NAAC
A Decade of Dedication to Quality Assurance

Contents

Acknowledgments

The NAAC would like to place on record the valuable contributions of many colleagues in preparing this document. In the process of information dissemination about the developments of the NAAC, a lot of material has already been published earlier by the NAAC. The staff of the NAAC have also been active in publishing in various academic forums as a strategy to reach out to the academia. Consequently, parts of the chapters are modified versions of material already published, either by the NAAC or by others. For using such material, the NAAC acknowledges with thanks the support extended by the respective publishers.

Special mention has to be made of two publications.

1. *3 Eventful Years of NAAC's Existence.* A NAAC publication covering the developments of the first three years.

2. *External Quality Assurance in Indian Higher Education: Case Study of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC).* A book written by Dr. Antony Stella, Adviser, NAAC, it was published in 2002 by the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), an autonomous body of the UNESCO. Under the 'New Trends in Higher Education' series, when the IIEP published books about the quality assurance developments of various countries, it released this book covering the Indian developments of eight years.

The NAAC thanks all those who have played a role in the preparation and publication of this book, including Mr. Ganesh Hegde, Assistant Adviser, NAAC who co-ordinated the publication work and Mr. N. Narayan who has added value to the book with his editing.
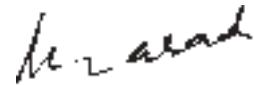
Foreword

It is not easy to document ten years of existence of an organization such as the NAAC that has been given the gigantic task of assuring the quality of the third largest higher education system in the world. The ups and downs, the trials and tribulations, the successes and struggles, the challenges and solutions – how does one distil ten years of various experiences on the long, arduous journey of quality assurance into a small, readable book?

The book captures the significant progress of the NAAC during the past ten years in promoting quality assessment, quality sustenance and quality enhancement in Indian higher education in the country. Many policy makers at the centre as well as the states, educational administrators, practitioners in the field of education and various stakeholders have contributed to the development of the NAAC. The impact the NAAC has made on the system of higher education is due to the collective effort and support of these visionaries and stakeholders. In addition to such support, the leadership provided by the former Presidents, Chairmen, and Directors of the NAAC has made the NAAC a formidable quality assurance agency (QAA). The future directions indicated in the book point to a pivotal role for the NAAC in the coming years in quality assurance, in India as well as abroad - a role that will require the continued support of educational leaders and stakeholders.

In an era where the only constant is change, this book is a snapshot of a largely successful past decade of the NAAC with just a glimpse of what the future beholds. Whatever the future beholds, this snapshot should give anybody the confidence that the NAAC will be able to emerge stronger and more successful in its endeavours to assure the quality of Indian higher education and also play a globally influential role as a quality assurance agency in formulating and strengthening general policies and practices of quality assurance of higher education in all countries.

I congratulate Dr. Antony Stella, Adviser, NAAC for the commendable job she has done in documenting the developments of the NAAC. Her association with the NAAC for the past eight years, as one of the first team of officers recruited, has added value to the documentation. She has been ably supported by her colleagues.

This book should be able to serve as an informative as well as an instructive document for all those involved and interested in quality assurance of higher education the world over. It could help evolving quality assurance systems and agencies in avoiding pitfalls in establishing themselves and existing quality assurance agencies in re-defining or refining their practices. Various stakeholders could benefit by the overview provided of the entire quality assurance process. All concerned could also benefit from the insights into the future directions that the NAAC may have to take to consolidate and extend its quality assurance activities.

Prof. V. S. Prasad
Director, NAAC

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Introduction

The world over, ensuring the quality of higher education is gaining prominence in policy making due to the interplay between many factors such as shrinking resource allocation for higher education and growing awareness about value for money among the stakeholders. While multiplicity in educational delivery and educational providers during the past two decades has widened access to, and choice of, higher education institutions, it has also increased the risk of poor quality educational provisions entering the higher education system. Especially since the 1980s, the expansion of the system of higher education was coupled with mounting criticisms about the quality of educational provisions. As a response to this issue, establishment of quality assurance agencies has become a common phenomenon worldwide. India joined this trend in 1994 with the establishment of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) as an outcome of its National Policy on Education (1986).

In the 1980s, it was strongly felt that the Indian higher education required quality assurance systems, over and above the then existing built-in checks, to ensure quality of a higher level. Although the expansion of the system of higher education in the country had been impressive in terms of numbers, providing access to higher education to millions across the length and breadth of the country, simultaneously criticisms were voiced about the quality of education being imparted. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) as adopted by the Parliament and the Programme of Action (PoA) document that followed argued the need for setting up a council for ensuring and enhancing quality. The NPE

and the PoA *inter alia* recommended that "*excellence of institutions of higher education is a function of many aspects: self-evaluation and self-improvement are important. If a mechanism is set up which will encourage self-assessment in institutions and also assessment and accreditation by a council…the quality process, participation, achievements, etc. will be constantly monitored and improved*". It is in this context that the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India initiated measures for setting up a quality assurance agency under its Act.

Built-in Quality Controls

The University Grants Commission by virtue of the statutory powers conferred on it is expected to develop effective mechanisms for quality control of institutions. Section 12 of the UGC Act of 1956 specifically requires the UGC to be responsible for "the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examinations and research in universities". Towards fulfilling this mandate, the UGC has evolved various monitoring mechanisms for quality control, which directly or indirectly look into the need and eligibility criteria for the establishment of institutions, and evaluate the fitness of the established ones to receive financial support. For instance, the *UGC Regulations, 1985*, are on the *Minimum Standards of Instruction for the Grant of the First Degree Through Formal Education*. These regulations are about working days, working hours, attendance requirements, supplementation of lectures by tutorials and/or problem-solving sessions, term paper, nature of evaluation, workload of teachers and several related matters. Similarly there are *Regulations for the Non-formal/Distance Education Mode*. Introduction of eligibility tests for teaching and research, Academic Staff Colleges for in-service teachers, establishment of curriculum development centres, the UGC panels on subject areas, examination reforms, question banks and financial assistance under various schemes are other measures through which the UGC is trying to enhance the quality of higher education.

In addition to the above mechanisms, the UGC initiates special schemes to enrich the quality of education. According to Section 12 CCC of the UGC Act, the UGC may establish "*institutions for providing common facilities, services and programmes for a group of universities or for the universities in general and maintain such institutions or provide for their maintenance by allocating and disbursing out of the Fund of the*

Commission such grants as the Commission may deem necessary". Under this provision, the UGC has established inter-university centres and national facilities to help universities improve the quality of learning, teaching and research by providing information resources, and facilities for research, library networking, audio-visual communication, etc. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) was also established under this provision of the UGC.

Besides the various guidelines of the UGC, the affiliating functions of the universities also contribute to the quality of higher education by ensuring that the affiliated colleges fulfill some minimum criteria. But the growth in the number of affiliates has reduced the role of the academic leadership of universities to mere monitoring of the minimum requirements. The state governments, which are the major providers of the state universities and colleges of the respective states, have their annual audit and review mechanisms. However, all that these providers do is oversee the monitoring mechanisms of financial and academic audit to satisfy themselves that the minimum requirements have been met.

Apart from the review committees, inspections and internal regulatory mechanisms in the UGC–University–Colleges-State government network, professional bodies play a significant role in licensing and ensuring quality in professional areas such as medicine, engineering, law, education and agriculture. While the UGC is responsible for co-ordination, determination and maintenance of overall standards of higher education, the professional bodies are responsible for certification of the professional programmes and authorizing the candidates to practice their profession. Some of them are authorized to release grants under specific heads and make policy recommendations on funding. There are more than 30 such bodies of which a few have been made statutory. In spite of these built-in quality controls, the deterioration in the quality of higher education was very often voiced as a major concern by education commissions and committees.

Quality Concerns

By the 1980s, the criticism about the deterioration in standards of higher education in the country was mounting. One of the major criticisms was about the inadequacy of the affiliating system. This system was effective when the number of affiliated colleges was less and the number of courses was also limited.

The affiliating model was perhaps the best model to guide a limited group of, say 20-30, colleges through one nodal academic body. But with the increase in the number of colleges, an established university with a larger geographical jurisdiction would have to cope with the demands of affiliating functions of may be 200-odd affiliates. The academic leadership, which the parent university is to provide to its affiliates, cannot be achieved meaningfully with such a ratio.

The growth in numbers is also reflected in the student enrolment, faculty involved and the number of programmes offered. The Indian system of higher education is the third largest in the world, third only to the USA and China, catering to about 10 million students through 0.5 million teachers and more than 16000 higher education institutions. With this growth in size, the explosion of knowledge and information technology has led to micro specialisations and a host of new inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary areas. Hundreds of course combinations have evolved. The nomenclature of different combinations varies greatly and the name of the award means little. In sum, with the growth in numbers, the associated problems also increased and there was increasing criticism that the country had permitted the mushrooming of institutions of higher education with substandard facilities. It emerged that a new initiative over and above the existing mechanisms would be necessary.

Need for a New Initiative

Considering these changing contexts and the consequent challenges, many committees on education recommended both accountability and autonomy to institutions of higher education. Based on such recommendations, the concept of autonomous colleges was conceived by the UGC to overcome the problem of the outdated and inflexible structure of the affiliating system. Measures to promote performance evaluation of colleges were also introduced. While there were discussions going on about academic freedom to deserving colleges, concern was expressed equally strongly about the universities as well. The major concern about the universities was that their achievement was not proportionate to the time, effort and intellectual resources expended on them. The document "Challenge of Education - A policy perspective" [1985] brought out by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) stated that universities should be truly autonomous and accountable. There was a growing consensus that academic

institutions can function well only when they enjoy substantial autonomy; a suitable system had to be designed to ensure accountability and also motivate institutions of higher education to be creative and innovative. In fact, the Committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council would note later in its report that "While the central motive to the accreditation system has come from the requirements of college autonomy, it also answers the need for a systematic and regular means of assurance that colleges and universities are functioning effectively."

It was expected that the creation of an autonomous national agency with sufficient expertise and credibility, would not only control the quality of higher education, but also motivate educational institutions to strive for excellence. However, it was not an easy task. Evolving a mechanism acceptable to the majority of the system needed careful deliberations and consultations at the national and international levels. Around eight years was spent in this developmental stage, which is explained in the following chapter.

2

The Foundations of Quality Assurance

The quality assurance efforts of the Indian higher education system gained momentum by the late 1980s. Guided by the thrust given to quality higher education by the National Policy on Education (1986), the UGC constituted the Committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council in 1986 to work on the approaches and method for assessment and accreditation suitable to higher education institutions in the country.

Committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council

The 15-member Committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council (Annexure II) was constituted under the chairpersonship of Dr. Vasant Gowariker, the then Secretary, Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India. The terms of reference of the committee were to "*make recommendations regarding setting up of an Accreditation and Assessment Council in order to develop a mechanism for maintenance and raising of quality of institutions of higher education while keeping in view the objectives, uses and various methods/procedures that are currently being followed by different countries or that can be adopted.*"

This committee constituted a sub-committee under the convenership of Dr. Vasant Gowariker to bring out a working paper on the above terms of reference. After a great deal of discussions on various aspects of assessment of educational institutions, a working group was set up to prepare a draft document suggesting practical steps towards setting up of the Assessment and Accreditation Council.

The draft report thus prepared was placed before the main committee on 9 December 1987. The main committee accepted the report and submitted it to the UGC. The report dealt with the following aspects:

(a) aspects of management of higher education and its shortcomings

(b) process of accreditation, its objects and methodology of working

(c) assessment of institutional effectiveness in each of the principal areas of institutional activity and responsibility

(d) steps towards an accreditation system in India and how to organize the process, and

(e) linkages with other accrediting agencies (accreditation of secondary schools and professional areas of study) and development of the National Testing Services.

The Committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council conceived the accreditation agency to be a self-financing institution whose recurring expenditure would be met entirely from the membership fees paid by member-institutions. It noted that the initial expenditure on setting up the Accreditation Council should be met by the UGC for a period of three years. The report outlined a few strong measures on linking accreditation with central funds. The notable ones are:

1   State governments will be free, as before, to found, charter or recognize, and to fund, new institutions, but those institutions will not receive any central funds until they become accredited. Funding, development or support of as yet unaccredited state institutions will be entirely the concern of the states.

2   For the founding of a new central institution, separate funds will be allocated to sustain it until it wins accreditation.

3   Within five years of the setting up of the Accreditation Council, only accredited institutions will be eligible for central funding. Some painful decisions will have to be made, but if there is to be any meaning in an accreditation system, it must be operated with great integrity, and therefore there must be no exceptions.

It also recommended the closure of non-accredited institutions. The report commented that if a central institution failed to win accreditation, even after a

reasonable period of time and investment of funds, the Accreditation Council would recommend its closure. "There are a variety of causes which will keep an institution from accreditation... In most cases what is called for will be a matter of reorganization and some additional finances, but not very substantial expansion of faculty and facilities. But some present institutions are simply too small to be able to offer a satisfactory educational programme... In such cases, consolidation with other institutions would be called for." Later when the accreditation agency was formed, many of these recommendations were modified substantially.

The UGC considered this report and decided that

> (a) the report be widely circulated among the academics,
>
> (b) regional seminars and a national seminar be convened to discuss the report and
>
> (c) the comments of the academics along with the recommendations of the seminars be placed before the commission.

The report of the Committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council, often referred to as Gowariker's report, was deliberated in nine regional seminars held at the Universities of Andhra, Annamalai, Gauhati, Kalyani, Lucknow, Mysore, Pune, Punjab and Rajasthan and at the national level seminar held at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, resulting in Dr. Sukumaran Nair's document (1990). Except for the two workshops organized at Kalyani and Gauhati Universities, all others and the national seminar strongly favoured the development of a system for assessment of institutions of higher education under the auspices of the UGC. The national seminar also reiterated that the accreditation system should enjoy reasonable autonomy in its structure and functioning. The seminar further suggested that the new system should be set up in such a way as to get maximum acceptance and credibility.

Dr. Sukumaran Nair's Action Plan cum Project Report

Based on the consensus arrived at the national and other regional deliberations, the UGC requested Dr. A. Sukumaran Nair, the then Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Kerala, to submit a project report on the National Accreditation

Board for Higher Education (NABHE). The report submitted in December 1990 contained comments on the following:

- Gowariker's report
- the concept of accreditation
- major functions of accreditation
- objectives and functions of the accreditation system in the Indian context
- management of the accreditation system, its administrative and organizational pattern
- linkages with professional bodies and
- modalities of accreditation and the rating scale to be used for assessing institutions.

The consensus arrived at and reflected in the report differed from the recommendations of the Gowariker's committee in some aspects. Dr. Sukumaran Nair's report emphasised that assessment and accreditation should be an enabling mechanism towards self-improvement. The Action Plan specifically mentioned that "the assessment is expected to be done in a healthy climate of mutual trust and acceptance between the visiting team and the institution. It should be participatory in nature, where the institution being assessed extends its full support to all the assessment activities, and looks forward to getting expert advice and constructive suggestions for improvement from the visiting team. The whole exercise should be conducted in an atmosphere of friendliness, impartiality, and scientific rigour, with special emphasis placed on 'institutional and system improvement' rather than on 'fault-finding' or 'condemnation'. The assessment procedures should be such as would help to augment the credibility of the new system."

It also differed from the recommendation of the Committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council in linking assessment outcome with funding. "Accreditation is conceived essentially as the certification of overall quality of an institution on the basis of comprehensive and systematic assessment of it by competent professionals. The accreditation procedure will help an institution to go well beyond the minimum requirements and standards by providing operational and realistic models of excellence. Accreditation is not expected to

be linked with the grant-in-aids or other types of financial support or assistance or recognition by the UGC or any other agency. Accreditation should be seen as a matter of institutional reputation and academic standing, and should be viewed not as an administrative requirement for its functioning, but as a matter of institutional prestige. It may be seen as a recognition and reward for the work that it has done in the past, on the one hand, and as an incentive for further improvement, on the other".

In a parallel development with the National Policy on Education (1986), the UGC appointed a Committee to review the management patterns and to set criteria for assessment of performance of educational institutions.

UGC Committee on New Models of Management

In January 1987, the UGC appointed a Committee under the Convenership of Prof. A. Gnanam, Vice-Chancellor, Bharathidasan University (the Vice-Chancellor, University of Madras when the report was submitted in 1990). One of the terms of reference to the Committee was "to set criteria for assessment of performance of educational institutions". The committee recommended that performance of an academic institution should be evaluated at least once every three years, by autonomous bodies comprising experts. The report noted: "We feel that the deficiency of the present system of management is the absence of any systematic method of reporting and evaluation of performance of the university. Society has invested precious resources in building up great institutions of higher learning. It is entitled to demand that the members of the academic community individually and collectively be made accountable in concrete visible terms." The report spelt out in detail the criteria for assessment and how the performance evaluation should be done - assigning weightages to criteria, scoring and classification of institutions into six grades that range from A (80% and above – outstanding) to F (below 30% – very poor).

The report recommended that "institutions falling into the last three categories should be warned and the last category indication should stipulate that its performance will be surveyed for an additional year and if no improvement was made, it could be disaffiliated or closed. The D & E categories should be put on probation and closely watched for three years and helped to come up to at

least C. If they fail, closure may have to be considered. The A-category institutions should be specially rewarded by the provision of additional resources to enable their development along their desired channels. Category B should also deserve special attention". The committee observed that the aim of such exercises should be that within the course of 5 to 10 years no institution would remain below mid-level. It also recommended that as time passes the criteria and scoring could be made tighter so that institutions would always endeavour to remain 'above water'.

All these reports with their emphasis on performance evaluation of HEIs by an autonomous body were under the consideration of the UGC. Meanwhile, the National Policy on Education (1986) underwent substantial revision.

Policy Revision in 1992

The revised policy document (1992) also emphasized the need for an all-round improvement in institutions and proposed that the main emphasis should be on the consolidation and expansion of facilities in the existing institutions. It laid stress on the need to take urgent steps to protect the system from degradation. To make the system work, the strategy identified in the policy document (l986) on performance appraisal of institutions was reiterated. It was also felt that the UGC could not do much for ensuring and enhancing quality, because of the absence of a specialised system within it. Consequently, the Programme of Action (PoA) 1992 stated: "*As a part of its responsibility for the maintenance and promotion of standards of education, the UGC will, to begin with, take the initiative to establish an Accreditation and Assessment Council as an autonomous body*". In March 1992, based on the outcome of the earlier efforts in this regard, the UGC resolved to set up a National Accreditation Board in Higher Education (NABHE) as an autonomous body for the achievement of the objectives envisaged in the NPE.

The Memorandum of Association and Rules and Regulations of the NABHE were submitted to the UGC in January 1994. Towards the end of July 1994, the UGC constituted an empowered committee under the chairpersonship of Prof. G. Ram Reddy, the then Chairperson, UGC to finalize the memorandum of association and rules and regulation of the accreditation board. The document on the NABHE, prepared after taking into consideration the existing methods of

quality assessment and quality control of higher education in the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia and also the higher education scenario in India, was considered by the empowered committee and was approved on 7 September 1994. It culminated in the establishment of the body with the name *National Assessment and Accreditation Council* (NAAC).

