

International Initiatives in Assessment of Quality and Accreditation in Higher Education

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Abstract

This comprehensive paper is an attempt to provide an overview of the design, development and implementation of quality assurance mechanism set up to ensure the fulfillment of criteria, goals and objectives of higher education. This paper attempts to develop an overview of approaches to quality by higher educational institutions around the world, in general, and in India, in particular. This paper highlights very recent initiatives in India pertaining to the mandatory assessment and accreditation with specific and analytical references and overview from the pending The National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010 as also the UGC Regulations, 2012, making 'Mandatory Assessment and Accreditation' for each Higher Educational Institution in India.

Introduction

Higher educational institutions internationally, are currently facing similar challenges of increasing student population, diversity within student group, under-prepared students, increasing workloads and decreasing resources. There are external pressures from funding agencies, accrediting professional bodies and employers which necessitate the maintenance of quality academic programmes through periodic reviews and assessment.

The past four decades have witnessed the transformation of higher education in most of the countries from elite to a mass system. This expansion has come about through the merging of two very different concepts of higher education: the traditional universities and colleges, which were accountable to no-one for the quality of their provision, and the recent professional and vocationally oriented institutions of higher learning, which are accountable to the monitoring and accrediting bodies. The

massification of higher education has been accompanied by the development of a set of much more intrusive quality assurance and inspection arrangements.

Although most of the universities and colleges of higher education are, in general, still free to develop degree and diploma syllabuses as they please, their teaching and learning arrangements are now subject to an array of external peer judgements, some of which may have direct financial consequences. As a result, a vigorous debate is now underway in most of the developed and developing countries about the meaning and preservation of academic autonomy in a more market-orientated sector, in which the principal external stakeholders-primarily successive governments-have demanded greater accountability. One view sees quality assurance as merely a way of measuring outputs, perhaps compared with inputs, so as to estimate 'value added'. Another sees quality assurance as a powerful weapon of change, which can be used to undermine the culture of a self-justifying academic community, replacing it with a concept of higher education firmly located within the national economy and 'the world of work'.

Quality assurance is the achievement of desired standards through application of agreed procedures. It requires continuous monitoring of performance. Accreditation is a formal recognition by an authorized agency of an institution having achieved agreed standards. It is based on, and follows, quality assessment. Quality to the idea of quality assurance is the concept of quality assessment. The procedure of quality assessment can be both complex and difficult. The system of accreditation is seen by many as being a means of assuring the quality of programme, or institution, through assessments and an incentive for their improvement.

International Initiatives

The reasons for the concern for quality in higher education vary from country to country. Factors like history, culture, state of economic development and awareness and approach for growth of higher education, play a significant role in the evolution of quality assuring and controlling system in a particular country. However, it is becoming clear that self-regulation coupled with peer review carried out by an independent agency could bring in an era of quality in higher education.

The rise in international economic competition over the last quarter of a century is having a profound effect on the higher education systems of all countries (Dill and Sporn 1995a). Contemporary social demands for individual employment opportunities, standards of living, and industrial competitiveness have raised expectations regarding rates of student participation in higher education, have made academic credentials essential to success in a 'work force lottery', and have increased employer-concerns about the preparation and productivity of the work force. Government financial resources for social and educational programs are being constrained by related social demands regarding governmental 'efficiency'. The increasing scope and complexity of higher education providers, the evolution of information technology – as a viable mechanism for teaching and learning, and the emergence of 'entrepreneurial' colleges and universities in many countries are also drastically changing the traditional academic context upon which previous quality assurance policies and practices were based. (Dill 1995).

In recent years, the creation of national systems for the assessment of quality in higher education has been a major feature of developments in many countries. There are now over 70 quality assessment agencies around the world which have responsibility of undertaking a review of the quality of higher education provision in their respective countries. (Shah 1997). Concern for quality in Higher Education has become the prime agenda of the countries world over. In countries like India, the explicit focus on quality assurance in higher education is relatively new. Till recently, access to higher education for an increased percentage of the relevant age group itself was an indicator of national progress and for the individual passing out of an institution of higher education, it meant a stamp of differentiation from the masses. But in the changing context of globalization of economic activities, education has become an international service and to withstand the pressure of this changing context, countries have been pressurized to ensure and assure quality at an international level. Consequently, many countries have initiated quality assurance mechanisms. Now, after a few years of practical experience, there is a rethinking on many issues of quality assurance and countries look for the experiences and practices elsewhere.

