

The Role of IQAC in Quality Sustenance through Brainstorming and Benchmarking

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Abstract

Quality has become the defining element of education. In order to survive in the competitive world of globalization, all higher education institutions should pay special attention to quality in higher education. NAAC proposes that every accredited institution establish an Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) as a post accreditation quality sustenance measure. The NAAC has adopted its New Methodology of Assessment and Accreditation from 1st April 2007. After taking cognizance of many changes NAAC formulated five core values. The NAAC has identified seven criteria to serve as the basis for assessment of HEIs. The assessment by NAAC will take a holistic view of all the inputs, processes and outputs of an institution. In essence, the NAAC assessment lays focus on the institutional developments with reference to three aspects: **Quality initiatives, Quality sustenance and Quality enhancement.**

IQAC is expected to activate the system and raise the institutional capabilities to higher levels so that the institution makes continuous improvement in Quality. Quality assurance is a conscious and planned process, and therefore, we should have some tools and mechanisms to ensure quality. The paper presents the application of two important tools as brainstorming and benchmarking and their significance in quality sustenance and enhancement.

The brain storming sessions at IQAC, department, criterion and administrative levels are to be conducted for the preparation of action plan for five years. This way brainstorming and benchmarking mechanisms are used properly to collect information and ideas from bottom to top level and set in motion the action plan keeping an eye on the benchmarks. Such tools enable the IQAC for the Quality sustenance and enhancement as well.

Introduction: Quality has become the defining element of education in the 21st century in the context of new social realities. Higher education is at the cross roads. At one end there is high demand for access to higher education, and at the other the quality is questioned. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) and the Programme of Action (PoA, 1992), inter alia recommended that: "Excellence of institutions of Higher education is a function of many aspects: self evaluation and self-improvement are important. The quality process, participation, achievements etc., will be constantly monitored and improved."

In order to survive in the competitive world of globalization, all higher education institutions should pay special attention to quality in higher education. NAAC has taken a number of steps to promote the quality of Indian higher education. In pursuance of the National Action Plan of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), Bangalore, for performance evaluation, assessment and accreditation and quality up gradation of institutions of higher education, the

NAAC proposes that every accredited institution establish an Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) as a post accreditation quality sustenance measure. Since quality enhancement is a continuous process, the IQAC has become a part of an institution's system and work towards realizing the goals of quality enhancement and sustenance. The prime task of the IQAC is to develop a system for conscious, consistent and catalytic improvement in the performance of institutions. The basic purposes of the IQAC are: a) To ensure continuous improvement in the entire operations of the institution, and b) To assure stakeholders connected with higher education – namely, students, parents, teachers, staff, would-be employers, funding agencies and society in general - of the accountability of the institution for its own quality and probity. The IQAC will evolve many mechanisms and procedures. Main functions include development and application of quality benchmarks/parameters in various activities of the institution and dissemination of information on quality aspects.

The NAAC has adopted its New Methodology of Assessment and Accreditation from 1st April 2007. After taking cognizance of many changes NAAC formulated five core values. The NAAC has identified seven criteria to serve as the basis for assessment of HEIs. The assessment by NAAC will take a holistic view of all the inputs, processes and outputs of an institution. In essence, the NAAC assessment lays focus on the institutional developments with reference to three aspects: **Quality initiatives, Quality sustenance and Quality enhancement**. The Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) is expected to activate the system and raise the institutional capabilities to higher levels so that the institution makes continuous improvement in Quality. A functional Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) and institutional website are the Minimum Institutional Requirements (MIR) to volunteer for re-accreditation. The specific focus of the Re-accreditation framework will be on the impact of first accreditation, especially on:

- The compliance of the suggestions and recommendations made in the Peer Team Report of the institutions during the first assessment and accreditation
- Quality sustenance and quality enhancement efforts of the institution during the post-accreditation tenure
- Evidence of contributing to the core values

Quality Sustenance: During the first assessment for accreditation, the NAAC's process may have triggered quality initiatives in many aspects, set in motion some innovative practices, served as a catalyst for institutional self-improvement, the participation of the stake holders may have led to new initiatives. The uses of technology in the learning process as well as for administration are a few such initiatives. These changes have a direct bearing on the quality of education and re-accreditation will consider how these initiatives have been sustained during the accredited period.

Quality Enhancement: It is proper and educationally sound to expect re-accreditation to bring to light how institutions have progressed over a period of five years with the accredited status. The re-accreditation would give due credit to the quality initiatives

promoted by the first assessment and the consequent quality enhancement that has taken place.