3

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council

The NAAC was established as an autonomous body, under Section 12-CCC of the UGC Act 1956, and registered at Bangalore on 16 September 1994 under the Karnataka Societies Registration Act of 1960 and Karnataka Societies Registration Rules of 1961. Its working is controlled by a General Council (GC) and an Executive Committee (EC) comprising senior academics and educational administrators from universities, colleges and professional bodies and representatives from organisations such as the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). According to the MoA (1994) of the NAAC, the head of the EC and GC would be a senior academic. In the first GC of the NAAC (Annexure-III) there were eleven members and by 1996, the NAAC had its full GC of 35 members, drawn from different sectors of higher education, to steer its policy decisions. Annexure IV lists the members of the present GC and EC of the NAAC.

The Executive Officer of the NAAC is the Director, with the status of a central university vice-chancellor, who is its academic and administrative head, and is the member-secretary of both the GC and EC. Since its inception the NAAC has benefited by the dynamic and committed leadership of outstanding academia.

Torchbearers of the NAAC

Prof. G. Ram Reddy was the founder chairperson, till his untimely demise in July 1995. Although Prof. Reddy was with the NAAC for a brief period after its

establishment, he had played a vital role in conceptualising the idea of external quality assurance for the Indian higher education system. As an eminent academician and a leading educational administrator, he had a rich and varied experience as a teacher of political science and vice-chancellor of three universities. As the chairperson of the UGC, he was very keen on improving the quality of higher education and was instrumental in the establishment of the NAAC.

Prof. Arun Nigavekar, one of the well-known Professors of the University of Pune, and member of the UGC was invited by the UGC to head the NAAC. A physicist by training with specialisation in Materials Science, he had 3 decades of teaching and research experience marked with substantial contributions in the field of science education, distance education and education media. He built the foundations, assuming charge as the founder Director of the NAAC, working from 1 November 1994 till 11 April 1998.

On 26 August 1995, at the invitation of the UGC, Prof. A. Gnanam, the then Vice-Chancellor of the Pondicherry University and a leading plant molecular biologist-biotechnologist became the chairman of the NAAC. An educational administrator who had been at the helm of affairs in three universities – Bharathidasan, Madras and Pondicherry, he was well known for the UGC report under his chairmanship, *Towards New Educational Management* (1990), popularly known as the Gnanam Committee Report. He contributed to the development of the NAAC as the Chairman of its EC till mid-2003, with additional responsibilities of Director of NAAC from mid-1998 to mid 2001.

With the support of these luminaries and the members of the GC and EC, during the first two years (1994-1996), the founding Director of the NAAC Prof. Arun Nigavekar laid the foundations of the NAAC and set the quality agenda in motion in the country. He was supported by a small team of officers on deputation from other organizations and senior academic consultants - Dr. V. Krishnamoorthy, Prof. Anjana Desai, Dr. Latha Pillai and Shri. Ashok Nandgaonkar.

During the early stages of the establishment of the NAAC, many policy makers and educational administrators have helped the NAAC.

 A special mention should be made about Prof. (Miss). Armaity Desai, former Chairperson of the UGC. A scholar of international repute, before heading the UGC she had held many positions of importance including the Directorship of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai. She extended valuable support for the development of the NAAC during 1995 - 1999, in her capacity as Chairperson of the UGC.

The government of Karnataka provided rent-free accommodation for housing the office of the NAAC. Dr. N. R, Shetty, the then Vice-Chancellor of the Bangalore University and Mr. J. P. Sharma, the then Principal Secretary in the Education Department of Karnataka extended their valuable help.

By June 1996, the first team of officers were recruited for the NAAC. Dr. Antony Stella, Dr. Latha Pillai, Shri. Madhukar, Dr. Shyamasunder and Shri. Pujar joined the NAAC to strengthen its activities. During the next two years, the NAAC slowly and steadily made itself visible in the educational scenario of the country and the concept of external quality assurance was promoted through hundreds of awareness activities and workshops.

Change in Governance Structure

When the NAAC was established, a conscious decision was taken to establish it as an independent body, as recommended by the various committees and the NPE-1986. The MoA was framed keeping the special needs of the external quality assurance body in mind. The MoA and the bylaws of the inter-university centres already established by the UGC as autonomous bodies were adapted to suit the specific requirements of the NAAC. Soon the UGC re-examined this "difference in the governance structure" and suggested that the MoA of the NAAC might be amended in line with that of the inter-university centres. However, the general opinion of the GC and EC was that the NAAC should continue to be on a different footing.

While these discussions were going on, the first director of the NAAC, Prof. Arun Nigavekar, was invited to head his parent institution, the University of Pune.

He went back to the Pune University to become its Vice-Chancellor. Following the procedures laid down in the bylaws, which states that "The Director shall be appointed by the GC on the recommendations of a search committee constituted by the Chairperson, NAAC", the GC went ahead to choose the next director. There was a difference of opinion among the GC members about the procedural safeguards, which resulted in the intervention of the UGC and that further led to legal complications. The UGC strongly advised the NAAC to amend its MoA in line with that of the other inter-university centres. The MoA and Rules and Regulations were subsequently amended to remove the differences in the governance structure of the NAAC.

According to the revised MoA (2000), the Chairperson of the UGC shall be the President of the GC of the NAAC. The Chairperson of the EC shall be an eminent academician in the area of relevance to the NAAC; he/she will be nominated by the President of the GC from among three members to be identified by the search committee for this purpose. The Director of the NAAC will be an eminent academician appointed by the President of the Council (the Chairman of the UGC) on the recommendation of a search committee.

The amendment to the MoA is expected to safeguard the smooth functioning of the NAAC, though it continues to be a contentious issue and there are arguments for and against it. In the meeting of the EC of the NAAC held on 15 May 2002, regaining the autonomy of the NAAC has been taken up as a priority item. All the EC members are in the GC also, thus maintaining the link between the EC's decisions and the GC's deliberations.

When the changes were brought about in the governance structure of the NAAC, Dr. Hari Gautam was the Chairman of the UGC. A renowned medical education expert who later became an educational administrator as the Vice-Chancellor of the Banaras Hindu University and then as the Chair of the UGC, he had many honours and positions of eminence to his credit for his outstanding contributions in the field of higher education, medical education, administration, and cardiothoracic surgery. In his capacity as the Chairman of the UGC, under the revised MoA, he became the first President of the GC of the NAAC and guided the quality assurance

developments of the NAAC till May 2002. It was during his leadership that in 2001 April, as the President of the GC, he appointed Prof. V. N. Rajasekharan Pillai as the Director of the NAAC, on the recommendation of a search committee.

Prof. V. N. Rajasekharan Pillai assumed the Directorship of the NAAC from 19 April 2001. He brought with him the rich experience of his science career and educational administration. A well-known polymer scientist and former Vice-Chancellor of the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, he had been honoured with many awards for his contribution in science and higher education. During his directorship for two years, till April 2003, he strengthened the NAAC by harnessing the support of the state governments and increasing the momentum of the promotional activities of the NAAC, till he went to the UGC as the Vice-Chairman.

The Present Leadership

Prof. Arun Nigavekar in his capacity as the Chairman of the UGC is currently the President of the GC. Prof. Ram G Takwale is the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the NAAC. Professor Takwale was Vice-Chancellor of three universities: Pune University, Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). A scholar known for his contributions to distance education and ICT-enabled flexible education in India, he has been honoured with international recognitions such as Honorary Doctorate degree by the UK Open University and Honorary Fellowship by the Commonwealth of Learning. Under his guidance, the NAAC is becoming more ICT-enabled in its approaches.

The developments of the NAAC today are being spearheaded by the present Director of the NAAC, Prof. V. S. Prasad, former Vice-Chancellor of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad. He is also well known for his contributions to Open and Distance Learning as former Acting Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the IGNOU. When he was the Director of the Distance Education Council (DEC) and Director of the Staff Training and Research in Distance Education (STRIDE) at IGNOU he

initiated quality assurance strategies in distance education in the country. An expert in Public Administration, he is the recipient of many honours such as the Honorary Fellowship by the Commonwealth of Learning for his contributions to distance education. He is member of the Board of the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN), a network of quality assurance agencies of the Asia-Pacific region.

Annexure V gives the succession of the leaders of the NAAC. With the leadership provided by these leaders and visionaries, the NAAC is striving hard to achieve the objectives for which it has been established. The Memorandum of Association of the NAAC provides broad guidelines to steer the functioning of the NAAC towards the realisation of its objectives.

Scope and Role

The objective of the NAAC as envisaged in the MoA is to assess and accredit institutions of higher learning in India—universities and colleges or one or more of their units, i.e. departments, schools, institutions, programmes, etc. The main objectives of assessment and accreditation are to:

1   Grade institutions of higher education and their programmes

2   Stimulate the academic environment and quality of teaching and research in these institutions

3   Help institutions realize their academic objectives

4   Promote necessary changes, innovations and reforms in all aspects of the institutions working for the above purpose

5   Encourage innovations, self-evaluation and accountability in higher education

The MoA also indicates broadly the criteria for assessment as follows:

1   Institutional mission and objectives

2   Organisation and governance

3   Infrastructural facilities

4   Quality of teaching and learning

5   Curriculum design and review

6   Support services

7   Student services

8   Sources, adequacy and management of financial resources

9   Quality of research and research facilities

10 Publications and consultancy/extension activities and/or

11 Any other aspect the Executive Committee and the General Council of the NAAC would like to examine

Although the MoA provided some guidelines on the criteria for assessment for the accreditation council to start with, when the assessment procedures were actually implemented, these criteria were fine-tuned to ten parameters. Later, based on the field experience with ten institutions, the ten parameters were revised to seven criteria.

Further, the MoA states that NAAC shall:

- ensure that the criteria are reviewed periodically and revised and updated as and when considered necessary in the light of experience gained through their application and development of the techniques and modalities of assessment.

- ensure that the criteria are objective and, to the extent possible, quantifiable.

- ensure that the criteria are publicized widely, particularly, in the academic community.

- arrange for the periodic assessment and grading of institutions of higher education, or units thereof, or specific academic programmes or projects.

- communicate the results of assessment and grading to the concerned institution in a form and manner appropriate for corrective action, rectification and self-improvement.

- help and encourage the institutions in developing their own procedures, techniques and modalities for self-evaluation.

- initiate research studies, in planning and evaluation of educational institutions, programmes, etc.

- ensure an optimized use of resources and the achievement of the identified goals of institutions of higher learning.
- establish regional branches as and when necessary to ensure the smooth conduct of assessment and accreditation.

To carry out these responsibilities, appropriate instruments and methodology have been evolved after a series of national level discussions and international consultations. Both the national conditions as well as the international trends have been considered and the outcome is a methodology that suits the Indian context at the same time incorporating all the critical elements of international expectations. It has been developed as an exercise based on mutual trust. After a decade of experience, building on the broad guidelines given in the MoA, the NAAC has redefined its scope and objectives in terms of its vision and mission statements.

Vision and Mission

The activities and future plans of the NAAC are guided by its vision and mission that focus on making quality assurance an integral part of the functioning of higher education institutions.

The vision of the 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 reality, defining the following key tasks of the organisation :

- 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 of 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.

Guided by its vision and striving to achieve its mission, the NAAC primarily assesses the quality of institutions of higher education that volunteer for the process, through an internationally accepted methodology. The details are given in the next chapter.

4

The Instrument and Methodology of Quality Assurance

The philosophy of external quality assurance worldwide and the specific objective of the NAAC to carry out its quality assurance responsibilities through an enabling process have been taken into consideration while developing the instrument and methodology. The resultant process is ameliorative rather than punitive and the instrument and methodology truly reflect this spirit.

If we consider the assessment continuum and list the extremes as below, the NAAC's process has been evolved in such a manner so as to stress on the positive approach which is more enabling than judgmental:

1 inspection *vs* assessment

2 minimum standards *vs* standards of excellence

3 fault finding *vs* institutional improvement

4 sitting above *vs* sitting beside

5 fragmentary *vs* holistic

6 impressionistic *vs* data-based

7 subjective *vs* objective

8 informal *vs* systematic

9 looking at the past *vs* looking to the future

10 suspicion *vs* trust

11 incompetence *vs* competence

12 weaknesses *vs* strengths

In this continuum, the NAAC's process of assessment is towards the holistic, objective, systematic, data-based and transparent shared experience that can contribute to institutional improvement. The methodological framework has been developed with this understanding.

Evolving the Instrument and the Methodology

While evolving the instrument and methodology, NAAC has adhered to the following cardinal principles, for which the experiences of other countries interpreted in the light of the distinct characteristics of the Indian context formed the basis.

1. Assessment and accreditation need not be an answer to all the quality concerns in higher education.

2. Quality assessment is a complex issue and hence should be used to address issues of high priority.

3. Assessment should be built on the existing data.

4. The process should be acceptable to the clientele.

5. Quality assessment to a large extent depends on peer judgment.

6. Despite differences in national contexts, the critical elements of quality assessment are bound to be the same.

In a developing country, the factors that affect the quality of education are many, ranging from financial constraints to sociological contexts. The External Quality Assurance (EQA) mechanism cannot possibly address all the factors and cannot provide the answers to all the problems related to the quality of higher education. Quality assessment is valuable for providing an outcome to be used in the prioritization and decision-making processes of institutions and other stakeholders. At the same time one should realize that quality assessment is a complex issue in itself—it is much more than merely applying predetermined criteria to arrive at simple and straightforward solutions.

EQA can help to clarify issues, but is an extravagant way of confirming that "below average performance is still below average". Many issues can be resolved

simply by giving them attention. There are enough mandatory mechanisms already built in the Indian system like annual inspection and reviews to take care of most of the routine issues. The experiences of other countries indicated that quality assessment as conceived by NAAC is a substantial task and would require a lot of commitment and adequate resources. Such a mechanism should have clear priorities of a high order.

Another important assumption NAAC made was that assessment should be built on existing data as much as possible. Higher education has all along used a lot of data, being traditionally awash in data on aspects like finance, staffing, and student enrolment. Generally, these data have been used to justify budgets or obtain more funding. Obviously, little has been used to improve the quality of higher education. The traditional data such as annual endowment growth, educational and general operating expenditures per student, research income generated, class size, student–faculty ratio, library holdings, student success rate and rate of employment of students may not address the issue of quality directly and explicitly. However, they may be useful indicators and hence to begin with quality assessment should use these existing data. Too much of emphasis on generation of newer data and new ways of documentation will become an intimidating factor. It may raise doubts whether the benefits would match such additional efforts. The best way is to induce improved documentation as the process progresses with the realization that it cannot be achieved overnight.

An important requirement for the success of evaluation of institutions is to ensure the acceptability of the process. The academic community knows only too well that anything that is imposed on the system will be resisted, if not rejected. If quality assessment has to lead to self-improvement, and if it has to remain an enabling and ameliorative mechanism, it is necessary to convince the system of the merits of the mechanism and allow the institutions to take their own time to get ready for it. Therefore, the concept paper on accreditation for the Indian system stated that assessment would be voluntary and that the stakeholders would be encouraged to use the assessment outcome for their decision-making.

The world over, EQA agencies have not found a better alternative to peer assessment; performance indicators and procedural safeguards are in use, largely, to guide peer assessment. In the Indian context too, it was well understood that quality assessment would have to largely rely on peer assessment. While external

quality assessment itself is a new culture that is slowly being nurtured in the higher education system, overemphasis on performance indicators will defeat the very purpose of assessment. Allowing variance for institutional differences, performance indicators can be used for inter-institutional comparison in certain areas, and that too for purposes of internal management and improvement. Anything more than that such as teaching output, research income, student progression, etc. should be balanced with peer judgment, and this became clear in all the consultations NAAC had on quantifying quality.

While it is essential to evolve the methodology to suit the national context, it is equally essential to ensure that it is in line with international trends. An analysis of the current practices of the national accrediting agencies of various countries reveals a great deal of diversity. They vary in structure and function. Variations can also be seen in their methodology, nature of the process (mandatory or voluntary), unit of assessment (institution or program), outcome and policy on disclosure of the outcome (confidential or public). In spite of the variance, the process of external quality assurance has the following critical common elements:

- Independent nature of the accrediting body
- Assessment based on pre-determined criteria
- Combination of self-study and peer review
- Safeguards and protocols to guide peer assessment
- Public disclosure of the outcome (The extent of public disclosure varies from disclosure of only the final outcome to disclosure of the full assessment report)
- Period of validity of the assessment outcome, varying from 3 to 10 years

When the NAAC's assessment methodology was developed the core elements mentioned above were considered and contextualised to suit the Indian system of higher education.

Methodological Framework

The NAAC follows an internationally accepted methodology that includes the following four stages for assessing a unit:

- Identifying pre-determined criteria for assessment
- Preparation and submission of self-study report by the unit of assessment
- Site visit of the peer team for validation of the report and for recommending the assessment outcome to the NAAC
- Final decision by the Executive Committee of the NAAC

In line with this methodology, the NAAC has developed a mechanism for institutional accreditation that considers the functioning of the institution in its totality. The MoA of the NAAC clearly spells out its objective *to assess and accredit institutions of higher learning in India, universities and colleges or one or more of their units, i.e. departments, schools, institutions, programmes, etc.* The institutional accreditation focuses on the performance of the institution in terms of its policies, facilitating aspects, healthy practices and the overall health of the institution. Assessment of other units such as departments and programmes has been discussed and the processes are still evolving. During the first phase of assessment, the NAAC consciously promoted institutional accreditation. In collaboration with professional bodies, it will expand its scope to consider departmental or programme accreditation, to suit the needs of the context.

Criteria for Assessment

In the beginning, ten parameters - Goals and objectives; Curriculum design and review; Teaching-learning and evaluation; Research and publications; Consultancy and extension activities; Organisation and management; Infrastructure facilities; Support services; Student feedback and counselling; and Generation and management of financial resources – that cover all the functions of a higher education institution were considered as the base for assessment. Under each of the ten parameters, the best practices expected of an institution were identified. They were called criterion statements (Annexure VI). If the inputs from the institution with respect to the ten parameters and the criterion statements were collated, it would give adequate details on all the features of an institution such as its policies, practices, programmes, resources and performance. This would facilitate the institution to appraise itself of its standing besides helping the assessment team to make a proper assessment.

Later, since the field experience warranted some overlaps to be avoided, the ten parameters were re-organised to seven criteria, without losing any key aspect of the parameters. At present, the seven criteria—Curricular Aspects; Teaching–learning and Evaluation; Research, Consultancy and Extension; Infrastructure and Learning Resources; Student Support and Progression; Organisation and Management; and Healthy Practices—form the basis for assessment. To spell out the focus of each criterion, "key aspects" of functioning have been identified (Annexure VII). The criterion statements have also been reorganised (Annexure VIII).

The field experience with the first batch of institutions (that were assessed under the earlier pattern of ten parameters) brought in clarity on the aspects that have to be covered under these criteria. The highlights of the criteria are given below:

Curricular Aspects: This criterion requires information on how the curriculum design of the institution 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 regional and national needs.

Teaching–learning and Evaluation: This criterion 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 criterion seeks information on the activities and facilitating aspects of the institution with reference to research, consultancy and extension.

Infrastructure and Learning Resources: This criterion 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 campus life. It also seeks information on how every constituent of the institution—students, teachers and staff—benefits from these facilities.

Student Support and Progression: The highlights of this criterion are the efforts of the institution to provide the necessary assistance for good student experiences

in the campus and to facilitate their progression. It also seeks information on student and alumni profiles.

Organization and Management: This criterion requires data on the policies and practices of the institution in planning, humanpower requirement, recruitment, training, performance appraisal and finance management.