Within Europe, both the European Commission (EC) and the Association of European Rectors (CRE) have initiated development work in this field. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), through its programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) has a project which extends from Europe to America and Australasia. In addition, UNESCO has supported activity in this field at its European Center for Higher Education (CEPES) and the various national quality agencies have formed an international body, the International Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (INQAAHE), (Brennan, Vries and Williams (Ed) 1997).

To a large extent, the interests of international bodies reflect those of their member-nation organizations: governments, universities, quality agencies etc. They also provide a mechanism by which policies and practice can be transmitted between countries. Above all, perhaps, they reflect the growing internationalization of higher education, the growth in mobility of staff and students, and the need for institutions and others to understand better and to calibrate themselves against the academic work of institutions in other countries. This latter aspect is also reflected in the emphasis placed by several national quality agencies – and in some cases their sponsoring governments – on drawing upon foreign academic expertise in the quality assessment process.

The United States has had a diverse system of mass higher education for many decades. This new economic and social reality has brought fresh attention to its quality assurance practices by both state and federal policy makers. At the state level growing concerns about the quality of college graduates entering the work force, first led in the 1980s, to policies on student assessment designed to improve the quality of undergraduate education, (Dill 1995).

Almost every country in the world is now committed to bringing higher education to the access of all those who want to have it. But many of them are not willing to put in money commensurate with the anticipated growth. On top of it, never in the

history of higher education has it come under such a strenuous demand, as today, from its funding agencies, governments and its sponsoring publics, to demonstrate quality in its works and account for its share of national resources.

Even in the USA, where educational institutions are free from governmental restrictions, (this is not the case now,) and accreditation has changed from an initial focus on judging (accepting or rejecting) an institution to a primary goal of to encouraging and assisting an institution to improve its educational quality.

The concept of accreditation now cannot be confined to a narrow definition, as broadly developed in the USA, whereby groups of educational institutions, professional practitioners, or educators from voluntary, non-governmental associations to give "Judgement" over individual institutions or their programmes. It has to be a process that encourages more of self-appraisal to know the weakness and strengths of the institutions. The entire stress is on doing better, doing it efficiently to achieve quality that should ultimately lead to excellence. This new incarnation of accreditation is now accepted all over the world and in the last five years or so as many as 38 countries have gone in for quality assurance and control system in one form or the other, (Nigvekar 1999).

There are some common features in most national systems of quality assessment, for example, self-evaluation and peer review visits. But there are significant differences in the purposes and methods between different systems. These are reflected in the balance of objectives between accountability and improvement, the focus of review (i.e. whole institution, subject level, teaching, research or a combination of these), and the ownership of the system (i.e. state owned, institution owned or independent), (Shah 1997).

American and British Perspective

Accreditation began first in the USA and that too as a relatively simple idea-a voluntary effort by a small group of educational institutions to agree on standards of distinguishing a college from a secondary school. Over the past eighty-five years or so, however, accreditation has developed into a much more sophisticated process for evaluating and improving educational quality in colleges, universities and comparable institutions. The process that began as a way of establishing, preserving and interpreting in common terms the standards of admission to colleges, whatever be the method or the combinations of methods of admission, in order to accommodate migrating students and to secure just understanding and administration of standards, has now been elevated to a wider domain of quality in education.

Accreditation, the way practiced in the USA, was generally unknown in most other countries because they relied on governmental supervision and control of educational institutions. However, things are changing in almost all the countries. This is a post-modern phenomenon that has come into picture because of the fast changing and increasingly complex relationship between society, government and higher education system, (Nigvekar 1999).

The quality of higher education in UK is recognized throughout the world. It has been reinforced recently by the establishment of two national bodies for quality

assurance:

- *The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which undertakes rigorous assessment of teaching quality.*
- *The Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), which undertakes rigorous audits of the quality assurance and procedures that each university has developed to monitor its own programmes.*

Besides meeting the standards set by government and the professional bodies, the universities in UK have their own internal system for ensuring and developing quality. The universities in UK believe in continuous improvement of their courses, through highly professional and motivated staff at the cutting-edge of new developments supported by close links with industry, commerce and the professional bodies.