Quality assurance is a conscious and planned process, and therefore, we should have some tools and mechanisms to ensure quality. Ishikawa (1982) has identified a set of seven tools that can be used by teams and individuals to interpret available data to derive maximum information. These seven tools are: process flowchart, graphs, Pareto analysis, fishbone diagram, scatter diagram, check sheets and control charts. There are five popular models of quality assurance: Baldrige criteria, ISO 9000-2000, Capability Maturity Model, Six Sigma and Total Quality Management.

Brainstorming: Brainstorming is one of the most fundamental processes of generating ideas and solutions for problem solving. During the brainstorming session, the following rules may be followed (Sallis, 1996; Bell et al, 1994):

- Be clear about the topic of brainstorming
- Wild ideas are welcome
- Do not criticize people’s ideas
- Build on ideas
- Allow everyone to express their ideas
- Record all ideas in a visible manner

Benchmarking: Benchmarking is defined as “a continuous systematic process for evaluating the products, services and work processes of organizations that are recognized as representing the best practices for the purpose of organizational improvements” (Spendolini, 1992). Benchmarking in education is a relatively new concept and can bring huge benefits in terms of continuous improvement of quality. The benchmarking can be set, by considering three fundamental performance issues articulated by the following questions:

1. Are we performing better than we have ever performed?
2. Are there any other organisations that are performing well and from whom we can learn?
3. Are there any practices that will improve our performance?

Qualitative Journey in Higher Education

| Pre-Accreditation | Accreditation | Post-Accreditation |
|--|---|---|
| Deciding to go in for A & A | Letter of Intent to NAAC | Establishment of IQAC |
| Preparing and motivating the stakeholders of the institution for A and A | Receipt of Manual and other Material from NAAC | Identifying the priority areas of operation |
| Developing Vision and Mission of the institution | Preparation of Self Study Report by the institution | Formulation of Plans and Strategies |
| Identifying the areas of action and operation | Submission to NAAC | Journey towards Sustenance and Enhancement of Quality |
| | Peer Team visit for assessment | Quality Enhancement initiatives are operationalised for TQM |
| | Grade of Accreditation awarded by NAAC | |

The role of IQAC is very crucial in quality sustenance. The steps to be taken by the IQAC after first accreditation are as follows.

Selection of IQAC members & coordinator

Study of NAAC new methodology, new grading system, manual for Self-Study Affiliated/Constituent Colleges (Effective from 1st April 2007), format of AQAR, Revised Guidelines for the Creation of the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) in Accredited Institutions

Analysis of peer team report (strengths, weaknesses, suggestions & recommendations)

The brain storming sessions at IQAC, department, criterion and administrative levels are to be conducted for the preparation of action plan for five years.

At IQAC level : The IQAC has to do strategic planning, make Vision, Mission Statement, Goals/Objectives etc and chalk out the long term strategic perspective plan for sustained growth, expansion, quality enhancement and student satisfaction.

In TQM, strategy, philosophy, values and goals must be transmitted down the organisation from level to level, in a systematic way to provide focus, clarity, direction and alignment. Strong commitment to Quality Road Map helps inclination to stick to the Policy Frame work.

Systems should be improved at every point and continuous improvement is aimed at and Policy Maintenance is the priority but is always open to corrections. In consistence with the Policy Framework, Policy Review is a mechanism to check, evaluate, innovate and relearn.

Selection of criterion conveners & members: The Conveners are selected after their consent to work as the convener of the criterion wise committees. The Conveners selected the members for their committees from the staff list, such that everyone is included in one of the Criterion committees.

Hierarchy of the different Committees for proper execution of the quality enhancing policies example: Ten committees are to be formulated by Clubbing of regular committees of the college in the frame work of NAAC methodology as follows:

| | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------|
| Academic Programmes | Extension programmes | Gymkhana |
| Teaching and evaluation programmes | Effective governance cell | Library |
| Co-curricular programmes | Infrastructure development cell | |
| Research Programmes | Management Information system | |

College committees are to be restructured under IQAC and seven criteria (appendix 1).

Awareness is created for reaccreditation via IQAC presentations on: Accreditation, post accreditation work [AQARs of five years], new methodology of reaccreditation and Criterion wise presentations by the conveners for the staff.

Arrange one or two day workshop to receive additional information of new methodology from external experts.

The innovative practices and mechanisms are to be evolved by the IQAC, such as academic calendar, academic news letter, academic audit, student participation in various committees.

At criterion level:

List of documents given to criterion conveners: SSR part, PTR, Grading system, Key aspects, key indicators, parts of SSR part I and II inputs from the respective criteria

Different cells should be formulated : placement cell, counseling for girls and boys, grievances redressal cells for employees and students, remedial coaching, coaching for advanced learners, slow learners, competitive exams, career guidance cell, anti-ragging cell, cell for prevention of sexual harassment, cell for extension activities, research committee, website cell , cell for youth festival, cell for elocution competition , BC cell, nature and adventure club, cultural committee, magazine cell, prospectus committee, UGC committee, staff welfare committee, staff academy etc.