Healthy Practices: This criterion focuses on the innovative and unique practices of the institution that add to its academic ambience. It is this criterion that caters to institutional diversity to some extent. A healthy practice need not necessarily be unique in nature but could be a pathway created to further the interest of the stakeholders of a particular institution amidst constraints. In other words, healthy practices are contextual in nature and a practice recognized as healthy in one institution may not necessarily be so in another.

Submission of the Self-Study Report

In practice, an institution that wishes to volunteer for assessment should send a letter of intent to the NAAC with the basic details of its eligibility. The Executive Committee of the NAAC has resolved as under regarding the eligibility criteria:

"Any institution of higher education imparting instruction at degree level and above shall be eligible for assessment by the NAAC, provided the institution works under the relevant provisions and discipline of some university established under the Indian law, at least as regards the programmes/courses to be assessed."

Further, the institution should have either been in existence for at least five years or sent out at least two batches of students after programme completion. After verifying the eligibility to undergo assessment when the NAAC accepts the letter of intent, the next stage for the institution is to prepare a self-study report about its functioning, along the guidelines given by the NAAC.

The submission of the self-study report to the NAAC is the first and the most important step in the process of assessment. The NAAC believes that an institution that really understands itself—its strengths and weaknesses, its potentials and limitations—is likely to be more successful in carrying out its educational mission better than the one without such self-awareness. Self-study

is thus envisaged as the backbone of the process of assessment. It is through the self-study report that the peer team tries to understand and tentatively evaluate the institution prior to visiting the institution. The NAAC has evolved clear guidelines to help institutions prepare a clear, concise and analytic report. Formats have also been developed to facilitate collection of data to prepare the self-study report.

The format to be used to prepare the self-study report depends on the type of institution. Based on the major differences and unique characteristics of different types of institutions, the NAAC classifies institutions of higher institutions into three categories—universities, autonomous colleges, affiliated or constituent colleges. To suit the needs of each one of these categories a separate manual has been developed. Guidelines and manuals have also been evolved for teacher education institutions, medical institutions, open universities and distance education units of conventional universities. These formats can be either downloaded from the NAAC website (www.naac-india.com) or obtained as hard copies from the NAAC. The format for the self-study report contains three sections—Profile of the University, Criterion-wise Inputs and data sheets to be filled by every department called Inputs from the Departments. In general, the format requires both quantitative and qualitative inputs from the institution. On receiving the self-study report from the institution, the NAAC initiates action for validation of the self-study report.

Validation of the Self-Study Report

The self-study report is analysed for completeness and adequacy of data by the NAAC. If there are information gaps the institutions are asked to provide further data. The self-study reports that are complete in all respects are processed further for peer assessment and validation by site visit.

Peer assessment is one of the critical elements, similar to self-study that has evolved as an internationally accepted component of external quality assurance. The recommendations of the peers have an important place in the accreditation process. The strength of this approach is dependent on the professionalism of the peers and this has been ensured to a large extent by identifying and involving the right kind of experts, and training them to do the job more efficiently.

Care is taken to select only those experts who have made significant contributions to higher education and are known for their integrity. Over the years, the NAAC has relied heavily on nominations, databases of other national bodies and informal ways of identifying the peers. Seven years ago the NAAC collected the curricula vitae (CVs) of thousands of experts and developed a database. Four years ago there was an effort to advertise in newspapers the profile of those who could be involved in the assessment exercise; applications were invited and experts were selected after a thorough scrutiny. The nominations have also worked very well. As the assessment visits gain visibility, faculty members have started to look at the assessment responsibility as a rewarding experience. An invitation by the NAAC to join the assessment visit is seen as "recognition" and experts send in their CVs to the NAAC. This has greatly facilitated the expansion of the database of experts who are central to the assessment exercise.

Apart from the database of peers/experts, the NAAC has developed a training strategy in which selected experts undergo a three-day intensive programme and are inducted into the National Cadre of Assessors. Since the NAAC focuses on the institution as a whole, it looks for peers who understand and appreciate the institutional context. The database of experts has a large number of experts who, although accomplished in a special field or discipline, can serve as "generalists".

The selection of team members and their subsequent visit to the institution are stages in a process that begins as soon as an institution submits its self-study report. The visit by the peer team gives the institution an opportunity to discuss and find ways of consolidating and improving the academic environment. The team by no means goes on a faultfinding mission nor does it interfere with the autonomy of the institution.

As the first step in constituting the peer team, from the extensive database of experts, the NAAC identifies a team of experts with national level representation and consults the institution about any justifiable reservations it may have about any member of the team. Where the objections are reasonable, the NAAC considers the institutional response and constitutes the peer team accordingly. The composition and the size of the peer team depend on the nature of the

institution—the number of sub-units it has, its geographic location, clientele, funding, socio-economic environment, etc.

Once the choice of the peers is made, the NAAC finds out whether the peers have any conflict of interest with the institution to be assessed. Though the peers are experts known for their integrity, to ensure and assure objectivity, they have to sign the *no conflict of interest statement.* It makes sure that the peer does not belong to the same state where the institution is located and that he or she has no affiliation with an institution competing directly with the institution to be assessed. It also requires a certification that the peer has no involvement with the proposed institution, directly or indirectly through any close relatives, in the past or at present, as either an employee or a member of any official body as a consultant or a graduate. A similar statement has to be signed by the institution. It has to certify that at least for a year none of the members of the proposed team would be appointed for any important assignment in the institution.

After receiving the confirmation from the peers, the programme of visit to the institution is finalized. The team visits the institution on mutually convenient days for validation of the self-study report through interaction with various functionaries and scrutiny of documents. The validation of the self-study report by the site visit and the subsequent assessment by peers has the following three steps:

- Criterion-wise assessment
- Application of weightages to calculate the overall grade
- Draft report of the peer team.

Criterion-wise Assessment

For each of the seven criteria, the peers look for evidence not only to validate the claims in the self-study report but also to judge the standing of the institution and record the appropriate percentage scores. While arriving at the criterion-wise final assessment, the performance of the institution with respect to the criterion statements is evaluated.

During the site visit, keeping in mind the philosophy of the NAAC, the peer

team does an objective assessment of the quality of education offered in the institution through three major activities—visiting departments and facilities, interacting with various constituencies of the institution and checking documentary evidence. The interaction with the faculty normally happens when the team goes to the departments and facilities. Separate sessions are arranged for interaction with the management, administrative staff, and representative groups of students, parents and alumni. It has been found that the interactions enhance the team's "feel of the institution". For each interaction the NAAC has evolved guiding agenda.

Application of Weightages

The validation and the subsequent assessment lead to an overall institutional grade and a detailed report, which begins with the team agreeing on the criterion-wise scores. Taking cognizance of the variance in types of institutions, different criteria have been allotted differential weightages. The weightages marked below are used for calculating the institutional score:

Criteria	University	Autonomous Colleges	Affiliated/ Constituent Colleges
Curricular Aspects	15	15	10
Teaching–learning and Evaluation	25	30	40
Research, Consultancy and Extension	15	10	05
Infrastructure Learning Resources	15	15	15
Student Progression and Support	10	10	10
Organisation and Management	10	10	10
Healthy Practices	10	10	10

The weighted average of the scores is calculated applying the following formula:

Institutional score $= \Sigma C_i W_i / \Sigma W_i$ (i = 1,2, ...,7), where $W_i =$ weightage of the ith criterion and $C_i =$ score of the ith criterion.

The institutional score is further used by the NAAC to get the overall grade. But the role of the peers is to give only the institutional score to the NAAC with the detailed report called Peer Team Report.

Peer Team Report

This report is the basis on which the NAAC takes a decision and hence the NAAC emphasizes that it should be specific about the commendations, weaknesses and suggestions. Moreover the report has to be shared with the institution at the end of the visit itself (except for the confidential part). This makes the report writing a serious mission to accomplish.

In the NAAC's methodology, sharing the report with the head of the institution has a very significant role that has influenced the whole methodology in many ways. Towards the end of the visit, the draft report is given to the head of the institution for checking of factual accuracy as well as for feedback on the evaluation of the peer team. If the head does not agree with the evaluative remarks of the team and thinks that the remarks are based on incomplete or wrong data, the issue can be discussed with the peer team. If the peer team is convinced of the observations of the head and the authenticity of the institutional data, the draft report may be modified accordingly. This opportunity for the head to differ from the opinion of the peer team and present the point of view of the institution leads to a responsive, open and diplomatic discussion between the peer team and the institution. Sharing the draft report makes the job of the peer team very challenging. The next chapter details the safeguards in place to ensure that this responsibility is carried out with utmost professionalism.

In the exit meeting that follows, the chairperson of the team shares the highlights of the assessment, (not the scores which are confidential till they are processed and approved by the Executive Committee of the NAAC) and hands over the draft report officially to the head of the institution. This 'draft report' is only for internal use by the institution. The report is passed on to the NAAC to be placed

before the EC of the NAAC, along with the confidential recommendations of the team. The decision of the EC is final.

The institutions use the report in many different ways. The policy on public disclosure requires that the institution should not use parts of the report or summarise the report to project a biased picture. If it uses excerpts from the report, anyone who wishes to see the full report should be given a copy. Till the report is finalised as a NAAC document, the institutions are asked to use it only for internal purposes. Once the final reports are put on the NAAC website, it is up to the institutions to publish them in their handbook or annual report or any institutional publication, making them available to their stakeholders in any way suitable to them.

The Final Outcome

The major role of the peer team is up to providing the institutional score and the detailed assessment report. The rest of the process is to be done by the NAAC as directed by the Executive Committee. In principle, if there are no adverse remarks or complaints from any quarters on the process or no apparent conflict of interest on the part of anyone involved in the process, the EC in its normal course of action approves the recommendation of the peer team. It further uses the institutional score to give the institutional grade.

If the overall score is not less than 55%, the institution gets the **Accredited** status. The accredited institutions are graded on a nine-point scale with the scale values indicated in the table.

Any institution which does not attain the minimum 55% points for accreditation would also be intimated and notified indicating that the institution is "Assessed and Found Not Qualified For Accreditation". After the

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

EC's decision, the institution is informed of the grade and the information is included in the website. Once the editing is over, the detailed report that highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the institution under various criteria is put on the NAAC website. Following this methodology, the NAAC has assessed 2021 HEIs.

Further, to provide a review mechanism for institutions that might have grievances about the process or its outcome or any other issues related thereof, the NAAC has evolved guidelines. An Appeals Committee (AC) has been constituted with five members - four members nominated by the Chairman of the EC of the NAAC and one NAAC officer as the member-convener of the AC, to be nominated by the Director of the NAAC. An aggrieved institution can make a written representation to the NAAC within thirty days from the date of receipt of the accreditation certificate in the proforma given by the NAAC along with a non-refundable fee of Rs.20000/-. The AC would consider the grievances and make recommendations for the consideration of the EC. The EC is the final authority to decide on the recommendations of the AC.

The accreditation outcome is valid for a period of five years from the date of the meeting of the EC that declares the outcome. An institution that wants to improve its grade can apply for re-assessment after a period of one year. Building on the lessons of experience in assessing institutions, for the ones that have completed five years of accredited status, the NAAC has evolved the re-accreditation framework.

Framework for Re-accreditation

As in the first assessment, the framework for re-accreditation also has the core common elements in its methodology – self-study and peer review. Accepting the central role of peers, the re-accreditation framework uses indicators with caution, to guide peer assessment. The other elements of the framework – unit of assessment, criteria for assessment and reporting strategy – remain the same in view of the national context and the purpose the process is expected to serve. The existing seven criteria – Curricular Aspects; Teaching-learning and Evaluation; Research, Consultancy and Extension; Infrastructure and Learning Resources; Student Support and Progression; Organisation and Management

and Healthy Practices - form the basis for assessment with the same nine-point scale to award institutional grades.

While much of the re-accreditation framework is similar to the first assessment, there are also four unique features of the re-accreditation process – the institutional preparations, the core values to which every higher education institution should be committed, the impact the first assessment has already made on the higher education institutions and the more explicit focus on the indicators of quality.

Institutional Preparations

The first assessment has created a quality consciousness among institutions and to further strengthen that, it is essential to ensure the internalisation and institutionalisation of quality initiatives. To facilitate this objective, the NAAC has evolved a strategy for institutional preparations where the HEIs have to demonstrate certain minimum capabilities. The re-accreditation strategy requires the higher education institutions that complete the five-year accredited period to enter the two-year institutional preparations period. The institutions that record their intent to volunteer for re-accreditation and begin institutional preparations can continue to use the outcome of the first accreditation till the end of the two-year institutional preparation period or till the re-accreditation outcome is declared, whichever is earlier. During the two years of institutional preparations, the HEIs that volunteer for re-accreditation have to work on fulfilling two minimum institutional requirements - the establishment of the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) and the use of ICT for data management. The institutional preparation has to result in the submission of the Re-Accreditation Report (RAR) to the NAAC.

Core Values in the Changing Context

The world over, the context in which higher education institutions have to function is changing. In India also, the institutions of higher education are amidst a mosaic of changes. The need to expand the system of higher education, the impact of technology on educational delivery, the increasing private participation in higher education and the impact of globalisation are the drivers of the changing scenario

in Indian higher education. These changes and the consequent shift in values have to be taken cognizance of while formulating the re-accreditation framework and they are as below.

(i) Relating to National Development

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have a remarkable capacity to adapt to changes, while at the same time pursuing the avowed goals and objectives they have set forth for themselves. Contributing to national development has always been a goal of Indian HEIs - explicitly or implicitly. Serving the cause of social justice, ensuring equity and increasing the access parameters to higher education are a few ways to contribute to national development. It is appropriate that the re-accreditation methodology of the NAAC looks into the way the HEIs have responded to these aspects.

(ii) Fostering Global Competencies among Students

The developments in the global scenario warrant the NAAC to include in its scope of assessment the skill development of students on par with their counterparts abroad. With liberalization and globalisation of economic activities, there is a need to develop human resources of a high calibre and consequently the demand for higher education at nationally comparable and internationally acceptable standards has increased. While increasing the access parameter and ensuring social justice will continue to be important objectives towards national development, the human resources of the country that are internationally and inter-culturally competent is of equal importance. Therefore, the role of HEIs in preparing the students to face the changing global scenario successfully with global competencies will have to be examined in the re-accreditation framework. This demands the HEIs to be innovative, creative and entrepreneurial in their approach to skill development among the students. It may involve collaborating with industries, networking with the neighbourhood and fostering a closer relationship between the world of work and the world of learning. The re-accreditation framework will look into how the HEIs demonstrate these qualities in their functioning.

(iii) Inculcating the Value System

Although skill development is crucial to the success of the students in the job market, skills are of no value in the absence of an appropriate value system;

HEIs have to shoulder the responsibility of inculcating the desirable value system among the students. In a country like India with cultural pluralities and diversities it is essential that the students imbibe the values commensurate with social, cultural, economic and environmental realities at the local, national and universal levels. There can be no dispute about inculcating core universal values like truth and righteous conduct, as well as the values emphasised in the various policy documents of the country. The re-accreditation will recognize the essentiality of values to be inculcated among students.

(iv) Promoting the Use of Technology

Most of the significant developments that one can observe today can be attributed to the impact of science and technology. The impact of technological advancement on educational transactions — both academic and administrative— indicates that our system of education is still uncomfortable with new technology. At a time when our educational institutions are expected to do more with less input, one should make use of the technological innovations that are readily available. Effective uses of ICT in HEIs may involve using ICT as learning resource, providing ICT literacy to the campus community, using ICT for resource sharing and networking, ICT-enabled administrative processes, etc. Therefore, the re-accreditation framework would facilitate putting in place electronic data management systems and electronic resources in HEIs.

(v) Quest for Excellence

While contributing to nation building and development of students, institutions should also demonstrate their drive to develop themselves into centers of excellence. Excellence in all that they do will contribute to the overall development of the system of higher education as a whole. This quest for excellence could start by establishing an IQAC in the institution. The first step to be considered by the IQAC could be the identification of strengths and weaknesses in the processes of teaching and learning carried out by the institution, particularly in relation to their linkages with the core values proposed by the NAAC. The institution is always free to expand or modify the core values in conformity with the goals and mission of the institution. This is a continuous reform process and one of the major outcomes of this process is the internalization and institutionalization of quality so that the institution continues

to excel. The quest to become a quality institution itself is a core value any institution of higher education has to imbibe and demonstrate in its functioning.

The five values mentioned above would form the foundation for the re-assessment of the functioning of the institutions that volunteer for re-accreditation. The special focus to be taken note of in re-accreditation, due to the impact of first assessment, has to be built on this foundation.

Impact of First Assessment

The re-accreditation would have a shift in focus in assessing the developments of the accredited period with reference to three aspects – quality sustenance, quality enhancement and acting on the assessment report. These three aspects need not be mutually exclusive of each other; developments in one area may influence the developments in the other two areas. However, in view of the emphases to be placed on the major areas of impact of the first assessment, these three areas would be considered.

(i)   Quality Sustenance

During the first assessment, the NAAC's process has triggered quality initiatives in many aspects of functioning of HEIs. The preparation of the self-study report has served as a catalyst for institutional self-improvement. The participation of the faculty members, administrative staff, students, parents and alumni has led to new initiatives. Interaction with the peers has assisted this process and also provided a means for the wider dissemination of information about educational development. It has triggered many innovative practices and paved way for institutionalising those practices. Establishing internal quality assurance cells to co-ordinate the quality initiatives and use 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 the re-accreditation will consider how these initiatives have been sustained during the accredited period.

(ii)   Quality Enhancement

It is proper and educationally sound to expect that re-assessment has to bring to limelight how institutions have progressed over a period of five years with accredited status. The re-assessment will give due place to the quality initiatives

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

(iii) Acting on the Assessment Report

Much of the quality enhancement has been a result of institutional efforts to act on the assessment report and the re-assessment has to take note of that too. The post-accreditation reviews, feedback from the accredited institutions and the outcome of national consultations indicate that the first assessment report has been a useful document to identify the areas of concern that might affect the quality of the institution. The re-accreditation has to address how HEIs have taken steps to overcome the deficiencies mentioned in the first assessment report and also build on the strengths noted in the report.

Further, to facilitate HEIs in demonstrating the special emphases mentioned above, the focus of the criteria have been spelt out clearly in terms of criterion statements and the core indicators have been identified.

Explicit Focus on Core Indicators

As in the first assessment, under each of the seven criteria the criterion statements spell out the best practices expected of a quality institution. For example, under "Criterion I: Curricular Aspects" the focus of the criterion is captured in the following criterion statements:

- *The institution has clearly stated goals and objectives that are communicated systematically to all its constituencies.*
- *The programmes of the institution are consistent with its goals and objectives.*
- *The institution has a wide range of programme offerings that provide adequate academic flexibility.*
- *Feedback from academic peers and employers is used in the initiation, review and redesign of programmes.*

The criterion statements are almost the same as those of the first assessment. In addition to these statements core indicators have been identified. The core indicators are similar to the "key aspects" used in the first assessment but have been allotted weightages.

The following core indicators have been identified under the seven criteria.

Criterion I — *Curricular Aspects:* Goal Orientation, Curriculum Development, Programme Options, Academic Flexibility and Feedback Mechanism.

Criterion II — *Teaching-learning and Evaluation:* Admission Process, Catering to Diverse Needs, Teaching-learning Process, Teacher Quality, Evaluation of Teaching, Evaluation of Learning and Evaluation Reforms.