The changes in the University system and massification of higher education in the UK have led to new arrangements for external quality assurance and assessment. There are two parallel processes in the UK: quality assessment, which is the responsibility of the funding councils and quality audit which is the collective responsibility of institutions through the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (CVCP), the Conference on Scottish Centrally Funded Principals (CVCP), the Conference of Scottish Centrally funded Colleges (CSCFC) and the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP). Quality assessment is concerned with the quality of educational provision and the standard of Students' performance, whereas quality audit is concerned with the mechanisms and structures which individual institutions of higher education pursue to assure themselves of the quality of their educational provision. Quality audit is one of the responsibilities of the New Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), the others being quality enhancement and credit the access. The HEQC division of Quality Audit provides the general public with an independent and informed view of maintenance and enhancement of academic quality and standards by the institutions of higher education, and renders them impartial critical estimation of their quality assurance and control mechanism so as to enable them to provide their students with an effective and ever improving learning experience.

Even though, as mentioned earlier, many countries now are in the business of quality assurance, two good models that have achieved reasonable success are those of the USA and the UK. The USA model obviously has a historic perspective: the model, which has stood the test of time with a voluntary approach. The British model, which has both governmental and non-governmental approaches, has served the purpose with quite a success. The American higher education system is still the best system in the world. And this is very true, because the high proportion of Americans benefited from higher education, (Nigvekar 1999).

Trends in Other Countries:

The assessment of quality in higher education is now on the agenda of many countries. The approach and methods are more or less the same. The only cross national differences of approach concern the question of what is to be included in

quality assessment; in particular, whether both teaching and research go together or they are to be treated separately. Netherlands, in recent times, has made a significant effort to assess the higher education in Dutch Universities. The Association of Universities in the Netherlands does external quality assessment of teaching in Dutch Universities. The Dutch Model is based on self-evaluation and peer review. Even though it is too early to pass a judgement on the impact of external assessment on Dutch Universities, it can be certainly said that there is lot of awareness about quality in the faculties and they are taking up the process quite seriously.

In Germany, procedures for quality assessment in the field of teaching are underdeveloped and demands of academic organizations, in this respect, have not yet been translated into action. The rise of private higher education in Portugal has made the Portuguese Council of Rectors (CRP) introduce a quality assessment mechanism. They have adopted the Dutch model with certain modifications. The stress is on reinforcing the independent character of the external visiting team.

Among the Scandinavian countries all the three major countries namely Sweden, Norway and Denmark have introduced the quality assessment system in one form or the other. Sweden launched a reform programme called "Liberty for Quality" in July 1993. It is envisaged that the Universities and university Colleges are to build their own quality assurance systems. A new national agency, the Office of the University Chancellor, is set up with responsibility for quality matters at the national level.

The Norwegian debate, which was initiated a decade ago, on higher education has also been influenced by the movement on quality assurance in the USA and the UK. The Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs and the Institute for studies in Research and Higher Education (ISRHE) have played a lead role in the initiation of the debate and come out with a programme of evaluation of higher education. The process is similar to what is followed in much countries-peer evaluation based on a self-evaluation report. The Danish system of higher education has traditionally been subjected to a high degree of central steering from the Ministry of Education. However, under the slogan An Open Market for Education, the Ministry, in 1990, launched an ambitious programme of modernization of higher education. This programme of modernization specifically pointed towards the need for organized and systematic evaluation efforts.

The situation regarding quality movement in the East, the Far-East and the Asian countries is also a recent phenomenon and it is encouraging. Japan, Australia, China, Hong Kong, Philippines are in the business of quality assurance and accreditation. The approach and the methodologies more or less are the same-encouragement for self-study to be followed by evaluation by external experts. There is a serious attempt to initiate the process for achieving quality in higher education in all these countries. There are already moves for sharing experiences with other countries. One such attempt has led to the establishment of an International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) which was established at an International conference held in Hong Kong in 1991. It has operated very informally for the last four years and very recently its Constitution has been accepted by as many as 22 countries which are members of INQAAHE. The main purpose of the Network is to collect and disseminate information on current and developing theory and

practice in the assessment, improvement and maintenance of quality in higher education.

Looking at these events at an international level and the current wave for internalization of education, it could be legitimately predicted that the revolution for quality, currently encompassing the domains of higher education is going to be further strengthened in the future. The entire process of assessment and accreditation is geared towards achieving quality in higher education.