Different associations are to be formed: Parent-Teacher Association, Alumni Association, Science Association, Social Sciences' Association, Literary Association, Commerce Association, etc.

Input formats are to be given to support services, academic and administrative committees.

IQAC should provide guidelines for functioning of all Cells & Committees.

Presentations by criterion conveners to all staff for awareness, expectations and documentation are to be arranged.

Mechanism for maintenance of Record:

- a. For proper record keeping, minute books, registers, files are provided
- b. Data collection procedure is suggested and asked to implement.
- c. Use of ICT for record keeping and information exchange in soft format is made a regular practice.
- d. Verification of the records.

Planning and coordination of different annual activities via academic calendar

- a. Every committee of the criterion asked to submit a task list and future plan.
- b. Every committee is given the list of activities to be carried out.
- c. All activities are compiled, planned and distributed evenly throughout the academic year by considering the balance in terms of weightage and time given.
- d. Academic calendar is prepared accordingly, displayed and monitored.
- e. Administrative calendar is also prepared similarly.

Feedback mechanism:

- a. Feedback is taken from students on curriculum, teachers, infrastructure, administration and management.
- b. Feedback is taken from teachers on administration, infrastructure and management.

- c. Gender audit is also conducted.
- d. Feedback from non-teaching staff on teachers, administration and infrastructure is also conducted.
- e. Feedback from participants and beneficiaries of every activity is made regular practice.
- f. Feedback is analyzed scientifically and statistically, results are conveyed to concerned stakeholder/person for improvement.

Participatory, transparent democratic work culture:

- a. Participation of every member.
- b. Proper distribution of work and recording the minutes.
- c. Due credit is given to the good work.
- d. Every decision taken democratically.
- e. Every document is made available to all.
- f. Proper publicity of the information on website.

Preparation of reports:

- a. Proper format suggested and made regular practice for reporting of every event.
- b. Preparation of compiled reports like AQAR/SSR via brain storming sessions.
- c. Presentation of rough draft to all and accepting suggestions for improvement.

Mechanism for documentation:

- a) Collection of list of documents from criteria
- b) Consolidation of information required by all criteria from various sections
- c) Distribution of list to respective departments, sections, cells
- d) Collection of documents at IQAC office
- e) Made available to all

At department level: Departmental files and personal file formats are generated and circulated. Departments are asked to keep updated stock register, meetings register, and alumni register. They are asked to plan and execute annual calendar of academic and co-curricular activities, time table, and future plans of the department.

At administrative level: Enlisting of infrastructural facilities to be made available or required renovation such as canteen, health centre, backup in computer laboratory, office automation hardware and software etc.

Meetings of various sections, departments, cells and committees are to be arranged for functioning, monitoring for expected output.

The benchmarking can be set, by considering the first fundamental performance issue, are we performing better than we have ever performed? For that we have to set the targets at our institutional level & then we can compare with any other organisations that are performing well and from whom we can learn.

| Key Aspects | Bench mark / target at institution level | Present | Target |
|--|--|---------|--------|
| 1. 1 Curricular design and development | Contribution in curriculum design (Members of BOS) Value Added / Interdisciplinary courses introduced | | |
| 1. 3 Feedback on curriculum | Significant use of feedback in changes in curriculum | | |
| 2. 3 Teaching-learning process | Innovative methods of learning experiences (use of ICT) | | |
| 2. 4 Teacher quality | Number, Ph.Ds, NET/SET, publications, other ahivements | | |
| 3. 1 Promotion of research | Facilities, FIP, encouragement to publication | | |
| 3. 2 Research and publication output | Numbers of Ph.Ds, Publications(international, national, state level) Papers in conferences Attendance in seminars | | |
| 3. 3 Consultancy | Broad Areas of Consultancy services | | |
| 3. 5 Collaborations | Number of MOU's Linkages for research & extension | | |
| 4. 1 Physical facilities | Present map and projected expansion | | |
| 4. 3 Library as a learning resource | Automation, computers, internet, reprographic facilities | | |
| 4. 4 ICT as learning resources | Is computer made available to all faculty and students? Computer aided Teaching Learning material How many departments have computer of their own? | | |
| 5. 3 Student activities | Participation at National/International levels in sports/NCC/NSS | | |

Conclusion: This way brainstorming and benchmarking mechanisms are used properly to collect information and ideas from bottom to top level and set in motion the action plan keeping an eye on the benchmarks. Such tools enable the IQAC for the Quality sustenance and enhancement as well.