Criterion III — *Research, Consultancy and Extension:* Promotion of Research, Research Output, Publication Output, Consultancy, Extension Activities, Participation in Extension, Linkages.

Criterion IV — *Infrastructure and Learning Resources***:** Physical Facilities, Maintenance of Infrastructure, Library as a Learning Resource, Computers as Learning Resources, Other Facilities.

Criterion V — *Student Support And Progression:* Student Profile, Student Progression, Student Support, Student Activities.

Criterion VI — *Organization and Management:* Goal Orientation and Decision Making, Organization Structure, Powers and Functions of the Functionaries, Perspective Planning, Human Power Planning and Recruitment, Performance Appraisal, Staff Development Programmes, Resource Mobilization, Financial Management.

Criterion VII — *Healthy Practices:* Total Quality Management, Innovations, Value Based Education, Social Responsibilities and Citizenship Roles, Overall Development, Institutional Ambience and Initiatives.

Taking cognisance of the diversity in institutional functioning in the three major categories of institutions – universities, autonomous colleges and affiliated colleges – the total score points of 1000 have been allotted to the seven criteria as given in the table that follows.

Criteria	University	Autonomous Colleges	Affiliated/ Colleges
Curricular Aspects	150	150	100
Teaching–Learning and Evaluation	250	300	400
Research, Consultancy and Extension	150	100	50
Infrastructure and Learning Resources	150	150	150
Student Progression and Support	100	100	100
Organization and Management	100	100	100
Healthy Practices	100	100	100
Total	1000	1000	1000

To further guide peer assessment, core-indicatorwise weightages have been allotted (Annexure IX). The indicator-wise scores would add to the criterion scores. The aggregate of the criterion scores converted to percentage results in the overall institutional score that would form the basis for the institutional grade. With the assessment framework given above, institutions that would like to get themselves re-accredited have to fulfil the minimum institutional requirements and submit a Re-Accreditation Report (RAR) to the NAAC.

The Re-Accreditation Report (RAR)

The RAR has to be in two parts. The first part is the electronic format called "e-format" that seeks mostly quantitative data. The second part of RAR is the evaluative report to be organized under the seven criteria and the various sub units. To facilitate data collection for writing this part of the report, a list of guiding questions has been developed by the NAAC. Since the questions are general in nature, the institutions may adapt them suitably to reflect their

strengths, significant developments, future plans and distinct characteristics in a meaningful way.

The first assessment has taught that there is no necessary correlation between quality and quantity, and a bulky description may well result from a lack of clarity, and may generate more information gaps than explanations. Therefore, the NAAC is introducing a page restriction for the re-accreditation report. For an average size multi-faculty college, the main document – the Re-Accreditation Report (RAR) - should not exceed 100 pages.

Peer Assessment and Final Outcome

On receipt of the RAR, the NAAC would do an in-house analysis of the report for its completeness and fulfillment of minimum institutional requirements. For the eligible institutions, peer team visits will be organized. Depending on the size of the institution, the site visit may vary from 2 to 4 days, but by appropriate use of the electronic mode the dependence on site visit and hence the duration of the site visit will be reduced. As in the case of the first assessment, the site visit will result in a detailed peer team report highlighting the strengths and areas of concern of the institution. The draft report of the peer team will be shared with the institution and then submitted to the NAAC for further processing. The Executive Committee of the NAAC will take the final decision about the accreditation status and the grade of the institution on the nine-point scale from C through A+ + which will be made public.

The validity period of the re-accredited status will be for seven years from the date of approval of the status by the Executive Committee. The re-accredited institution has to record its intent for the next accreditation by the end of the fifth year and initiate institutional preparations during the sixth year; reports should be submitted to the NAAC by the end of the sixth year and the NAAC will conduct the assessment and declare the accreditation outcome before the end of the seventh year. Institutions that do not follow these deadlines will lose the accreditation status.

The HEIs that have initiated institutional preparations are being given further orientations. Parallel activities are conducted on orienting the select peer teams for the re-assessment framework, through roundtables and focused discussions. The certainty about the number and type of institutions to be re-accredited during

a specific period of time, (for example 20 HEIs — 9 autonomous colleges, 10 affiliated colleges and one deemed university—spread in 6 states are to be re-assessed during 2004-2005), will be an advantage in evolving a definite strategy that can be mostly under control and reduce the inter team variance. Thus, the next academic year 2004-2005 will be the period of actual implementation of the re-accreditation process; the first batch of 20 HEIs (Annexure X) are expected to submit the RAR by December 2004 and by May 2005 the re-accreditation results could be announced.

The instruments and methodology of the NAAC have been discussed at various forums. The institutions have access to all the manuals and guidelines of the NAAC, even the ones that are prepared for the peer teams. This has enabled the NAAC to instill confidence among the academia. There has not been any major criticism of the adequacy and reliability of the overall methodology. However, what the unit of assessment should be, what the assessment outcome should be and how objective peer assessment is, are often issues of debate. The arguments behind these debates and the rationale for the NAAC's stand are explained in the next chapter.

5

Implementing Quality Assurance: Challenges and Solutions

After an internationally accepted methodology for quality assurance was settled upon, the NAAC had to decide on three more issues at the start: What should be the unit of assessment? Who will do the assessment? What should be the outcome of assessment? The collective opinion was that the NAAC should promote institutional accreditation in the first phase, with a central role for peers in the whole process, and that the reporting strategy should be an overall institutional grade supplemented by a detailed assessment report. This chapter deals with the rationale for the stand taken by the NAAC on these issues, the institutional response to the quality assessment model thus evolved and the way the NAAC faced those institutional responses.

Unit of Assessment

The unit of assessment appropriate to the objectives of the NAAC and the Indian context has been chosen. Since putting systems in place was seen as the major objective to be realised first, the NAAC decided to promote institutional accreditation in the first cycle. Almost all countries have some mechanisms already in place, which would assess the institution as a whole. Some national assessment agencies use the individual academic programme as the unit for assessment and a few others use a mixture of both. The choice seems to depend on many considerations, some of them being the size of the national system of higher education as a whole, the specific purpose for which the assessment has been commissioned, the significance of the outcomes to the stakeholders, its viability, and, above all, the feasibility of such reviews. Considering these factors,

it became clear that the Indian system of higher education would benefit by institutional accreditation.

It may appear that there are certain disadvantages in the choice of the institution as a unit of assessment such as the inability to ascertain the quality of its departments or academic programmes. This concern did result in suggestions for department accreditation and programme accreditation. The assessment of academic programmes or departments may have the advantage of looking at their functioning in detail, providing the right kind of inputs to beneficiaries like students.

However, the disadvantages of choosing the department or the programme as a unit of assessment are more in the context of Indian higher education, especially in general higher education. For such accreditation, the number of units to be assessed at the national level being very large, assessing all those units within a fixed period of five to seven years may not be feasible. Critical size is another factor to be considered. Normally any programme at a given institution may not involve more than a few faculty and consequently the unit size may be too small for such a big effort. Compared to the institution as whole, the composition and character of the department or the group offering a programme may undergo frequent changes. If a faculty or two move out of the institution, the quality of the offerings will suffer and hence, the outcomes of the assessment may not be tenable for any extended time. Further, even though departments offer programmes , most of the infrastructural facilities and learning resources such as the library and computer centres may be shared with others; their quality is determined by the central governance structure rather than by the departments of studies. Many programmes that are inter-disciplinary in nature cut across more than two departments that have to share varying responsibilities. This will pose a problem in the objective assessment of a specific programme or department. In view of these considerations, the NAAC took up institutional accreditation to begin with.

Who will Assess?

There are many variations among quality assurance agencies in the role played by the peer team and the role of the agency in assessment decisions. The NAAC defined these roles clearly and developed the support structure accordingly.

The NAAC's role in assessment *per se* is kept minimal; its personnel only co-ordinate the peer team visits to institutions. They remain in the background and do not take part directly in assessment decisions. At the same time, to ensure the consistency and credibility of the assessment process, the NAAC plays a leading role in the broader assessment scenario. It has a major responsibility in planning the evaluation framework, development and fine-tuning of the instruments and methodology, eliminating the conflicts of interest in the assessment process and enhancing the professionalism of the peer assessment. Thus, the NAAC does not stop as a mere co-ordinating agency but strikes a balance between the co-ordinating functions and steering the assessment processes.

Assessment Outcome

The reporting of assessment by the NAAC is an overall institutional grade supplemented with a detailed assessment report, which is made public. Whether the assessment report should be made public or kept confidential is a bone of contention in many countries, both sides having valid arguments. However, evolving systems are inclined to provide more quality-related data to the public, and the NAAC consciously opted for public disclosure. After ensuring through appropriate safeguards that the report qualifies to be a NAAC document, the full report is made public. It is expected that such a strategy would promote self-improvement by institutions. When the grades are made known, institutions understand as to where they stand in the quality continuum as compared to others at the national level. The assessment report highlights their strengths and weaknesses, which enables them to plan further quality enhancement strategies. Even the ones that get a higher level of rating can plan on sustaining it through co-ordinated and conscious efforts. The quality profile (introduced since 2003) – the criterion-wise scores – also indicates the core areas where the institution has done well and the ones that might need improvements.

Response to the Assessment Model

For the model of assessment envisaged by the NAAC, the institutional response was mixed in the initial years. Gradually the NAAC convinced the academia and there is now an overall appreciation for the NAAC's process. Three phases can be distinguished in the evolution and implementation of assessment and

accreditation. Phase-I (1994-1997) was the initial stage of the NAAC where the focus was on strategies to develop the instruments and gain acceptability by the majority. Phase-II (1998-2001) was the crucial period of implementing the accepted methodology and fine-tuning it. Phase-III (2002-) is the current period where some of the stakeholders have given a clear indication that the outcome of assessment will have a major role in their decision-making. Under such stakeholder pressure, a large number of HEIs are approaching the NAAC for assessment. The NAAC has responded well to the challenges that each of the phases has presented.

Phase-I (1994-1997): The First Three Years of Striving for Acceptability

Any change introduced in conventional practices is difficult and unsettling for educational administrators and the teaching faculty, who, by and large, belonging to a conservative group, are inclined to change slowly. The faculty hesitate to accept any change that upsets the status quo; the administrators fear that the change may not result in the expected outcome at all. So they tend to reject the proposed changes. In addition to the problem of "rejection responses", the accreditation process had its own procedural difficulties and unknown snags which surfaced unexpectedly. Some of them are given below.

Apprehensions about the relevance of the NAAC

In the initial years, institutions were either indifferent or reluctant to volunteer for assessment. Besides the general lethargy and the fear of getting assessed by others, there was also a lingering doubt in the minds of some about the relevance of the entire concept and its applicability to the Indian context. Some wondered whether another agency like the NAAC was needed when various monitoring mechanisms were already in practice in the system. It was not realized that the existing regulatory mechanisms tend to border on routines that ensure only minimal requirements and do not focus adequately on "Quality Enhancement". Further, the difference in the frame of reference for accreditation by the NAAC was not very clear to many. It took nearly three years of an intensive awareness campaign to spread the message among the institutions of higher education.

Implications of Lower Rating

There was a concern about what might happen to students and teachers of institutions that may be rated low in the NAAC's process. The doubt whether a lower rating would fetch lower funding was expressed. The majority of the institutions accepted the NAAC's methodology as a more reliable and objective approach compared to the fragmented and subjective social assessment. But there were a few who voiced their criticisms about the possible divide the NAAC's process could promote between *highly-rated* and *not-so-highly-rated* institutions. To alleviate these doubts, the NAAC argued that its primary aim was to help institutions in improving themselves and that its more objective and transparent assessment and outcome would replace subjective social assessments. Institutions were also assured that funding would not be linked to the NAAC's rating. For example, the state government may decide that highly-rated institutions should be given support for sustenance of quality whereas the ones with lower ratings could get support for development of facilities that would improve the quality of their offerings. However, institutions of average quality are still apprehensive about the implications of lower rating.

Resource Requirements

The investment in terms of human resources, especially in the preparation of the self-study report is central to the accreditation process. In fact many institutions realised how intensive the exercise could be only after initiating the self-study process. It is the faculty and staff who spearhead the preparation of the report, without any extra remuneration. Depending on the workload, the NAAC suggests that at least the co-ordinator of the steering committee may be relieved of some of his/her routine work to co-ordinate the preparation of the self-study report. Most of the institutions have the basic facilities needed to prepare good in-house documents. Therefore, the human and other resources required for the preparation of the self-study report was not a problem. But, the major concern of the institutions was the accreditation cost in terms of the accreditation fee and the site visit expenses (travel, boarding and lodging) of the peer team.

To face the rejection responses successfully and clear the apprehensions, the NAAC applied multi-pronged strategies at various levels - awareness programmes to familiarize the academia and educational administrators with the concept of assessment, debates on critical issues, workshops on development

and research, training the experts for assessment, discussions with administrators to harness government support and so on.

Reaching Out

Hundreds of seminars and academic interactions were organized with various groups of academia at the national level, to discuss the methodology and implications of the NAAC's process. A wide range of promotional materials was prepared and distributed to thousands of teachers of higher education. The materials included a few booklets answering most of the queries and apprehensions of the academia. The *NAAC News*, the quarterly newsletter of the NAAC, also added to the efforts to reach out to more number of institutions. Further, most of the awareness activities were conducted involving various universities, colleges, state councils of higher education, state governments, directorates of collegiate education, academic staff colleges and other forums like the Association of College Principals. Such activities helped in mustering support for the NAAC's process.

Strengthening Internal Mechanisms

Interactions with HEIs revealed that although many of them were interested in quality assurance, they hesitated to volunteer for assessment. They felt the need for some more time and effort to set their house in order. Such institutions wanted the advice of the NAAC to initiate improvements in their system. There were also institutions that felt that they could not afford to pay the fees for assessment and accreditation. But they were interested in the internal exercise of self evaluation. To address the needs of these institutions, the concept of Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) was developed by the NAAC. Detailed guidelines were developed and mailed to all HEIs. The guidelines suggested a methodology similar to the external review by the NAAC, based on the same set of criteria and report writing, but without the site visit by an external team. By re-organising internal resources it became possible for the HEIs to establish IQACs and operationalise them to facilitate continuous quality improvements. A meeting of the vice-chancellors and directors of institutions who had expressed their intention to establish IQACs was held in January, 1996 at the NAAC headquarters at Bangalore. In three years, 44 universities established IQACs. The feedback from the member-secretaries of the IQACs was highly encouraging.

Development of Instruments

Through a series of consultative interactions with a large body of academia, the NAAC evolved the norms, methods and a series of instruments for assessment. Detailed manuals and guidelines to facilitate institutional preparation were published to cater to the different segments of the Indian higher education system. To facilitate data collection by the institutions, formats and computer-readable data sheets were developed seeking a lot of micro-level details. The grading system was also finalised. Dr. Sukumaran Nair's project document (1990) had recommended grading institutions, with letter grades A, B or C for accreditation and D and E for non-accredited status. This was taken up for discussion by the NAAC. The grading pattern with letter grades from A to E was finalised at the Brainstorming Session on Judgement Model on Institutional Accreditation held in June 1997. The cut-off point for the accredited status (55%) and the range of 10 scores for each grade (55-65 – C; 65-75 – B and 75 and above – A, with upper limit exclusive) were also finalized at the same meeting. Presenting these details, the document 'Judgement on Institutional Accreditation' was published and widely circulated.

When the grading pattern was finalised, one of the questions raised was: What *benchmarks and indicators has the NAAC evolved for placing the institutions under various categories?* If the assessment outcome had been a two-point scale –– Accredited/Not accredited – the question on benchmarking might not have gained so much importance. The multi-point grading sensitised academia to the rationale behind the classification. To evolve benchmarks with reference to the NAAC's objective, identifying the best practices that would lead to a significant improvement in the quality of education, which is nothing but Best Practices Benchmarking, was considered as a viable option. Under ideal conditions, the best practices that can be expected in an ideal institution were identified as *criterion statements* and they served as benchmarks.

Harnessing the Support of the UGC and the States

Workshops were organized jointly with state governments and state higher education councils like the West Bengal State Council for Higher Education (WBSCHE), the Uttar Pradesh State Council for Higher Education, the Tamil Nadu State Council for Higher Education (TANSCHE) and the Andhra Pradesh State Council for Higher Education. The support of the UGC and the state governments for accreditation cost cleared the concerns of the institutions about

the resource requirement. The Commission at its meeting held in July 1997 resolved that *"…the payment of assessment and accreditation cost to the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), up to a maximum of Rs. 5.00 lakhs in case of large universities, may be accepted as an admissible item for plan grant of the respective universities by the Commission. The grant for this purpose may be released to the concerned university".*

These developments helped the NAAC to move from the initial stage of struggling for survival towards acceptance by a small group of volunteers who were convinced of the merits of the NAAC's process. By the end of three years of existence, the NAAC had received "letters of intention" from 29 out of around 160 conventional universities volunteering for assessment. Eleven of these institutions were at various stages of preparation of the self-study report. Pondicherry University was the first one to submit the self-study report. The NAAC received the report on 2 August and the peer team visit was conducted during 15-20 September 1997. Following that around half-a-dozen self-study reports reached the NAAC. They became the early innovators on whom the NAAC could operationalise its procedures and prove its benefits to the others.

Collaboration with Professional Bodies

Research on quality-related issues, expanding the database of experts, making the NAAC functioning ICT-enabled, interaction with other professional bodies for collaborative assessment and strengthening of the publication programme were given a thrust. At the international level, the NAAC strengthened its interactions by professional visits to other quality assurance agencies, receiving delegations from other quality assurance agencies, participation in conferences, and holding membership in networks such as the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. The initiation of the collaborative project with the British Council and the workshop on Effective Learning and Teaching in Higher Education conducted by NAAC-AIU with the support of Commonwealth of Learning (COL) need a mention here. A NAAC publication entitled *3 Eventful Years of NAAC's Existence* was brought out highlighting the developmental path taken by the NAAC during this phase.

In a nutshell, by the end of phase-I, the NAAC had the quality assurance framework in place, made itself visible in the quality assurance scenario, built professional links, and was ready to build on the field experience.

Phase-II (1998-2001): The Next Four Years - Period of Operationalising the Strategy

During this period, the assessment process was implemented and the field experience strengthened the NAAC's efforts to fine-tune the instrument. The major focus was on orienting the institutions, training the assessors, guiding the peer assessment and responding to the genuine concerns of HEIs. Announcing the accreditation result for the HEIs that were assessed till December 1998, public disclosure of the assessment reports through the NAAC website, simplification of instruments, revision of criteria and grading pattern, publication of *NAAC News*, and more international collaborations in training strategy were other major events that mark this phase. The NAAC became more visible in the international scenario. The NAAC's ability to uphold professionalism in peer assessment and the rigorous training programmes were appreciated by international colleagues.

A significant development in this phase was an MoU (in 2000) between the Bangalore University and the NAAC. The Bangalore University formally handed over 5 acres of land in its Jnana Bharathi Campus to the NAAC for developing the NAAC's own campus in Bangalore.

Orienting HEIs

The self-study report is the backbone of the whole process and preparing the self-study report is an intensive but self-rewarding exercise. Although preparing reports was not a new concept for any institution, HEIs found the evaluative element of the report difficult. In the initial stages, most of the self-study reports turned out to be descriptive in nature. Even the self-analysis, which is expected to be the soul of the report, was similar to a summary of the descriptive data given in the self-study report, with a few exceptions. Through workshops on self-study reports, the institutions were oriented on the expectations of the analytical part of the report.