An Indian Perspective

India in the last 60 years has developed a very large system of education and has created a vast body of highly skilled academicians equipped with scientific and technological capabilities, robust humanist, philosophical thought and creativity. India is the largest democracy in the World and India has the largest educational system as well. Indian higher education system is one of the largest in the world. There were only 20 universities and 500 colleges with 0.1 million students at the time India attained independence. This has increased to 611 universities and university-level institutions and 31,324 colleges as on August 2011 (UGC, 2011).

The educational system in India is today in a critical state – resistant to change. It is in danger of soon becoming irrelevant. Since Independence, though many commissions have submitted their reports and many eminent men have propounded their plans for rejuvenating the system, there has always been a wide gap between the plan and the action leaving the system still stranded on the roads. This large system of higher education deserves that action must be taken periodically to assess its performance, to conduct academic audits and also provide a system for its assessment and accreditation.

The educational system in India is today in a critical state – resistant to change. Though large, our educational system is neither relevant nor effective. India's educational ethos needs major reforms in the context of changes that are sweeping our country. Transformation that society is going through warrants a rejuvenation in the way we teach and what we teach. Restructuring of our educational institutions and the contents of the curricula is what is needed to produce the desired outcome.

Unplanned institutional proliferation and unabated expansion of students enrolment should be resolutely and effectively curbed. It is, however, more important and pertinent as well to safeguard against mistakes than to unnecessarily expand. Funds alone cannot help to improve the quality of our education. It urgently needs motivation of all including that of teachers, students, administrators and others. It is high time that we assess the quality and accredit the higher educational institutions in India, the impact of which, shall be fulfillment of objects and targets in India's National Policy on Education & Programme of Action.

There is general agreement that the state of Indian Higher Education is far from satisfactory. The overall impression amongst lay persons is that standards are deteriorating and that the knowledge and skills imparted by our academic institutions are to a great extent irrelevant to the needs of Society. The failure of the system to deliver the goods has been attributed to a number of maladies including its colonial

roots, the failure to control unplanned expansion, perennial shortage of funds, inflexible academic structure with an antiquated examination system, resistance to change from all its constituents, activism on campuses, highly politicized and bureaucratized system of management, pressure from politicians and special interest group, the distancing of the universities from society and a general lack of concern. The truth, however, is that there is a great variability in the standard of education provided by Indian academic institutions. The interaction between accountability and autonomy determines the culture within the higher education institutions. The balance between the two tends to show different patterns. Ultimately, the quality of higher education is a function of the higher educational institutions.

The subject of assessment and accreditation is new to the Indian higher education system. Only recently people have started recognizing these terminologies. Being newly developed concepts they create more of an apprehension rather than a readiness to attempt to understand what they mean. The feeling is that it is one more innovation that is floated by those higher up in the policy ladder and, therefore, when teachers or educationists or for that matter managers of education are asked whether they would like to know about assessment, maintaining high standards, assuring institutional accountability, making education more meaningful and accreditation, the response is usually not very positive. However, if they are asked whether they would be interested in such topics like giving more autonomy to institutions, being responsive to students' and society's needs and generating more resources, the interest level soars. In fact assessment and accreditation address themselves to all these topics and it is an activity to achieve improvement in the working of an institution in all its spheres of activities so as to develop quality in its prime task, that is education. (Nigvekar 1999).

During the last fifteen years there has been a sharp increase in awareness, amongst, all connected with higher education, regarding the need for maintaining quality in university-level institutions and desirability for adopting formalized quality assurance procedures. Concern for quality of education is being expressed by society (represented by government and the tax-payers) the institutions of higher learning (represented by its management and faculty) and their clients (students, and prospective employers).

