops and consultancy services” (Stella, 2005).

In the APQN conference in Bengaluru, the culminating session outlined the following measures as necessary for future enhancement for HEIs.

1. Cooperation among quality assurance networks and organizations to dissolve boundaries for quality higher education
2. Endeavour to Foster Trust Beyond Borders in higher education quality assurance
3. Sharing global information resources
4. Promoting values and ethical practices in quality assurance
5. Sharing and promoting good practices
6. Strengthening of capacity building
7. Developing strategies and resources for next generation quality assurance in age of Technology
8. Resource mobilization for quality assurance
9. Strengthening professionalism in quality assurance

#### **Self-Assessment factors**

To make an institution prepared for a self-assessment, three factors are necessary, they are

1. Planning
2. People

Before this is committed to assessing the details, one needs to understand the scope of the assessment. The fundamentals questions to be asked are (**who** and **what** are to be assessed)

- a) What are you trying to do?
- b) How are you doing it?
- c) Why are you doing it that way?

- d) How do you know it works?
- g) How do you improve it?

Further, as it has been noted above planning stage is quite significant:

**Planning** – this must be carried out within the framework of the institution’s principles of self-assessment

- A self-assessment aims at improvement and enhancement of the quality
- It is necessary to create a broad basis for the self-assessment and to sensitize staff and students
- The working group (IQAC) is in charge of the self-assessment, gathering data, analyzing material and drawing conclusions
- Everyone should be at least acquainted with the contents of the self-assessment report and should recognize it as a document from his or her own institution
- The working group might organize a workshop or seminar to discuss the draft SSR

**Persons** involved in the assessment must be

- Knowledgeable, dedicated and have a thorough understanding of the plan
- Awareness of self: strengths and weaknesses
- Ability to stay focused
- Demonstration of strengths
- ‘Can-do’ spirit
- Equipoise and feedback absorption

For the sake of documentation in this context, mere information cannot be considered as evidence without supporting criteria. Criteria are necessary for a judgment to be made and information becomes evidence when it is linked to the criteria on which judgments are made. Thus, one can rationalize, Information + Criteria = Evidence

The academic discourse in an HEI is the backbone of quality that remains within the domain of teachers, student community, parents, alumni and the management. The following factors are taken into consideration. Each subdivision will enable us to prove the fact that further areas have to be explored.

### **Curriculum Development and Course Assessment**

- Course design
- Course validation and approval
- Assessment, including moderation
- Course reviews

### **Feedback from Students and Alumni**

- Evidence, views and recommendations from staff/student meetings, course/programme committees
- Students' views on effectiveness of teaching must be obtained.
- Tracer studies, employment within six months of qualifying,

### **Staff development**

- The responsibility IQAC for policy and implementation of staff development
- Mechanisms evolved by IQAC for identification of staff development needs
- Maintaining a record of those who have been benefited and duration

### **Data on Resources**

- Institutional approach to research; relative importance given to it etc
- Collaboration with industry or other institutions
- Achievements and contribution to country's development
- Provision and design of programmes of study
- Review of established courses and programmes
- Teaching, learning, research and communications
- Academic staff – staff appointment procedures, staff development and training, staff appraisal, promotion, evaluation of teaching quality, validation of courses, internal and external to the institution
- Verification, feedback and enhancement
- Problems identified, actions taken and outcomes

### **Graduate Attributes**

Graduate attributes perceive the ways in which the moulding of the students and their exit level qualities are analyzed:

- Curiosity for learning (that makes a positive difference)
- Determination to expand and fulfill their potential
- Passion to engage locally and globally
- Creative problem solvers and researchers
- Critical and reflective thinkers
- Effective and influential contributors
- Skilled communicators
- Enquiry and lifelong learning
- Aspiration and personal development

**ISR: Institutional Social Responsibility quotient**

**3S:** Service orientation, Selflessness, Self-discipline

How to identify the quotient? **ISR QUOTIENT**

**A) Service orientation:**

- A passion to work for reason(s) beyond just delivering a task.
- A propensity to serve rather than merely transact or “do the job”
- Collaborative & inclusive
- Working towards the satisfaction of all
- Compassion based on human values and not merely passion for value

**B) Selflessness:** The natural trait to give, to share.

- Expressing love towards duty for the sake of benefiting others and readiness to sacrifice self-interests.
- Putting all stakeholders’ welfare / benefit first, always.
- Rewarding others, sharing credits

**C) Self-discipline:** Uncompromising on values and principles, with openness for continuous learning from all sources.

- Consistency of thoughts, words and action
- high on self-practice first
- Frugal with resource usage of any kind
- Practical knowledge based action and not merely bookish/general knowledge

### **Academic Audit**

It is important to know how to go about in conducting Academic audit. The following questions are vital on these vital areas.

#### **Determining Learning Objectives**

- Have we consciously considered what students who complete our courses/program should know and be able to do?
- For employment?
- For their abilities/responsibilities as citizens?
- Do we use and document information gathered from employers, former students, senior institutions?
- Do we identify and learn from best practice, evaluate student outcome goals of comparable departments in other institutions?

#### **Designing Curriculum and Co-curriculum**

- How do we determine what is taught, in what order, from what perspective?
- Do we work collaboratively on curriculum design?
- How do we decide what resources and resource materials will be used as content vehicles?
- Do we consciously consider how the course design relates to other courses students will take as part of this program?
- Do we consider out-of-classroom activities that could complement or be integrated into the curriculum?
- Do we identify and learn from best practice, evaluate curricula of comparable departments in other institutions?
- How are teaching and learning organized for students?
- What methods will be used to expose students to material for the first time?
- To answer questions and provide interpretation?
- To stimulate student involvement with the material?
- To provide feedback on student work?
- Do we analyze teaching and learning processes on a regular basis?
- Do we strive for coherence in the department's curriculum and educational processes?

- Do we work collaboratively on process design?
- Do we identify and learn from best practice, evaluate teaching and learning methods of comparable departments in ours and other institutions?

#### **Developing Student Learning Assessment**

- What measures and indicators do we use to assess student learning?
- Have we defined indicators or measures of achievement based upon our stated learning objectives?
- Do we assess performance only at the end of the course/program or do we compare beginning and ending performance to ascertain value added?
- Who is responsible for assessment?
- Do we work collaboratively on assessment design, implementation, and analysis?
- Do we base decisions on facts?
- Do we identify and learn from best practice, evaluate assessment practices of comparable departments in ours and other institutions?

#### **Assuring Implementation of Quality Education**

- Are we organized to ensure that our mutual departmental objectives and priorities are implemented consistently?
- How do we assure ourselves that content is delivered as intended, that teaching and learning processes are being implemented appropriately and consistently, that assessments are conducted as planned and the results used effectively?
- Do we work collaboratively to implement improvement initiatives?
- Do we identify and learn from best practice, evaluate quality assurance practices of comparable departments in ours and other institutions?

#### **Conclusion**

To make the system work function efficiently and effectively, the HEIs should function as per guidelines of NAAC and the following parts are essential:

- Commitment of governing body
- Identification of key functions
- IQAC
- Various Stakeholders

- SWOT analysis
- Student focus
- Faculty development
- Evidences
- Infrastructure

However for further exploration the aspects such as *Graduate Attributes, ISR Quotient, and Academic Audit* need proper study.

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