Institutions expressed that the yardstick for grading should take note of institutional diversity and their unique environments. This expectation still poses a problem when institutions insist that the constraints of their environment should be accepted as justifications for their non-performance. The NAAC's assessment has already been sensitised to institutional diversity through differential

weightages for the criteria for assessment. There is also a little leeway for peer assessment within a broad but consistent frame of quality assessment.

The length of the peer team's site visit that varies from two to five days was perceived to be very short, even for the purposes of validating the peer team impressions. So, the NAAC developed worksheets to facilitate the pre-visit preparations. The data-sheets, worksheets and guidelines such as agenda for interactions were combined into the publication *Peer Team Document.* On an average, each peer spends 20 to 40 hours on pre-visit preparation, analysing and making notes on the report submitted by the institutions. However, some institutions still feel that their strengths would have been noted well by the team if the site visit had been for a greater duration. Institutions were given extensive orientations about using the site visit time appropriately to project their functioning truthfully to the peer teams.

In the orientation programmes, the NAAC addressed areas not very familiar to many HEIs such as providing documentary evidence for claims, involving the entire campus community as a team to prepare the report, moving beyond individual achievements to projecting the institution, acknowledging weaknesses and putting in place mechanisms to overcome them, translating goals into action, improving student participation in the teaching-learning process, involving parents and society in the institutional functioning, etc.

Orienting Assessors through Training Programmes

Having accepted peer assessment as a part of its methodology, the NAAC brought in consistency and objectivity among the peers by appropriate safeguards, training strategies and discussions. A notable effort in this direction is the development of the 'National Cadre of Assessors'. To train peers for assessment, experts from different parts of the country were selected through nomination and advertisements and through a rigorous selection process. For the assessors thus selected, the NAAC organized 3-day residential training programmes to induct them into the 'National Cadre of Assessors'. The training programmes were designed with ample scope for case studies and simulations to eliminate the personal bias of the peers. One of the NAAC officers was sent to the UK to study their programme. International experts were invited to the NAAC to share their experiences. This training strategy, that is still followed, has given a professional dimension to the National Cadre of Assessors. The trained assessors

are not full-time employees of the NAAC but join the assessment teams on invitation by the NAAC.

To assess the effectiveness of the training strategy, after completing two training programmes, the NAAC invited an international observer to be a part of one of the assessment visits. The feedback had substantial influence on the planning of the peer team visit as well as on the training strategy. In addition to the training for the assessors, roundtable discussions have been held for the experts and chairpersons of the peer teams who may not fit into the profile of assessors (they may be too senior to participate in training sessions or are educational administrators like the vice-chancellors of universities). This has greatly reduced the inter-team variance that may arise due to differences in the frame of reference, backgrounds, experiences and perceptions of peers

Guiding Peer Assessment through Pointers of Quality and Frame of Reference for Peer Assessment

Under the seven criteria, the criterion statements and key aspects guide peer assessment. To further strengthen the peer assessment on those key aspects, the NAAC evolved the Pointers of Quality and Framework for Peer Assessment. For every key aspect of the first six core criteria, the existing situation in most of the good institutions is taken as the base standard, a standard higher than the base would give a higher level of classification, and a standard lower than the base would give another category. Data were collected from a representative sample of around 40 good institutions and averages were calculated for the quantitative aspects. For some key aspects it was possible to fix a three-level classification, and for others a two-point scale was fixed and certain credit points were attached to the various levels of achievement (Annexure XI).

After a thorough discussion with a group of experts, the pointers of quality were piloted on a few institutions. It became clear that for initial focus on aspects of importance, the pointers were useful as the referral point. Field experience also indicated that these pointers required contextualisation. The credits attached to the pointers could not be added up to arrive at the criterion score. When the team has to judge the institution on a criterion, the outcomes on various pointers need to be synthesized and peer assessment becomes vital. Further, the peers have to synthesize both qualitative and quantitative inferences to arrive at a holistic value judgement, in the context of the institution. In other words, the

peers have an important role in moderating the pointers and credits, and in synthesizing the outcome in the context of the institution. Hence a format - The Frame of Reference for Peer Assessment - was evolved to synthesize peer assessment. The format required the peers to provide justification for their value judgements for every key aspect of functioning of the institution (Annexure XII).

The *Peer Team Document* prepared by the NAAC during this phase was designed to bring in consistency in the working of the peers by providing institution specific data, agenda for the various sessions, pointers of quality and the framework for peer assessment. Starting from tentative evaluation to final grading, it helped the peers in recording the reasons for the assessment, the issues to be probed further and the evidence required. As the peer team orientations and training programmes were strengthened, the pointers of quality and frame of reference for peer assessment were dropped. But the criterion statements remain as the referral points for peer assessment.

Responding to Genuine Expectations

To make its process ameliorative, the NAAC brought in a few changes during this phase in its criteria for assessment and grading pattern. Ten parameters that formed the basis of assessment were re-organised to seven criteria, without losing any of the aspects of functioning covered by the parameters. In addition, for each of the criteria, key aspects of functioning were identified. This made the focus of the criteria clear to the institutions as well as the peers. Today the criteria and key aspects have been accepted as holistic and comprehensive enough to project the functioning of an institution in the right perspective.

The grading pattern also underwent changes. The first grading scheme that was proposed had the letter grades A, B and C for the accredited status and D and E for the non-accredited status. Though grade B may denote a good institution, if A stands for an excellent institution, because of the stigma attached to grade B, as a symbol of second grade, institutions did not want to be awarded the grades B and C. While these concerns were being raised, the NAAC was yet to declare the assessment outcome for any of the HEIs assessed. In January 1999, the recommendations on the accreditation status of the first batch of 8 HEIs were placed before the EC of the NAAC. The EC suggested that only parameter-wise scores might be given to those institutions. Concerns were also expressed that for our huge system of higher education, the three-point classification of

accredited HEIs between score values of 55-75 may not capture the differences in performance between them.

In the developments that followed, the grading system was revised, to a two-tier system where at level one, Accredited/Not Accredited was the outcome. At level two, only the accredited institutions were classified on a five-point scale with A-five stars (A*****) being the top category and A-one star (A*) being the bottom category. The cut-off at both extremes remained the same – 55% for accreditation and 75% and above for the highest grade. Each grade had a range of 5 now instead of 10 to accommodate the five-point scale. (In further revisions, the five-point scale was replaced by a nine-point scale to respond to the concerns about the star culture and the clubbing of institutions at the higher levels.)

The detailed report of the peers satisfied most of the institutions. Some complained that insufficient evidence and rationale were provided in the assessment report to support the conclusions and recommendations. The correlation between the report and the grade was questioned in a few cases. Some institutions felt that their unique features were not noted well in the report. Such complaints were minimal and the feedback was taken as an important input to further fine-tune the reporting methodology.

The expectations of the institutions about the incentives and disincentives for the outcome of accreditation became more explicit during this phase. The expectations varied from getting help in syllabus revision to getting deemed university status. Some of the expectations were not under the NAAC's purview at all. However, the NAAC addressed these issues with the spirit to uphold the credibility of the assessment process and to make the process more beneficial to the institutions.

After assessing around 125 institutions, the NAAC conducted an evaluation of its procedures by collecting feedback from the accredited institutions and assessors. The analysis of the feedback indicated that the NAAC's procedures were workable but a few aspects needed fine-tuning. The openness with which the NAAC carried out the evaluation instilled confidence among the academia. These measures made a significant impact in addressing the genuine expectations of the stakeholders and in guiding peer assessment. That brought in more support from the stakeholders, promoting large volume of assessment.

In spite of the voluntary nature of the process, during this phase, many state governments took steps to enthuse institutions to come forward for assessment. In Tamil Nadu, the Directorate of Collegiate Education (DCE) decided that all the government-run colleges would have to undergo a comprehensive assessment in a phased manner and identified 11 colleges for the first phase of assessment. Following that another group of 11 colleges underwent assessment. The assessment reports of these colleges were analysed by the state government to evolve state policies for improving higher education. Further, the Tamil Nadu State Council for Higher Education (TANSCHE), the apex advisory body to the Ministry of Education of Tamil Nadu recommended to the government that the outcome of assessment and accreditation be used for two major decisions – conferment of autonomy to colleges and recommending Deemed University status to colleges. In the states of Kerala, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Bihar similar moves were contemplated. The UGC and MHRD decided that the outcome of assessment would be linked to their funding policies and fixed a time-frame for all the universities and colleges to undergo assessment by the NAAC. This made many institutions initiate the preparation of the self-study report.

At the international level, the NAAC became more visible and the methodology of the NAAC was appreciated. The sixth bi-annual meet of the INQAAHE hosted by the NAAC at Bangalore in 2001, attended by 145 experts from other countries representing 45 countries, enhanced the international standing of the NAAC. Collaboration with counterparts in other countries, research on quality-related issues, representation of the NAAC and its officers in international forums, international delegations to the NAAC to learn from its experiences, etc. were on the increase. At the national level, as the stakeholders made their choices clear, more and more institutions joined the mainstream of quality assessment. The shift in the institutional response from "rejection, indifference and hesitation" to "acceptance, adoption and implementation of quality enhancement strategies" made the responsibilities of NAAC more challenging during this phase.

Phase-III (2002 -   ): Appreciation for the NAAC and Stakeholders' Impact in Promoting Assessment and Accreditation

The institutional response to the NAAC's process became very encouraging. There was an overall appreciation for the intrinsic benefits of accreditation.

Partnership with state governments, revision in the grading pattern, new models of the site visit to meet large volume assessment, supporting the quality enhancement activities of HEIs, initiation of re-accreditation procedures and international collaborations mark this phase. This is also the period when some of the recommendations of a committee constituted by the UGC to review the policies and practices of the NAAC were implemented.

Review of the policies and procedures of the NAAC

Arising out of the decision and the consensus arrived at a national consultation held in December 2001, the Chairman, UGC constituted a committee under the convenership of Prof. K. Gopalan, former Vice-Chancellor, Cochin University of Science and Technology to recommend changes required in the policies and procedures of the NAAC. The committee met in the UGC office on 28 and 29 December 2001 and submitted its recommendations to the UGC on 4 January 2002. While noting that the assessment and accreditation process of the NAAC was well-defined and suited the Indian higher education system, the committee made recommendations to fine-tune and stabilize the procedures of the NAAC. The recommendations dealt with issues such as making the format of self-study more comprehensive, ensuring the quality of peer assessment, key aspects to be looked into during the process of assessment, adopting research assessment exercise, initiating departmental accreditation, disclosure of criterion-wise scores, initiating post-assessment follow-up, constituting the appellate authority and introducing the 9-point scale for grading the institutions. Of all the recommendations, the one that had the most significant impact on the NAAC's assessment model was the change proposed in the grading system.

Change in the Grading Pattern

The grading system that used "stars" and worked well for 240 HEIs came under criticism on the count that it promoted a 'hotel' culture and that the highest grade had a wide range—any score above 75 would result in the top grade. So after much debate, and national consultations, the UGC Committee on NAAC's Policy and Procedures (2001) recommended that the star grading may be replaced with a 9-point scale. The recommendations were approved by the EC and with effect from 15 March 2002 the NAAC follows the nine-point scale which uses a combination of letter grades and pluses (55-60 – C, 60-65 – C+ , 65-70 - C+ + , 70-

75 – B,.....95-100 – A++ - Upper limit exclusive). With this new grading, the issues of re-orienting the stakeholders to the new system of grading, training the assessors appropriately and facing the questions of non-comparable outcomes emerged as challenges. These issues were addressed through orientations and workshops. However, it has been realized that whatever further revision has to be done, it should be done only in the next cycle of assessment.

New Models of Peer Team Visits

The decision of the state governments like Haryana, Maharashtra and Karnataka, making accreditation mandatory, resulted in a large volume of assessment activities in a short time. With the UGC's decision to support the expenses for assessment and accreditation of universities and colleges with effect from 1 April 2004, more and more colleges are expected to volunteer for assessment and new models of organising peer team visits have been developed by the NAAC. Following the model of member-conveners and Chair-cum-conveners, the capacity of the NAAC to assess institutions was enhanced to around 200 institutions per month. To support the new model of site visit with member-conveners, the database of experts was expanded through nominations, rigorous training programmes, orientation programmes and roundtables. The NAAC also developed an online database, accessible to the NAAC officers, with information on the peer teams sent to different institutions, at various stages, and remarks, if any. It facilitated sharing of information among the council staff. ICT-enabled processes were introduced at the NAAC.

Handling Grievances

The appeals mechanism, described in the earlier chapter, was established in 2004. Only six appeals (less than 2% of the total assessment visits) were made after the announcement of the accreditation results for 413 colleges in May 2004; this indicates that the NAAC's process has gained acceptability and credibility among the institutions.

Finalising the Re-Accreditation Process

Considering the field experience, the lessons of experience of the other quality assurance agencies, post-accreditation reviews and national consultations, the methodology for re-accreditation was finalized by the Academic Advisory Committee and duly approved by the Executive Committee of the NAAC. The

guidelines on re-accreditation were sent to the first two batches of HEIs that were accredited during 1998-99 and 1999-2000.

Quality Enhancement of HEIs

Many workshops and seminars on various aspects of quality enhancement have been supported during this phase. Identifying best practices and disseminating the same towards quality improvement have been initiated. Promotion of stakeholder dialogue on quality-related issues has also been taken up during this phase. To begin with, interaction with students about quality-related issues was initiated.

Other developments

During this period, the foundation stone was laid for the NAAC campus in the Jnana Bharathi Campus of the Bangalore University by the then Honorable Minister of HRD Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi. Moving beyond assessment, the NAAC organized numerous post-accreditation and quality enhancement activities. Besides this, 5 regional workshops for capacity building of Women Managers in Education were organized under the Chairpersonship of Prof. (Miss). Armaity Desai, former UGC Chairperson. In its effort to network accredited institutions, the NAAC facilitated two national conventions. These conventions recommended that accreditation be made mandatory and that statutory powers be conferred on the NAAC to strengthen its role.

Phase III is also marked by positive developments in strengthening the partnership with state governments to promote assessment and accreditation, collaborations with other national bodies for accreditation of specialised institutions, and participation in and contribution to international developments in quality assurance. Since these developments form the basis for chalking out the action plans for the future, they are discussed in detail in Chapter 8 of this book.

The current phase is marked by the tenth year (2004) of the founding of the NAAC. To celebrate its decennial year, the NAAC has organized many initiatives such as the 'Decennial Lectures on Quality Education and Sustainable Development' delivered by 10 eminent academicians in selected universities and colleges that helped in taking the message of quality across the country. It

has also organized a national workshop in Goa on the 'Best Practices in Higher Education' and an international conference on quality assurance practices in teacher education, as a part of the decennial year activities.

To sum up, during the past decade, the NAAC has faced problems and challenges at different levels. The most notable ones were the lack of motivation among the institutions, resistance from faculty to external assessment, questions on resources needed, apprehensions about the objectivity of the process, lack of clarity on the implications of assessment outcome and lack of awareness on the part of the stakeholders. However, the efforts of the NAAC in involving the various stakeholders helped in tackling these issues and there has been a shift in the institutional response from "rejection, indifference and hesitation" to "acceptance, adoption and implementation of quality enhancement strategies". Institutions that experienced the assessment visit have strengthened the NAAC by implementing quality enhancement strategies suggested in the assessment report, thus setting models to be emulated by other institutions. The positive impact the NAAC's process has made on institutions stands testimony to the intrinsic benefits of accreditation. Some of the significant aspects are highlighted in the next chapter.

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The Impact of Assessment and Accreditation

The success of a strategy can be gauged by the impact it makes on the primary beneficiaries. The process of assessment and accreditation by the NAAC has the institution itself as the primary beneficiary. The external quality assurance as promoted by the NAAC has made a significant impact on the primary beneficiaries and the benefits extend to a number of secondary beneficiaries as well. There are also areas that need further improvement. This chapter discusses the major findings of the NAAC's efforts to understand the impact it has made on the system of higher system in general and HEIs in particular. With more HEIs undergoing assessment by the NAAC, the areas of improvement more or less remain the same but the extent of improvement required varies coupled with new emerging challenges.

The Impact Analysis

Four years ago, when the NAAC decided to do a mid-term review, the major tasks were understanding the impact of assessment and accreditation and understanding the areas of the NAAC's process that needed further improvement. A questionnaire was developed in consultation with a few heads of institutions and chairpersons of peer teams. The questionnaires were piloted on 15 institutions and some minor improvements were incorporated. The questionnaires were then sent to the first 100 institutions that had undergone assessment and accreditation. The analysis of the feedback, as recorded by the institutions, revealed that the NAAC's impact has been felt by institutions in most aspects of their functioning—pedagogical, managerial and administrative; only the significant ones are mentioned below.

Ownership on Quality Matters

The NAAC's process has made institutions realise that quality is the responsibility of the institutions themselves. Quality management procedures were introduced in some institutions. Especially, the institutions that did not have such procedures in place before initiated formal mechanisms. Managements were often able to bring in major changes on the grounds that it would demonstrate a commitment to quality. For example, institutions introduced peer appraisal and student evaluation of teachers, issues that still continue to be a bone of contention in many institutions.

Focus on Goals and Objectives

During the first two years, the NAAC's scheme of assessment was based on ten major dimensions of functioning of institutions called parameters. One of the parameters—Institutional Goals and Objectives—looked into the goal orientation of the institution. Even in the revised scheme of seven criteria, goals and objectives of the institution is a key aspect in the criterion Curricular Aspects. So institutions initiate discussions on their specific goals and objectives and the means to achieve them. Institutions began making co-curricular provisions related to specific objectives and strengthening extension activities to realise the goals. Efforts were also made to have consultations to revise the goals to suit the contemporary as well as the larger needs of society and make an appropriate choice of courses. The myth that they have no role in goals and course offerings was demystified.

Going beyond the Constraints

The greatest effect of undergoing the process has been the taking up of innovative programmes by institutions beyond the mandatory requirements of the affiliating system. Institutions that were unhappy about the systemic constraints of the affiliating mode realised that within the affiliating structure they could attempt many innovative strategies on their own.

Increase in Programme Options

Introduction of need-based programmes was observed in most of the institutions, increasing the programme options. Many institutions started their own certificate and diploma programmes to fulfil the growing demand from students.

Restructuring of the Curriculum

The autonomous institutions that had the freedom to innovate in curriculum and the affiliated colleges that were offering additional programmes of their own restructured the curriculum. Some succeeded in introducing the Choice Based Credit System, which gives more freedom and flexibility to students; in some cases it is flexible to the extent that a student can structure his/her own curriculum. The revision of curriculum content was accepted as an ongoing process instead of a routine to be undertaken once in three or five years. Institutions also understood effective ways of doing it, such as involving employers and peers.

Improvement in Teaching–learning Strategies

The attention of the institutions became focussed on the right priorities and responsibilities especially with reference to teaching–learning as their primary mission. In the scheme of assessment of the NAAC, the criterion *Teaching–learning and Evaluation* carries the maximum weightage. It gave a positive stimulus to institutional attention and oriented the institutions to improve their quality of teaching–learning by going beyond the routine examination-oriented outcome. It became well understood that teaching–learning has to be as important as research or even more, in the universities as well. Improved teaching methods using educational technology, projects and student seminars, providing computer skills, encouraging co-curricular activities, and incorporating community orientation were observed.