Higher education being very expensive, a large number of developing countries including India cannot offer it to all who want it. It will be much worse to provide higher education without proper and reasonable facilities. In fact this is what is being actually done by many of the universities and colleges with the regrettable result that unemployable graduates are being produced in large numbers. It is true that higher education in India is heavily dependent on government support and as such it can hardly generate private funds to maintain its independent status and expansion. Governmental funding on such a large scale also has resulted in lowering of the quality, getting easy higher degrees and diplomas compromising, the academic merit and competence. A change in this pattern is indeed needed.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has been given the primary mandate to monitor and maintain the standard of teaching, examination and research. Unfortunately, the UGC has not been able to accomplish much as desired in this

respect, in spite of serious, sincere and sustained efforts made for years together in this context. The UGC in consultation with the concerned authorities should enforce the academic audit in the universities to monitor its performance and the academic standard. This is the need of the day and through it necessary reforms in higher education can be accomplished. A move of the UGC for introducing academic, administrative and financial audit in the universities has been unanimously endorsed at the All India Vice Chancellors' Conference recently held in Mangalore. Academic integrity and accountability have to be restored.

The Kothari Commission (1964-66) had stressed the need to maintain quality in Higher Education. India's National Policy on Education 1986(NEP) and the Programme of Action 1992(POA) also deal with quality in higher education and lay stress on self-evaluation and self-improvement.

'Quality assurance' is a key word, which is to be seriously applied to the system of higher education. Accreditation, assessment and academic audit are its basic components and should be enforced on the institutions to produce the desired results. There is enough motivation for criticizing a system but there is not enough motivation for improving it. It is time now that we motivate people and generate confidence in them to perform better and better.

Hence accreditation envisages schemes of self-study by those integrally connected with the institution, the faculty, the alumni and administration. The channels of communication inter-connecting the one with the other should ensure free flow of the feedback so vital for evaluation. The introspective consciousness on their part, as much through sensitizing as through conscientizing, can help overcome ailments at all levels. An exercise in period evaluation as frequent as a weekly round up in a session of two or three hours at the week end covering the task done can spell health and sanity to the whole set up. It helps in identifying the strength and weakness of the system to map out strategies of redressal and remedial mechanism. It promotes flexibility in planning by reordering priorities and for the attainment of the desired results even by modifications in decision-making. The PERT techniques of Programme Evaluation and Review Technique can come handy in monitoring the realization of institutional goals. The scheme of self-study is a continuous on-going process aimed at excellence and is far from being a terminal activity. It should be a long drawn out exercise spanning over a minimum period of five to six years before the external agency can be invited to inspect. Institutional excellence is a slowly emerging resultant with steady inputs and sustained efforts over a fairly long period. The mushrooming institutions can make no dent in achieving it overnight.

Sweeping changes occurring across the globe in the Higher Education Sector are very significant in various respects i.e. border less higher education, integrated global job market and knowledge centered development. Higher Education has always helped the developing nations particularly India as a major means of socio-economic transformation. The other interesting developments include stakeholders (student) centric evolution of Higher Education with greater emphasis on employability of academic programmes pursued. These rapid changes have reinforced the need for quality and excellence in Higher Education beyond geographies. Like in the industry and economy, the international competition to Indian universities and colleges

through these developments seems inevitable.

The performance evaluation of higher education institutions through the process of assessment & accreditation as a means of self introspection along with the inputs from peer review is of recent phenomena in India. National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has so far accredited 104 universities and 744 colleges in the country. Apart from mere assessment and accreditation, NAAC has been taking up several measures for sustainable growth and development of accredited institutions. One such activity is state wise analysis of accredited institutions. Such analysis is imperative because of heterogeneous nature of different geographical regions. Due to this, the states within India present diverse spectrum of higher education development. The major purpose of this state wise analysis of accreditation reports is multifold. i.e., on one hand to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the accredited institutions to suggest remedial measures for their further qualitative development and on the other hand to provide a suggested action plan to the facilitators (state governments, apex bodies, parents etc) and also to stake holders (students) to guide them towards right choice of institution for pursuing higher education.

The Indian system of higher education has, (Prasad, 2004) always responded well to the challenges of the time. When the system came under severe criticism that it had allowed the mushrooming of higher education institutions (HEIs), compromising the quality of educational offerings, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) took initiatives to restore the standards of higher education. Consequently, the National Policy on Education (1986) that laid special emphasis on upholding the quality of higher education in India noted certain policy initiatives. On the recommendations of the Programme of Action (1992) document that provided the guidelines for the implementation of the National Policy on Education (1986), in 1994, the UGC established the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) as an autonomous body to assess and accredit institutions of higher education and its units thereof, with its headquarters at Bangalore, (Prasad, 2004).