Stimulating Research Culture

Research, Consultancy and Extension is one of the criteria for assessment and this has stimulated a research culture which is more pronounced in colleges that were focussing only on teaching. Although the weightage allotted to this criterion is the least for affiliated colleges, it has improved the encouragement for faculty research at all levels including the affiliated undergraduate colleges. Research initiatives such as applying for projects, providing seed money for research initiatives, conducting seminars and symposia, providing support services for the faculty involved in research, deputing faculty to complete their research degrees and supporting efforts to publish have improved. Some institutions have established research centres with liberal seed money from their governing bodies.

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Improved Documentation

Although some mentioned that the process of preparing the self-study report and getting ready for the assessment visit involved a lot of unnecessary documentation, most thought that it was a promising tool for improvement of their documentation, especially for teacher appraisal, student progression, alumni profiles and placement services. While the institutions geared up to record and manage data that would improve their performance, individual faculty members too realised the importance of maintaining regular teaching diaries, documentation of their academic contributions and other scholarly pursuits outside the institution and data on their community-oriented services.

Improved Student Services (Learning Resources and Support Services)

It focused the attention of the institutions on the support services within their reach, which they had never thought of before. Student support like open access and extended working hours of the library, getting latest books and quality journals, establishing inter-library linkage, centralised computer centre with an access to it, placement cell, campus interviews, on-the-job training, guidance and counselling and financial assistance were greatly improved. Student activities were channelled towards skill development and leadership training.

More Information Technology

Most of the institutions improved their centralised computer facilities providing easy access to students and teachers. The internet was made available to all faculty members and a restricted use of it was provided to postgraduate students and research scholars. The computer departments of many colleges started introductory courses for non-computer science students. Though information technology was entering all institutions, the NAAC's process made its need felt by all the sections of the institutions instead of confining the benefits to a few sections like the computer science department and the administrative office. Institutional efforts for its appropriate use and preparing its members for optimum use greatly improved. That led to the use of technology as a learning resource in the real sense by more faculty members. Computer Assisted Learning packages were developed. The admission, examination and library services were computerised.

Human Resources Development

Training of the staff in new communication technologies, faculty development programmes, and student activities gained a new thrust. They were seen as useful investments for the development of human resources of the institution. The faculty, staff and students were facilitated with an open and transparent policy.

Standing United

Small differences were forgotten and the faculty and the management became united. Since it was realised that quality enhancement was an institutional effort and not merely an outcome of an individual's conviction, it led to participatory and consultative decision-making to implement quality enhancement strategies.

Greater Inter-Departmental Interaction

The preparation of the self-study report requires inputs from all the sub-units of the institution and hence it calls for co-operation. In this context, all the sub-units came closer to work together. Departments that were functioning like islands within the bigger system started sharing their experiences and expertise. They came to know the achievements and good practices of one another, which developed inter-departmental initiatives, intimacy and a new synergy. Team teaching, faculty of one department handling specialised topics in other departments, inter-disciplinary course offerings and sharing of facilities were strengthened.

Healthy Competition among Sub-units

While the process made the sub-units appreciate the contribution of one another to the academic ambience of the institution, it also resulted in healthy competition among the departments with each unit trying to maximise its contributions and achievements.

Rediscovering of Self

Things taken for granted were rediscovered as their unique characteristics and strengths. Interaction with peers and employers to strengthen the rediscovered potentials, linkage with other institutions and industry to capitalise on the potentials, collecting feedback from parents and alumni to further identify their strengths and weaknesses, collecting feedback from students for improving their

educational experiences and consultations with peers to overcome the weak links were initiated. In short, initiatives that require confidence, self-reliance and potential bloomed.

Triggering of Healthy Practices

Quality assessment triggered new healthy practices. Informal mechanisms like student feedback on teaching and learning, and performance appraisal were institutionalised. Individual efforts towards organising seminars, arranging for special lectures, enriching the syllabus with current topics, initiating students into the project mode and other innovative learner-centred activities were institutionalised. Dissemination of information on faculty development and strategies to tap the various schemes available to support research and development in the institution in general became well known and the faculty members were encouraged to use those facilitating aspects.

Community Orientation

There was an increase in community-oriented activities—extending expertise to the development of the immediate neighbourhood, initiating research that would solve the problems of the neighbourhood, students and faculty participation in those activities.

Change in the Policies and Practices of the Management

There was a change in the perception of the management on issues such as faculty workload, supporting research culture and encouraging faculty development. The inter-personal relations between the management and the other units of the institutions improved. There was a change towards a participative and transparent style of management, involving the other units in decision-making.

Recognising Stakeholder Expectations

The expectations of the employers, students and parents formed a substantial basis for many new initiatives of the institutions. New courses were initiated; skill development components were incorporated in the curriculum. Opinions from students and parents were sought on the educational experiences provided in the institution.

Greater Involvement of Students, Parents and Alumni

Alumni involvement and parent involvement in improving the institution became explicit. Regular meetings with parents and alumni and getting their feedback could be seen. The activities of the alumni association were revived. Institutions that did not have those associations initiated them and collected alumni profiles. Student participation in certain decision-making and sharing of responsibilities of institutional activities were encouraged.

Inter-institutional Networking

The curiosity of the institutions about what the others had done with reference to the NAAC's frame of reference for assessment led to better information dissemination and co-operative efforts among neighbouring colleges. Many highly-rated institutions are exploring the possibility of establishing a network among themselves to initiate student exchange and staff exchange programmes.

Planning for the Future

Institutions started thinking beyond routine teaching–learning and chalked out future plans. The focus on future plans became clear, and vision and mission documents and perspective plans were drawn up. Institutions also realised the importance of projecting their strengths and unique features to society to get good resources—funds, students and teachers.

Greater Value of Accreditation

Even institutions that volunteered for the process with apprehension have understood the great value of assessment after undergoing the process. Initially some institutions volunteered just because the neighbouring institutions had done so or the accreditation of the NAAC was seen as a marketing strategy. But later, they realised that the process of assessment had done a lot to revive and stimulate the quality culture of the institution.

Impact of the Assessors

Not all aspects of impact could be captured in the questionnaire. In addition to the impact revealed by the data collected through the questionnaire, the positive impact made by the assessors cannot be ignored. Hundreds of assessors and peers who were involved in the various activities of the NAAC—assessment

exercise, awareness programmes and workshops—made a positive impact on their respective institutions. Especially, the assessors and peers who were involved in the assessment visits became the change agents in their own institutions. They were able to clear the unfounded fears of their colleagues. In many institutions, they became the nucleus of the assessment initiative and were invited to chair the steering committees. The neighbouring institutions approached them for consultation. Since the NAAC has the policy of not inviting assessors from the same state where the institution is located, the impact of the assessors spread across the country very quickly. The NAAC also made use of their services effectively as ambassadors in those regions for awareness programmes as well as for identifying potential institutions for follow-up.

Assessors have also played an important role in the dissemination of healthy practices and innovative strategies among institutions. What they observe in an institution often triggers new developments in their parent institutions. Today participation in assessment visits is seen as a rewarding and challenging experience, though the remuneration paid by the NAAC is very nominal and in no way matches the hard work put in by the assessors. Faculty members are happy to include it as recognition in their curriculum vitae. Even the highly qualified and experienced experts indicate that serving in assessment teams is equivalent to a faculty development programme in higher education administration.

There were also issues that were not very pleasant. In spite of the explanation that institutional uniqueness will be taken care of, institutions have started copying the top-bracket institutions. The manuals developed by the NAAC to facilitate the preparation of the self-study report have also contributed to this. The manuals give a generic format for data collection, which may contain a few questions that may not be relevant to a particular institution. Forgetting the generic nature of the format, for any aspect questioned in the manual, the institutions have hurriedly initiated those mechanisms. Further, not all questions have value addition; some are only for data collection. Yet institutions have hurried to put all mechanisms in place. This may lead to decrease in diversity among institutions and create institutions tailor-made to the manual.

The NAAC could understand that, at times, those who met the peers had been carefully coached. In some institutions the interactions with representative

groups of students or staff turned out to be sessions of eulogising the management or the head of the institution. Experts had been consulted on preparing documents. Some had spent much time preparing documents and plans that would impress the peer team. In other words, by trying to please the assessment team, institutions created the semblance of quality rather than effecting quality assurance. This too had led to improvement in quality to some extent. However, the peer team always had a balanced composition of academia that could appreciate the new initiatives of the institutions, and, at the same time, differentiate gloss from reality.

Areas that Require Improvement: Assessor's Perspectives

In order to have a holistic understanding of the impact a questionnaire was developed to ascertain assessors' views regarding the following:

- What is the perceived quality of the NAAC's process and outcomes?
- Does the methodology of the NAAC address appropriate issues relevant to quality?
- How do the chairpersons and members of the peer team perceive the utility of the process?
- How could the training of chairpersons and members of the peer team be improved?
- What aspects of the process need to be strengthened further?

The questionnaire constituting the above issues was distributed to 100 assessors (chairpersons and members of the peer team). The principal finding was the strong positive evaluation of many of the features of the process by the peers. Most respondents while suggesting improvements in the process generally agreed and were satisfied with the current practices of the NAAC. On the whole the suggestions centred on:

- More freedom to institutions to structure the self-study report
- Increase in the duration of the visit
- Getting more inputs from society about the institution
- Responses from parents and students to be more scientific
- More involvement of the affiliating university during the assessment visit to the affiliates as in the case of government colleges where the state governments are involved

- Developing a follow-up mechanism for the accredited institutions
- Publicity to be given to the benefits of accreditation
- Helping institutions to develop internal quality assurance strategies for continuous evaluation
- Strengthening of assessors' training
- Establishing minimum norms for each of the five categories of institutional grades
- Clearly stated benchmarks and focus on outcome
- Reconsideration of star classification and grading
- Grading of departments and not institution as a whole
- Grading of the criteria and not the whole institution

Some of these suggestions have been implemented such as helping institutions to develop internal quality assurance strategies. A few other suggestions such as benchmarks and outcome-based assessment have been considered while fine-tuning the guidelines for peer assessment. The rest have been discussed in various forums and the collective decision was to go by the current framework.

In sum, the mid-term review revealed that external quality assurance as promoted by the NAAC through self-study and peer review had resulted in the expected outcomes. The instances like boosting the image of the institution in the self-study report, trying to copy the others and creating an artificial atmosphere of team work and open climate were found to be minimal and could be taken as referral points for fine tuning the process of accreditation. The impact accreditation has on policy making is still evolving but the trends are very encouraging. The suggestions for further improvement have been encouraging.

After the Mid-Term Review

The next major analysis was done during 2002-2003 when discussions to develop the framework for the next assessment started. By then the first batch of HEIs that were accredited during 1998-1999 were in the fifth year of their accredited status. The NAAC had to inform them about the framework for the next assessment since the accredited status is valid for a period of five years. Although

the options to define the framework for the next assessment are many, basically, there are two approaches. One approach is to retain the existing assessment framework as such and make minor changes for the next assessment. The other approach is to bring in major changes and introduce new elements in the basic framework itself. Once major changes are made then it will become "the next cycle". In both approaches there was scope for change.

In any system, the first assessment normally helps in mapping the system and the aspects to be contextualized further and challenges to be addressed emerge at this stage. Although mid-way refinements have to be part of the continuous evolution of the assessment process, one can expect significant changes in the fresh cycle or next round of assessment. During the past, in response to the concerns expressed by the academia, the NAAC had already made a few changes such as revision in criteria and grading pattern. The NAAC was aware that any further major change should be done when institutions get into the next assessment. At the same time the NAAC was also aware that there does not exist an ideal system of accreditation anywhere in the world. When a country evolves a national system, contextualising it to the national scenario to the extent possible, meddling with it for small differences is not good. The system should be able to weigh the advantages and disadvantages carefully and then decide about the changes. It was in this context that the NAAC wanted to understand the impact the assessment process has made on the HEIs and the suggestions that come out of those experiences to shape the next assessment process. A series of post-accreditation reviews were conducted.

Post-Accreditation Reviews

The post-accreditation review is not to be understood as a review of accredited HEIs. Neither is it a review of the NAAC. Rather it is a holistic review of the experiences of the NAAC and HEIs with respect to all aspects of the assessment process so that the outcome could form the base for planning the next assessment strategy. The NAAC evolved a format in consultation with the accredited colleges and collected data on various aspects of the accreditation and the post-accreditation experiences.

The accredited colleges that had enjoyed the accredited status for more than

one year were invited for the review. The colleges submitted a report based on the questionnaire mentioned above, and made a presentation on the following aspects:

- Campus reaction to the assessment exercise
- Observable impact and substantive changes after the peer team visit
- Action taken on the report
- Future plans of the institution
- Expectations from the NAAC
- Feedback to the NAAC for planning the next assessment
- Initiatives of the institution in disseminating the concept of quality assurance in the region

The reviews were well attended by three-member teams from the institutions – the principal, the steering committee coordinator and a representative from the management from each invited institution, as suggested by the NAAC. The presentations revealed that the campus reaction to the assessment report had been positive except in a few cases where the institutional expectations did not match the assessment of the peer team. Irrespective of campus reaction to the report, all institutions reported that they had acted on the report positively, which had resulted in significant improvements. In terms of the degree of impact, the following emerge as the aspects that have experienced the maximum influence:

1. Initiating bridge/remedial courses
2. Use of new technology in teaching
3. Systematic evaluation of student outcomes
4. Conducting faculty development programs
5. Extension activities with community orientation
6. Personal and career counseling
7. Placement efforts
8. Library resources and laboratory facilities and equipment
9. Linkages with society, parents and alumni
10. Interpersonal relationship between different constituents

On aspects where the impact of assessment has not been felt significantly by the HEIs, a list of obstacles were provided. Most of the benefits noted by the institutions are about understanding self, higher levels of motivation to move forward and improvement in various aspects of functioning. For the query on the obstacles faced by the institutions in implementing the recommendations given in the assessment report, the following obstacles had been recorded:

o Being the rural institution, it is deprived of certain facilities with regard to research and consultancy.

o Being a constituent college of the university, it is necessary to obtain dual permission from both the managing bodies to get things done.

o Certain suggestions were vague and their implementation had been difficult.

o Being a government college, the funds had to be allocated only by the government.

o Unable to progress much in the research and extension activities because the college has not been given any approval for any P. G. course.

o Implementation of the CBCS in its true perspective was not possible due to faculty resistance.

o Financial and administrative constraints due to several masters were obstacles in enhancement of research, consultancy and extension work at a faster pace.

o Difficulties are being encountered in establishing industrial tie-ups, MoU with other institutions and consultancy services due to lack of interest shown by the industries and institutions of the neighbourhood.

o Restructuring of the syllabi could not be done in the affiliating system.

o The records of the alumni cannot be maintained due to the 50-year-old history of the college and it is difficult to trace old students.

o Research culture could only have a slow outcome.

o Being an affiliated institution, modification of existing curricular programmes to suit the socio-economic environment in the region could not be done.

- Difficulty in getting additional courses sanctioned by the university.
- To start self-financing courses, admission to full strength and the paying capacity of students in this backward area are unpredictable.
- There is a clash of policies between the government, the university and the NCTE in matters of staff appointment, starting new courses and conducting P.G. and research programmes. This was an obstacle in implementing a few suggestions by the peer team.

The obstacles mentioned above helped the NAAC to plan feedback strategies to the various stakeholders to facilitate institutions in implementing quality enhancement strategies. Besides the expectation that the NAAC should do the needful to circumvent some of the problems mentioned above, the other expectations of the institutions were mostly on facilitating network efforts, more interaction with the NAAC, guidance to strengthen the academic ambience, incentives for better performance, and help in reducing procedural delays with the government. Compilation of healthy practices and more NAAC-sponsored workshops on different aspects of quality enhancement were also suggested. The institutions insisted that the NAAC should provide the criterion-wise scores also along with the institutional grade (which was later approved by the Executive Committee of the NAAC).

The institutions recorded many suggestions for the next assessment. Expressing the appreciation for the transparency, objectivity and clarity in the procedures of the NAAC, the institutions have emphasized that the same should be maintained in the next cycle also. Providing more guidelines about the preparation of the self-analysis to help the institutions project their strengths well, incorporating annual and mid-term feedback as an integral part of the next assessment, pre-site visit by at least one member of the peer team to the institution or the NAAC staff to prepare the institution for the site visit, having a peer from the same locality to facilitate the understanding of the institutional context, etc. are the other suggestions that follow. Institutions have also indicated that the standards of the next assessment should become more international and increase the global competitiveness of the highly rated accredited institutions by incorporating appropriate dimensions in the assignment procedures. The need to facilitate credit transfer and mutual recognition of awards from accredited institutions across national borders also find a mention. A few

institutions have not approved the recent change in the grading system of the NAAC and the consequent non-comparable outcome. The need to have a consistent grading system in the next assessment has been emphasized.

It is to be noted that the NAAC has already acted on some of these suggestions and expectations. In sum, all the reviews ended with a positive note. The suggestions on the next assessment, in general, did not require a major change in the assessment framework. For suggestions that seemed to require a major change, the advantages of the existing pattern outweighed the value additions possible by those changes. The outcome of the reviews also fed into the national consultation the NAAC organized to firm up the framework for re-accreditation.

Feedback from Students

With the aim of promoting quality as a student-centered initiative in HEIs, the NAAC organised a programme - "Impact of Assessment: Students' Feedback" at the NAAC office on 25 June, 2004. The highly interactive session saw the eloquent expression of grievances, appreciation, arguments, suggestions and questions put forth by the students. The advantages, limitations and the role of students in improving the quality of education were discussed in detail with the students. On the whole, the students acknowledged the improvements brought forth and gave credit to the relevance of the NAAC.

Overall Positive Impact of the Process

The feedback from institutions, assessors, students and others, obtained through questionnaires, reviews and interactive programmes, reveals that the NAAC's assessment and accreditation process has had, in general, a positive and encouraging impact on the quality of higher education system and processes in the country. Such feedback also helps NAAC fine-tune its methodology to eliminate shortcomings, ensuring that the entire exercise of assessment and accreditation leads to intended improvement in the quality of Indian higher education to benefit all its stakeholders.

7

Lessons of Experience
of the NAAC

India has the third largest system of higher education in the world— more than 300 university level institutions and more than 16000 colleges—that caters to 10 million direct and full-time students with 0.5 million teachers. For such a large and diverse system, conceptualizing a national quality assurance mechanism and operationalizing the processes have been a formidable task. Since its inception in 1994, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) had spent 3–4 years for evolving its policies, principles and instruments. Since 1998, about 2000 institutions have been assessed. The experience gained in evolving an acceptable methodology of External Quality Assurance (EQA) for such a complex system and the field experience are many. This chapter is an attempt to share those lessons of experience.

Activating the Internal Mechanism

Since its inception, the NAAC has promoted the concept of 'Internal Quality Assurance Cell' (IQAC) with guidelines on setting up internal structures to review quality as an ongoing process. Many of the institutions that initiated IQACs felt confident about the process of self-evaluation and later volunteered for accreditation by the NAAC. The real benefit of accreditation has been the impact it has had on making the internal quality assurance mechanism functional and robust, which in turn strengthened the ownership of quality assurance among the institutions. The NAAC could also observe that the impact of assessment on HEIs that did not have robust internal quality assurance systems was marginal; such HEIs tended to fall into complacency rather quickly.

Involving the Early Adopters

Most of the institutions that volunteered for assessment in the beginning were confident of their potential and were eager to know their strengths and weaknesses through an objective external assessment. Some were already employing their own institutional evaluation through internal mechanisms. The broad involvement of these early adopters, who could share their positive approach and success stories, enabled the NAAC to ensure widespread support from the others. Those who were involved in the assessment visits became the change agents in their own institutions and it enhanced the acceptance of the NAAC's efforts. Institutions of all categories, starting from the ones that were placed at the lowest rung of the classification to the ones that are placed at the highest rung, have uniformly acknowledged that assessment by the NAAC made a significant change in their pedagogical, managerial, administrative and other aspects of functioning. The appreciation can be seen in the way institutions are acting on the recommendations of the peer team. The NAAC could also realise that unless this impact is sustained, complacency might set in.

Guiding Peer Assessment

Performance indicators and procedural safeguards are in use largely to guide peer assessment. While external quality assessment itself is a new culture that is slowly being nurtured in the higher education system, over-emphasis on performance indicators will defeat the very purpose of assessment. Therefore, the NAAC maintained a balance between quantification and peer assessment and it was found to be workable. The concerns expressed often about the inter team variance is addressed through the rigorous training programmes.

Handling the Reactions to the Process

During the first three years, which focused on strategies to gain acceptability by the majority, the institutions were either indifferent or reluctant to volunteer for assessment by the NAAC. Besides the general *inertia* and the fear of getting assessed by others, there was also a lingering doubt in the minds of some about the relevance of assessment and accreditation to the Indian context. Bearing this in mind, the NAAC invested a lot of time and effort in information dissemination on its philosophy and principles, targeting the various stakeholders.

Care was taken to ensure that the strategies had:

- broad involvement and consensus-building to ensure widespread support in evolving the norms and criteria;

- careful development of the methods and instruments for assessment;

- transparency in all its policies and practices;

- rigorous implementation of procedures;

- safeguards to enhance the professionalism of assessment.

Incorporating these elements, the NAAC applied multi-pronged strategies at various levels: awareness programmes to reach out to the academic community; publication programmes for dissemination of information; workshops on development of instruments; training the experts for assessment; discussions with administrators to rope in their support for HEIs; consultations with policy makers to ensure government support, and so on. Involving all the different stakeholder groups also helped to enhance the insights of the group process. It strengthened the feeling of ownership of the process among the academic community.

Mid-term Review

The mid-term review brought to light the perception of the academia that the NAAC's process is more oriented towards the achievements of HEIs rather than on how effectively they serve the society. A few other expectations that value orientation should be given special emphasis could be observed. Although these aspects have already been taken care of in the first assessment, it gave a momentum to the NAAC to consider them more explicitly in the re-accreditation.

Problem-Causing Changes in the Process

The assessment outcome underwent significant changes during the first assessment which caused a few unintended outcomes. With every change, the issues of re-orienting the stakeholders to the new system, training the assessors appropriately, and facing the questions of non-comparable outcomes, emerged as challenges. For example, in the case of change in the grading pattern, the

NAAC is already facing the situation where institutions do not accept the NAAC's advice that the scores of the two grading patterns are non-comparable. Institutions which are two levels below the present top grade in the nine-point scale, with institutional scores of 75-79, convert the score into the earlier grading pattern and advertise themselves as five-star institutions. There are even instances where institutions advertise about having been rated with six stars and seven stars – grades the institutions awarded to themselves by extending the earlier grading pattern. These changes could have been avoided with more rigorous initial deliberations. That has made the NAAC opt for the same grading pattern for re-accreditation also. Today there is a consensus that any further change in the framework of quality assurance would be taken up only when a new cycle of assessment begins.

Other Lessons

In the initial stages of the development of the instrument and methodology, the NAAC agreed on *rigorous in-house efforts coupled with wider national consultations.* In spite of external quality assessment being a new initiative, there was enough expertise and wisdom outside the NAAC. It was agreed that the in-depth groundwork should be done by the NAAC, which was to be enhanced, by the appropriate combination of focus group workshops and national level seminars. While the focus groups led to micro-level discussions, the national level consultations broadened the horizons of thinking.

Bringing in people from various backgrounds and interests also helped to *enhance the insights of the group process.* During all discussions, NAAC was cautious not to impose its ideas on the working group to allow new and open-minded suggestions to come up. In fact it even helped in avoiding the counter-productive effects. It allowed the consensus to evolve from the group and that strengthened the feeling of *ownership of the process* among the institutions.

Emphasizing the significance of the self-study report as the beginning of quality assessment and insisting on the participatory process also nurtured the feeling of ownership. The internal quality assurance mechanisms of institutions were encouraged and involved, which also facilitated to a large extent the participation of the members of the institution in the process.

While evolving the norms and indicators, the work already done by the UGC, National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration and Association of Indian Universities—the national bodies of Indian higher education—was taken into consideration. By *updating and expanding the statistics already evolved by these agencies,* the NAAC could work on its approach. The pilot studies helped in fine-tuning the crude statistics into 'sensitive indicators'.

It was found that the *policy of transparency* in all efforts paid rich dividends. Instead of trying to be defensive, the NAAC was explicit in reiterating that its process is by and large designed to serve the prime objectives in the first cycle of assessment and may be expanded to include improvements to serve more beneficiaries during the next cycle. The *transparency and clarity in approach* instilled confidence among the academia.

While working towards the support of the academia, the NAAC was aware that it was not possible to expect total acceptance of all its efforts. Whatever be the strategy followed, there may always be a minority group to criticize it. The reason need not be based on ignorance or lack of conceptual clarity or skepticism but may be based on genuine concerns. Keeping this in mind, the NAAC followed a *multi-pronged approach for information dissemination* on the assessment philosophy and principles - a publishing programme and hundreds of awareness activities conducted for the HEIs. The list of the NAAC publications is given in Annexure XIII. The assurance that was given to the academia about the appropriateness of the process enhanced the acceptance of the NAAC's efforts. The large number of academia involved in these activities became the nucleus for clearing the apprehensions of colleagues in their institutions.

Responding positively to the genuine concerns of the academia has been the strength of the NAAC. *Fine-tuning the instrument and methodology* and *obtaining government support* towards accreditation costs were the initiatives taken by the NAAC in response to the genuine concerns expressed by the institutions of higher education. The NAAC respected not only the concerns expressed by institutions but also the *expectations of institutions.* The mid-term review held in June 2000 was a response to analyze the expectations of institutions. The *openness and transparency in evaluating the evaluation process* itself through mid-term review was well received and it brought the institutions closer to the NAAC.

In particular, the following ten lessons have significant bearing on the future directions of the NAAC:

o The assessment framework should have the following core common elements in its methodology – self-study and peer review.

o The other elements of the framework – unit of assessment, criteria for assessment and reporting strategy - should be viable, feasible and practical in the national context.

o Assessment should strengthen the internal quality assurance mechanisms.

o The feeling of ownership of the process has to be developed among the institutions.

o A combination of focused core group workshops and broad national level consultations ensures the appropriateness of the strategy.

o Ensuring widespread support in evolving the norms and criteria help in eliminating the adverse effects of initial errors.

o Peer assessment is vital in contextualising the assessment and guiding peer assessment through quantitative indicators requires caution.

o Capitalizing on the 'early adopters' promotes the acceptance of the process.

o An appropriate training strategy for peers enhances professionalism in the assessment process.

o Transparency in the process has to be maintained at all stages of the assessment process.

In sum, the reflection on the developmental path taken by the NAAC – success stories and painful mistakes - indicates that the NAAC has gone through various stages, from initial rejection to overall appreciation today. The rich experience and insights gained in the field while formulating and implementing the assessment process has strengthened the capabilities of the NAAC as a quality assurance agency. The lessons of the field experience of the decade have enabled the NAAC to decide on the directions to be taken in the coming years in its mission of assuring the quality of Indian higher education.

8

Future Directions

During the past ten years, nurtured under the leadership of eminent academicians and educational administrators, the NAAC has made a mark in the higher education scenario of India. Building on the strong foundation laid by its past Chairmen and Directors, and with the lessons of field experience, at the completion of its tenth year, the NAAC has to set for itself definite goals for the next few years. A few of them are listed below:

1. **Strengthening of Assessment and Accreditation Methods and Operations**

    As on 31 October 2004, of the around 150 university-level institutions that are recognized by the UGC for funding, 106 have already been accredited and another 10 are awaiting the site visit. Similarly, of the 5589 colleges recognized by the UGC for funding (as on 31 March 2004), around one-fifth have been accredited. During the past one year alone around one thousand institutions have been assessed. The NAAC will have to ensure that this momentum is maintained.

    With the UGC's decision to support the expenses for assessment and accreditation of universities and colleges with effect from 1 April 2004, more and more colleges are expected to volunteer for assessment. In addition, many state governments are making accreditation mandatory. The NAAC is also strengthening its promotional activities to reach out to the institutions that are yet to be accredited. As a result, in the years to

come, the NAAC will have to handle a large volume of assessment activities. To meet the large volume assessment, new models of organising peer team visits have been developed. Following the model of member-conveners and Chair-cum-conveners, the capacity of the NAAC to assess institutions has been enhanced to around 200 institutions per month. If this trend is maintained, the NAAC can assess all the UGC-recognized colleges in a period of two years, provided they submit the self-study reports to the NAAC. To support the new model of site visit with member-conveners, the database of experts has been expanded through nominations, rigorous training programmes, orientation programmes and roundtables.

Recently, since May 2004, a review mechanism in the form of an Appeals Committee (AC) has been introduced for institutions that may have grievances about the process or its outcome or any other issues related thereof. Only six appeals were made after the announcement of the accreditation results for 413 colleges in May 2004; the low number (less than 2% of the total assessment visits) indicates that the NAAC's process has gained acceptability and credibility among institutions. In the next few years, the NAAC will strengthen the safeguards and support processes, and also continue to fine-tune its procedures to reduce inter-team variance in peer assessment.

2. Implementing the Re-accreditation Process and ICT-enabled Assessment

Strengthening the re-accreditation process has become a major task from this academic year onwards. Considering the field experience, the lessons of experience of other quality assurance agencies, post-accreditation reviews and national consultations, the methodology for re-accreditation has been evolved. The Academic Advisory Committee has given its consent and the Executive Committee of the NAAC has approved the methodology and guidelines. The approved guidelines on re-accreditation have already been sent to the accredited institutions. Orientations are being organized for the first two batches of HEIs that have to get ready for re-accreditation – the HEIs that were accredited during 1998-99 and 1999-2000. The first

batch of 20 HEIs will be undergoing the peer team visits soon; most of them have already submitted the re-accreditation report. For the next two years, implementing the re-accreditation methodology and finalizing the manual that has been piloted on the first batch will be given importance. It also involves providing more guidelines to peer teams on core values, core indicators and e-format, which have been introduced as new elements in the assessment framework.

In the re-accreditation methodology, the use of core indicators and collection of data on those indicators through the e-format have been piloted, as the preparatory stage for ICT-enabled assessment. The experience in assessing the first batch will feed into finalizing the guidelines on those aspects. The Pune University has taken up a project with NAAC funding to develop the ICT-enabled assessment framework. The outcome of this project will also feed into the ICT-enabled processes in the re-accreditation method and that will be strengthened in the next few years.

3. Design and Development of Assessment of Programmes and Departments

The NAAC has taken a lot of effort to discuss department accreditation in various forums. Workshops and consultations have been conducted in this regard and they have resulted in many valuable recommendations. After intensive consultations with academia, the National Consultative Committee for Sciences (NCC), constituted by the NAAC to develop the strategy for departmental accreditation, identified the eligibility criteria for departmental accreditation and developed the draft manual on departmental accreditation for the sciences. These developments were placed before the Academic Advisory Committee (AAC) for its opinion. The AAC has recommended that much more work has to be done especially with the involvement of subject experts, before the manual and the methodology could be finalized. It has advised the NAAC to initiate departmental accreditation collaboratively with other professional bodies.

The AAC also considered the limited core staff strength of the NAAC and the infrastructure available currently, and suggested focus on the

completion of institutional accreditation of the UGC-recognized institutions during the 10th plan period. In view of the enhanced staff strength the NAAC will have soon and also due to suggestions by the MHRD and the UGC, the NAAC would initiate a pilot exercise in a select area of study, and build on the lessons of field experience. As advised by the AAC, for the select area of study, the national body that enjoys regard and professional authority in subject expertise will be the collaborating partner. The pilot study would be given special attention in the coming two years and based on the lessons of the pilot study, the programme or department assessment would be implemented.

4. **Undertaking "Research, Consultancy and Publication" in Quality Assurance**

a) ***Research:*** The functioning of a national quality assurance agency has many dimensions that go beyond the task of assessment and accreditation. In line with the practice followed by well-established international quality assurance agencies, it is essential that the NAAC establishes an R & D unit in the NAAC to work on quality-related issues. The emerging areas of significance where the NAAC can contribute through its research initiatives include the theoretical basis for quality assurance, mutual recognition issues and quality assurance across national boundaries. To optimise the benefits of accreditation, research is also needed on issues like further fine-tuning the instrument and methodology, impact of assessment on educational management and administration, institutional response to quality assurance, stakeholder perceptions and expectations, case studies, benchmarking and reporting the assessment outcome. To support the research initiatives, the library of the NAAC should be strengthened to become a resource centre on quality-related issues. The UGC-Infonet facilities and other resource sharing networks through the NAAC library will be strengthened.

b) ***Consultancy:*** With major World Bank support coming to the Asia-Pacific region for capacity building in quality assurance, the NAAC

will also extend consultancy to the emerging quality assurance systems of the Asia-Pacific region.

c)   *Publications:* The publication programme of the NAAC serves promotional and information dissemination needs and covers publication of promotional materials, its newsletter, conference proceedings, manuals, state-wise reports and guidelines. Launching a peer-reviewed research journal on quality assurance may also be considered to add to the R&D initiative of the NAAC.

5.   Strengthening Partnerships

To support the multi-faceted and emerging functions related to assessment and accreditation, partnerships are required which include action at two levels –extending the networking efforts with state governments in coordinating state-level assessment-related activities and activating the internal quality assurance mechanisms in the universities and colleges.

At the state level: For better co-ordination and follow-up, the NAAC is promoting the establishment of State Level Quality Assurance Co-ordination Committees (SLQACC) and Quality Assurance Cells (QAC) assisted by the NAAC with a one-time non-recurring grant and recurring annual grant till the end of the 10th Plan Period. The State Level Co-ordination Committees and Quality Assurance Cells established in 16 states, with the one-time token support of the NAAC, are evolving action plans to enhance the quality of higher education in the respective states. The NAAC has also brought out a booklet "Guidelines for Establishment of State Level Quality Assurance Co-ordination Committee (SLQACC) and Quality Assurance Cell (QAC)". Ensuring the support of and co-ordination with the other states will be given more attention.

At the institutional (universities and colleges) level: To make quality assurance an integral part of the functioning of institutions, the NAAC is promoting the establishment of the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) in all higher education institutions in general, and in accredited institutions, in particular. Detailed guidelines have been evolved by the NAAC to

facilitate the formation of IQACs. Establishing an IQAC is a pre-requisite for any institution that comes forward for re-accreditation. In response to the NAAC's efforts to promote the establishment of IQACs as post-accreditation initiatives, most of the accredited institutions have established IQACs; the follow-up of these institutions will be streamlined.

In the case of universities, in addition to its continuous evaluation of a university's quality enhancement activities, it is expected that a university IQAC should provide academic leadership to its affiliates on quality-related matters. At the colleges, the IQACs are expected to promote continuous quality enhancement. In future, the NAAC will strengthen these partnerships.

6. Promotion of Best Practices

In the changing context, HEIs look for the experiences and practices of others that demonstrably contribute to quality. But, there is little literature on demonstrable best practices that enhance quality. In response to this need, recently the NAAC organized a national conference on 'Best Practices in Higher Education'. The conference resulted in discussion notes on best practices and case illustrations. Participants have emphasised the need to follow up this national conference with more regional level workshops. Further, presentation of best practices – at least one for each criterion – is already a part of the re-accreditation report of HEIs. During the peer team visit, the best practices would be verified and validated by the peer team members. The validated best practices would be included in the database of best practices to be maintained by the NAAC. During the next few years the NAAC will focus on developing and disseminating the database of best practices.

7. Promotion of Dialogues and Partnerships between Higher Education Stakeholders

Moving beyond accreditation, the NAAC has to expand its scope by strengthening its advisory role. State-wise analysis of accreditation reports has been initiated for policy initiatives. This analysis is being done in states

where at least 15% of higher education institutions have been accredited. Such reports have been published for the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Haryana. In these states, interaction with the various stakeholders about acting on the issues of concern has yielded good results. For a few more states – Maharashtra, Punjab, West Bengal and those of the North-East - the analysis has been done and the state-level discussions will be initiated shortly. Building on these initiatives, the NAAC will involve other stakeholders such as students, parents and employers in developing partnerships to enhance the quality of higher education. To begin with, empowerment of students through quality literacy will be given a thrust. Developing a student charter, conducting awareness activities on using quality-related information and shaping institutional quality through student participation, etc. would be taken up in the coming years.

8. Collaborations

a) *National: Accreditation of specialised single faculty institutions*

The generic model of assessment for institutional accreditation and the instruments developed for the purpose have been accepted by the HEIs and academia alike. The instruments present the broad guidelines and the HEIs are expected to adapt them to suit the institutional diversity. By and large this has been working well and using the generic instrument HEIs of different specialisations have been accredited by the NAAC. However, there are also requests from some sections that specific manuals may be developed to suite the specialised HEIs. The AAC of the NAAC has been favourable to such expectations provided there is a competent body in the area of specialization that would like to collaborate with the NAAC in developing the instrument jointly and also use the outcome of such collaborative assessment efforts.

While collaboration with the National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) has resulted in joint assessment and accreditation, efforts have to be strengthened towards the other collaborations. The NCTE has an MoU with the NAAC for accreditation of teacher education institutions. Discussions have been initiated with the AICTE about executing an MoU for co-operation between the NAAC and the NBA. In the meeting held on

15 April 2004, it has been agreed that a working group will be constituted to prepare a draft MoU between the NAAC and the NBA. Collaborations with other councils will also be explored for assessment of subjects/ programmes or specialized institutions.

b) *International:* The NAAC is engaged in active collaborations with many quality assurance initiatives of other countries, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. Various inter-governmental bodies and networks have supported the NAAC's efforts to host international academic events such as: Bi-annual meeting of INQAAHE (2001), Expert Meet on Indicators of Quality and Facilitating Academic Mobility in the Asia-Pacific Region (2002) (with the support of the UNESCO), and Roundtable on International Practices in Quality Assuring Teacher Education (2003) (supported by the COL). The NAAC is the co-convener of the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN). The Director of the NAAC is one of the three office bearers of the APQN. Visits of delegations from South Africa, Cambodia and Sri Lanka have been facilitated by the NAAC. Other activities scheduled in the near future are: The International Conference on Indicators of Quality in Teacher Education, 5-7 November 2004 supported by the COL, Bi-national meet with UK experts, and professional visit programmes with the UK, South Africa and Cambodia. Such activities will be intensified to increase the visibility of the NAAC in the international scenario and to enhance its contribution to the growing knowledge in quality assurance.