The subject of assessment & accreditation was new till 1994, to Indian higher education system. India has presently two national level accreditation bodies. As a follow-up action to the NEP 1986 Policy Statement and in pursuance of the function, specified in the AICTE Act 1988, the AICTE has constituted the National Board of Accreditation. It has a clientele in professional disciplines like engineering, management and pharmacy and National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) an autonomous organization established by the UGC, with an agenda for judging and assuring quality in liberal arts, sciences and other disciplines. For any institution of higher education in India, the facets that are important are organization and management structure, academic activities, organization structure, academic administrative structure, academic support resources and services, and financial resources generation and management structure. Covering all these facets of the multidimensional phenomenon help in the functioning of an institution of higher education.

India has one of the largest and diverse education systems, in the world. Privatization, widespread expansion, increased autonomy and introduction of programs in new and emerging areas has improved access to higher education. At the same time it also led, to widespread concern on the quality and relevance of the higher education. To address these concerns, the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) and the Programme of Action (PoA, 1992) that spelt out strategic plans for the policies, advocated the establishment of an independent National accreditation agency. Consequently, the National Assessment And Accreditation Council (NAAC) was established in 1994 as an autonomous institution of the University Grants Commission (UGC). The mandate of NAAC as reflected in its vision statement is in making quality assurance an integral part of the functioning of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The Vision of NAAC is to make quality the defining element of higher education in India through a combination of self and external quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance initiatives. The mission statements of the NAAC aim at translating the NAAC's vision into action plans and define specific tasks of NAAC engagement and endeavor as given below:

- To arrange for periodic assessment and accreditation of institutions of higher education or units thereof, or specific academic programmes or projects;
- To stimulate the academic environment for promotion of quality in teaching-learning and research in higher education institutions;
- To encourage self-evaluation, accountability, autonomy and innovations in higher education;
- To undertake quality-related research studies, consultancy and training programmes, and
- To collaborate with other stakeholders of higher education for quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance.

Striving to achieve its goals as guided by its vision and mission statements, NAAC primarily focuses on assessment of the quality of higher education institutions in the country. The NAAC methodology for Assessment and Accreditation is very much similar to that followed by Quality Assurance (QA) agencies across the world and consists of self-assessment by the institution and external peer assessment by NAAC.

Under the methodology introduced by NAAC in 2007, the higher education institutions were assessed and accredited by a two-step approach. In the first step, the institution is required to seek 'Institutional Eligibility for Quality Assessment (IEQA)' and the second step is the assessment and accreditation of the institute under the grades 'A', 'B', 'C' for accredited institutions; and 'D' for those which are not accredited. NAAC has identified seven criteria and follows the process of Grade accreditation only and does not undertake threshold accreditation, i.e. the Grade is only a relative value assigned to a university and does not denote an absolute attribute of quality. NAAC has been continuously fine-tuning its assessment and accreditation methodologies in tune with local, regional and global changes in higher education scenario. This helps in reaching out to HEIs and wider acceptance of the methodology. The methodology of NAAC has stood the test of time for last 18 years,

mainly because it has remained dynamic and responsive to the stakeholder feedback.

NAAC's relevance: The role of NAAC, (Ranganath, 2013), has always been to provide appropriate information to stakeholders on whether minimum standards are available in an institution to deliver education. On the relevance of NAAC's assessment in today's higher education scenario, the quality assurance mechanism in the country should become stringent. We need a highly robust, objective assessment mechanism in place as higher education is growing quickly, (Ranganath, 2013).

Global rankings : Many NAAC-graded institutions, (Ranganath, 2013), do not figure in global higher education institutional rankings, which reflects poorly on NAAC, however, Assessment and rankings are distinctly different from each other. The intention of NAAC is to ensure the institution has minimum requirements to deliver quality education. We don't measure excellence. On the other hand, rankings are not bothered about this. They look at an international mix of faculty and students, research publications, grants generated from research among other criteria. They also look at UG teaching, where some of our universities could score well, but we lose on the international mix. On its part, NAAC is taking steps to constantly empower higher education institutions. For instance, NAAC provides grants of Rs 75,000 for each IQAC to conduct seminars and workshops. There is some NAAC-related activity happening at least 200 days a year.

Targets achieved by NAAC: NAAC, (Ranganath, 2013), did not carry out any assessment and accreditation work for the first four years. It was a challenging period for NAAC as its genesis introduced the concept of external quality assurance. The NAAC had to convince stakeholders, students and academics in universities of the importance of quality assurance in higher education. The success of NAAC, (Ranganath, 2013) is often measured by the number of higher education institutions it has accredited. However, it is to be understood that this is not to measure NAAC's performance. Assessment and accreditation has been made mandatory not because NAAC has failed; it is because response from higher education institutions was poor. So far, whoever has volunteered, The NAAC has assessed them. The NAAC completed till 06 January 2000 the assessment of around 100 institutions and the institutional grades have been announced for 85 institutions, which include 6 universities and 79 colleges from only 11 States in India. With the UGC's decision taken in 1999-2000 to extend financial support to meet the accreditation cost to all the institutions of higher education, more number of colleges started coming forward for accreditation and the total number of Institutions Accredited, as on 08 January, 2004 were 848, which include 104 Universities – 104 and 744 Colleges, showing tremendous positive response and initiative of participation in the voluntary process of NAAC assessment. The latest statistics as on 16 June 2013, (Ranganath, 2013) is that, 172 universities and 4,857 colleges, who have been assessed by NAAC. But, this scenario is still dismal, since, there are 620 universities and more than 35,000 colleges in the country, (Ranganath, 2013), and the said statistics show that NAAC has accredited only 172 universities and 4,857 colleges. Of these, only 35 per cent of universities and 10 per cent of colleges are graded 'A'. In other words, as on today, more than 400 universities and 31000 Colleges have not come forward to get assessed at the hands of NAAC.

The NARAHEI Bill, 2010 :- Reforms in the Accreditation System and Ratings: The 11th FYP made accreditation mandatory for all institutions of higher education. It envisaged the setting up of multiple accreditation agencies with a National Body to rate the accrediting agencies. Beside institutional accreditation, departmental and programme accreditation was also recommended. The National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions [NARAHEI] Bill, 2010 was introduced in the Parliament with a view to achieving reforms in accreditation. The Bill is under active consideration of the Parliament.

Considering the time-span required for the above-mentioned proposed [NARAHEI] Bill, pending before the Parliament, the UGC, with unambiguous desire and object, decided to frame 'Regulations' to make the Assessment and Accreditation of the higher Educational Institutions mandatory. Accordingly, the UGC, in exercise of the powers conferred, (Gazette of India, 2013) by clauses (f) and (g) of sub-section (1) of Section 26 of 'The University Grants Commission Act, 1956', the University Grants Commission framed the Regulations' called the University Grants Commission (Mandatory Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Educational Institutions), Regulations, 2012, and made applicable to (a) all universities established and / or incorporated by or under a Central Act, a Provincial Act or a State Act; (b) all institutions, other than technical institutions, declared by notification under Section 3 of the 'University Grants Commission Act to be deemed to be universities; (c) all colleges, other than technical institutions, including autonomous colleges. These Regulations have come into force from January 25, 2013, being the date of notification in the Official Gazette of India, (Gazette of India, 2013).

Summing Up:

The worldwide experiences indicate that most of the issues in assessment and accreditation centre around the following pertinent questions:

- Should the accreditation be made mandatory and linked up with the (a) norms of funding (b) norms of recognition to universities and permanent affiliation to colleges?
- Can the criteria applied now be made more sensitive to the varying institutional contexts?
- What would be the Benchmarks against which we can place the institutions on the quality continuum?
- What indicators could be useful in narrowing down the inter-team variances in their assessment of institutions and programmes?
- How such indicators could be interpreted to assist the peer judgement objectively?

Mushroom growth of universities and colleges has been the main cause of lack of quality in HEIs. There has to be a policy decision as regards opening of a new educational institution and this be taken only after examining its need and feasibility.

Reference Material and Acknowledgement

The author has extensively used several private and official documents, articles, research work, reviews journals, periodicals, newspapers and books while preparing this paper. The entire list of reference materials is given in alphabetical order. Grateful acknowledgement is made to all known and unknown (in case of official documents) authors and publishers.

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This is a list of recognized higher education related accreditation organizations. The list includes agencies and organizations that play a role in higher education accreditation and which are recognized by the appropriate governmental authorities. The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) is a global association of quality assurance organizations, both governmental and non-governmental. It was founded in 1991 with 8 member organizations and now has over