9. Human Resource Development for Assessment

In view of the recognition the NAAC already enjoys at the international level for its professionalism in quality assurance, there is potential to train accreditors for the emerging quality assurance systems, specifically of the Asia-Pacific countries. The infrastructure of the new campus will also provide the requisite facilities to conduct such training programmes. During the next few years, the NAAC will establish its expertise as a centre for human resource development in quality assurance in the Asia-Pacific region. To begin with, a certificate course in professional development of assessors will be initiated at the national level which can be extended to the emerging quality assurance systems of the other countries. With

adequate funding from the UGC, the construction of the new campus for the NAAC office is in progress. The new facilities will help the NAAC to explore more developmental areas in quality assurance. The conference and residential facilities would support the running of training programmes and workshops periodically and also facilitate consultants and staff on deputation to render their services to the NAAC.

10. Quality Assurance of Cross-border Education

There have been requests from higher education institutions of other countries for accreditation by the NAAC. There is also a need to consider the collaborative arrangements the HEIs of India have with other countries to offer joint qualifications. To address these issues and to evolve guidelines for accreditation of educational provisions that cross the national borders, the NAAC has constituted a committee – Committee on International Accreditation. The committee has met a few times and the guidelines are being finalized. On finalizing the guidelines, international accreditation will be taken up, especially for institutions from the SAARC countries.

For an organization whose achievements in the last ten years have exceeded all expectations, the future holds challenges that will undoubtedly test its mettle. But one can be confident that with its dedicated personnel and the support and encouragement of all concerned, the NAAC will emerge triumphant as one of the world leaders in quality assurance of higher education.

9

Milestones of the Decade

From the initial phase of apprehension about the philosophy of external review, the country has gradually moved to the current phase of appreciation for the intrinsic benefits of accreditation. The following are a few milestones of the past decade in the NAAC's journey of promoting quality-related initiatives in higher education:

❶ The significant progress of the NAAC during the past ten years is due to the leadership provided by the former Presidents, Chairmen, and Directors of the

Brainstorming on NAAC's Process

NAAC. Their committed contribution to the development of the instrument and methodology has added great value to the outcome. Right from the beginning, the NAAC was fortunate to have visionaries at its helm of affairs. They had a major role in guiding the national consultations and in shaping the various developments at the NAAC.

After a series of national consultations, when the methodology for external quality assurance by the NAAC was finalized, the inputs and advice of the members of the GC and EC helped the council a great deal. The contribution of the GC and EC in building this institution is of great value. All the other achievements that the NAAC can be happy about today and all the targets that the NAAC has achieved now are due to the unstinted support extended by the authorities of the NAAC during the initial years. This continues to be the greatest strength of the NAAC.

EC in deliberation

❷ A significant achievement of the NAAC is the partnership with stakeholders for pro-active measures to promote assessment and accreditation. So far 16 states – Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu,

Universities Accredited by NAAC, State-wise (16 September, 2004)

State/Union Territory	Nos.	State/Union Territory	Nos.
➢ Andhra Pradesh	12	➢ Madhya Pradesh	07
➢ Arunachal Pradesh	01	➢ Manipur	01
➢ Assam	02	➢ Meghalaya	01
➢ Bihar	01	➢ Nagaland	01
➢ Chandigarh	01	➢ New Delhi	01
➢ Chhattisgarh	01	➢ Orissa	03
➢ Goa	01	➢ Pondicherry	01
➢ Gujarat	04	➢ Punjab	03
➢ Haryana	03	➢ Rajasthan	07
➢ Himachal Pradesh	01	➢ Tamil Nadu	11
➢ Jammu and Kashmir	02	➢ Tripura	01
➢ Jharkhand	01	➢ Uttaranchal	04
➢ Karnataka	08	➢ Uttar Pradesh	06
➢ Kerala	04	➢ West Bengal	07
➢ Maharashtra	15	**Total**	**111**

Colleges Accredited by NAAC, State-wise (16 September, 2004)

State/Union Territory	Nos.	State/Union Territory	Nos.
➢ Andhra Pradesh	34	➢ Maharashtra	808
➢ Assam	83	➢ Meghalaya	03
➢ Bihar	05	➢ Mizoram	03
➢ Chandigarh	09	➢ Nagaland	01
➢ Chhattisgarh	10	➢ Orissa	09
➢ Goa	11	➢ Pondicherry	02
➢ Gujarat	07	➢ Punjab	53
➢ Haryana	147	➢ Rajashan	38
➢ Himachal Pradesh	11	➢ Tamil Nadu	137
➢ Jammu and Kashmir	11	➢ Tripura	04
➢ Jharkhand	06	➢ Uttar Pradesh	13
➢ Karnataka	315	➢ Uttaranchal	19
➢ Kerala	90	➢ West Bengal	47
➢ Madhya Pradesh	34	**Total**	**1910**

Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, West Bengal – have established quality cells and co-ordination committees to promote assessment. The tables in the previous page indicate that there are states like Maharashtra, Haryana and Karnataka with a large number of accredited institutions and others with just a few.

As on 16 September 2004, of the 2021 HEIs - 111 universities and 1910 colleges - that have been accredited by the NAAC, 1296 are in these three states and they require a special attention with respect to quality improvement. There are states in the northern region, where in spite of relatively bigger systems of higher education, the number of accredited HEIs is a single digit and these states need more awareness activities. The NAAC has been successful in harnessing the support of the State governments in addressing the differential requirements of the states.

In states such as Maharashtra post-accreditation and quality enhancement activities are conducted involving the states. The states that have only a few accreditated HEIs benefit from the large number of awareness programmes conducted by the NAAC in collaboration with the state governments. The partnership with the states has been further strengthened through the NAAC's advisory role. State-wise analysis of accreditation reports have been initiated for policy initiatives – this exercise is for states where at least 15% of higher education

institutions have been accredited and has been done for the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Haryana, West Bengal, the North-East, and Punjab.

❸ The NAAC's efforts to promote usage of the assessment outcome as reliable information for decision-making have been very successful. The UGC has already linked with the outcome of assessment and accreditation its developmental

support to educational institutions. With effect from 1 April 2004, the accreditation expenses of colleges recognized by the UGC for funding are directly met by the UGC. The NAAC accreditation with a suitable grading has been made a pre-requisite for the granting and continuation of autonomous status and deemed-to-be university status for institutions. Of the 35 states and union territories, all the states and union territories have experienced the process, except just five: the state of Sikkim, and four union territories, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, and Lakshwadeep Islands. They have only a few HEIs and some of them are getting ready for the process. The quality map indicates how most of the states have experienced the process of external quality assurance by the NAAC.

❹ From the small beginning of accrediting a batch of 20 institutions in the year 1998-99, the NAAC has consolidated its procedures to assess a large number of HEIs in a year without compromising on the quality of assessment. In the academic year 2003-2004, around 1000 HEIs have been accredited by the NAAC - a remarkable achievement in the history of assessment and accreditation all over the world. The following chart presents the rate at which accreditation activities have been increasing over the years.

1038

251

21   70   82   88

❺ Collaborations with other national professional bodies for accreditation of specialised institutions have been initiated. The National Council for Teacher Education has an MoU with the NAAC for accreditation of teacher education

institutions. Manuals and guidelines for teacher education institutions have been developed. Under the collaborative arrangement, 101 teacher-education institutions and university departments have been assessed.

❻ The NAAC is engaged in active collaborations with various inter-governmental bodies to host international academic events. Some of the events hosted are:

'Expert Meet on Indicators of Quality and Facilitating Academic Mobility in the Asia-Pacific Region' (2002), with the support of the UNESCO, and Roundtable on "Innovations in Teacher Education: International Practices of Quality Assurance" (2003), supported by the COL. 'The International Conference on Indicators of Quality in Teacher Education' (5-7 November 2004), supported by the COL,

Cambodian delegation at the NAAC office

Bi-national meet with UK experts, and professional visit programmes with the UK, Sri Lanka, South Africa and Cambodia are some activities scheduled in the near future.

❼ The NAAC contributes to many quality assurance initiatives through its membership in the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). It organised the sixth bi-annual meeting of the INQAAHE in March 2001 at Bangalore.

The NAAC is actively involved in capacity development in quality assurance in the Asia-Pacific through the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN), which is a regional sub-network of the INQAAHE. The World Bank is channelising its support for capacity building activities through the APQN. The Director of NAAC, Prof. V S Prasad is a member of the Board of APQN.


❽ The NAAC has taken steps to identify and disseminate best practices in higher education. It organized a national conference on 'Best Practices in Higher Education' (26-27 July 2004) at Goa. The best practices identified during the conference have been published as a book.

The NAAC has taken many steps to strengthen the dialogue on quality related issues among the various stakeholders. Interaction with student groups on the impact of quality assurance is an effort to involve students in this dialogue.

❾ The publication programme of the NAAC has contributed a great deal to reaching out to the academia. Around 60 titles have been published by the NAAC, including promotional materials, guidelines, handbooks, manuals, reports and conference proceedings. The titles of the NAAC publications are given in Annexure XIII.
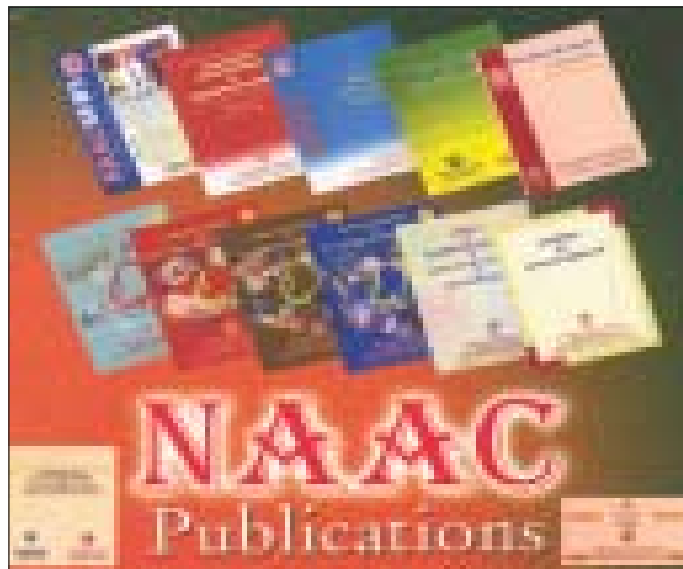
❿The efforts and the activities of the NAAC in the past ten years have resulted in *Quality* becoming a watchword in the Indian higher education system. Quality has become a movement in the country. Everyday in some part of the country,

there is some activity or the other related to quality, either organized or supported by the NAAC – awareness activities, training programmes, orientations or peer team visits.

It has been a decade of successes and struggles for the NAAC. During the process of implementing the quality assurance strategy and fine-tuning it during the past ten years, the hurdles the NAAC had to face, the strategies adopted to overcome them, and the unintended consequences the NAAC came across have been many. As the system evolved, both strengths and weaknesses have emerged, and the NAAC has always responded quickly to avoid the pitfalls and maximize the benefits of its processes. During the years to come, the NAAC will continue to demonstrate its commitment to quality through redefining goals, fine-tuning its procedures and expanding its scope to address more quality-related issues.

In quality assurance systems and in many issues of quality assurance, a question that will always be asked is: "Is there a better way of doing things?" The Indian experience, which is dynamic and rich, but still evolving, has thrown light on some of those issues and it will continue its contribution.

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Reminiscences of two former Heads of the NAAC

Early Years of the NAAC: Reminiscences of the Founder-Director

Prof. Arun Nigavekar

Introduction

The most enduring learning experiences are those that have changed "attitudes and mind-sets" of people. This statement is more valid for higher education. Higher education the world over has stabilised itself in terms of its academic objectives, the manner and mechanism for achieving these and the operative as well as governance structure to make it happen. Over the years all those who are part of the system, those who make it happen, i.e. teachers, administrators and managers and also those who are the beneficiaries, namely, students, families and societies have become familiar with one type of system that has sustained over 1500 years. Hence everybody is comfortable with the things that are happening in the higher education system. The uncertainty and the suspicion creeps in such a "stabilised" environment when someone starts thinking from an entirely different perspective by looking at the "process of higher education" as a commodity that has to have a certain "quality" of standards. All nations in the world have gone through such a difficult phase when the question of "quality" came in the picture. However, with time, developed nations reconciled themselves to the process of assessment and accreditation in higher education.

The Indian higher education system also has a reasonably long history; of around 150 years. It has, over the years, adapted itself to a "stablised system" as accepted by other nations. So when a question of creating an environment and also mechanism for making a judgement of quality in the institutions of higher education emerged in the Indian higher education scenario a decade and half ago, the reactions of academicians was no way different from that of

academicians the world over when they embarked on treading the path of quality some six decades ago. It was, therefore, a stupendous task for me when I had to carry the mantle of introducing "quality" in the Indian higher education system. It was the most, as I mentioned earlier, difficult and trying experience for me as I had to struggle with "frozen attitudes". Hence, you can imagine how happy I am that National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has grown from strength to strength and is now 10 years old.

The NAAC would be celebrating its Decennial Year in the presence of our Hon'ble President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in November, 2004. I feel delighted about this mainly because the nation as a whole has now started taking "quality" more seriously. This was, however, not the case 15 years ago. I would like to start by recollecting my impressions of "the world of education" at that time.

12 years ago, in 1992, I became the Member of the University Grants Commission and had the opportunity to play an important role in the establishment of the NAAC. In the Commission I pursued the concept of developing a formal institutional mechanism for assessing the quality of higher education in our colleges and universities. The then Chairman of the UGC, Prof. G. Ram Reddy (who is no more with us today) and the Secretary, Higher Education in the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Shri S.V. Giri, who is presently Vice-Chancellor of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Prasanthi Nilayam, Anantapur (A.P.), and also the entire Commission fully supported the concept and in a span of 12 months, the NAAC became a reality in the form of an Inter University Centre of UGC. The then Prime Minister of India, Shri P.V. Narsimha Rao, was also keen to establish an independent agency for the initiation of the quality movement in higher education. It is interesting to note that Shri P.V. Narsimha Rao was the Education Minister when the new National Policy for Education was initiated in 1986, which was later converted into the Programme of Action in 1987 under the leadership of the then Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi. It was, therefore, a very fitting tribute to the National Policy of Education, which talked about the creation of an institutional mechanism for promoting quality in higher education, that in the tenure of Shri P.V. Narsimha Rao, the most significant step for the initiation of quality in higher education was taken. It was sheer coincidence that I was the one who was chosen not only to create an institution but also to carry forward the concept of quality in higher education,

mainly because I pursued the concept with vigour and determination to create an institutionalized structure. I thus became the Founder-Director of the NAAC. It was also to fulfill the strong desire of the late Prof. G. Ram Reddy that someone very young and with a strong will and determination should shoulder the burden of such a difficult task that I donned the mantle of founder-Director, NAAC. I was a reluctant entrant, as I was doing reasonably well as a Professor of Physics, and also as the Coordinator of the Centre for Advanced Studies in Material Sciences and Technology and was not ready for such a challenging job. However, a meeting with Prof. G. Ram Reddy, Shri S.V. Giri and few of the Commission Members like Prof. S.P. Singh convinced me to take up this challenge. I do recollect, at the end of our meeting, I said a few sensible things and also put up, I will not say conditions, two points for the consideration of Prof. G. Ram Reddy. The first thing I said was that I be allowed to establish such an institution below the Vindhyas (if it was to succeed); and I did suggest either Pune or Bangalore (and later on gave preference to Bangalore as I felt it would be the parochial on my part if I insisted on Pune) and, hence, the NAAC was established in Bangalore. The second point I made was that the Governing Council of the NAAC should always be headed by academicians of repute in the country[1] and I be left alone (and given full freedom) to devise a method for judging quality in institutions of higher education. Of course, I did add that it is not for a single person to come out with the workable and right approach for the creation of the instrument and methodology for judging quality in higher education and that the advice and collective wisdom of a large number of academicians would contribute to such a task. But it was also necessary, and that is what I felt, that one person should take overall responsibility for taking forward the movement of quality and this was the sole reason for my asking for full freedom. It was the vision and the generosity of the then leadership, both in the UGC and in the MHRD[2] that put the concept of creation of an institution like the NAAC in a fast speed mode and the NAAC started operating in Bangalore from 1 November, 1994. It is a thing of pride that over 10 years, the organization that started in a rented premises[3] (and with furniture that was also rented[4]) has now emerged as a prime institution for assurance of quality in higher education not only at the national level but also at the international level. Right from the very first day it was desired and endeavoured to create an organization that would establish a link with organizations at the global level with similar goals/mission[5]. This

was felt necessary because higher education was, and continues to be, universal and the demand for excellence through quality was, and is, on the global agenda. No nation, therefore, can bring about any change in isolation and it has to build a bridge with other nations in pursuing the agenda of quality.

As mentioned earlier, I took over as Director of the NAAC, on November 1, 1994. The first major promotional exercise on quality in higher education was carried out in Pune in the annual meeting of all Vice-Chancellors organized by the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) on 11 November in the same year. That was the day when the UGC formally launched its crusade to bring quality in higher education institutions. The agenda given to me was to conceptualise (what one means by quality) for the complex and huge Indian higher education system and to develop instruments and methodologies to assess and judge efficiency, accountability and academic excellence in the functioning of the institutions as well as in the teaching-learning programmes run by the institutions. There was a much bigger and difficult agenda; to evolve a consensus amongst teachers, educationists and managers of education for acceptance of scrutiny by an independent agency and that too on a voluntary basis and at their own cost[6].

The promotion of the concept of quality in India was not an easy task. The system of higher education in India had grown (and continues to grow) very fast during the first 50 years and was, and still is, replete with self-contradictions nurtured by academics as well as socio-political forces and nourished by unwarranted interests. Reduced resources and built-in apathy had made, and continues to make, the system vulnerable. In such an atmosphere, any new idea suggesting self-introspection and the will to shake off apathy and tread the path leading to excellence through quality was bound to be looked at with suspicion and resisted[7]. We, therefore, had to decide on how to go about not only spreading the message of quality but also creating a method which was acceptable to all and was compatible with universal standards. The NAAC adopted a frank but friendly approach. It won the confidence of higher education institutions by establishing a personal rapport with the stakeholders in higher education through correspondence, roundtable conferences, seminars and awareness programmes[7].

Every step taken by the NAAC was carefully and meticulously planned and

nothing was done in a hurry. It spoke about the ground realities and appealed to their conscience to face the challenges of the changing times. It also warned them about the emergence of unavoidable alternatives provided by universities in other countries. We talked about the emerging scenario because of globalisation of higher education resulting from the bringing of computing, telecommunications and the learning sciences in the field of education. It was such a direct approach that solely started giving an image and also identity to the NAAC[8].

It is also interesting to note that out of 159 universities, 29 came forward for institutional assessment and accreditation. Well, on a voluntary basis and at their own costs and also with no immediate assured advantage, I feel, a response of 18% was very encouraging. In addition, around 40 colleges came forward for assessment and accreditation as the outcome of our intensive programme on promotion of quality education.

Development of Instrument and Methodology for the NAAC's Process

One of the first things that was intensely deliberated was whether the NAAC should develop a process for institutional assessment and accreditation or for programme assessment and accreditation. It is obvious that there is a deep inter-linkage between the working of an institution (and here institution means a college or university) and the teaching programmes run by the institution. The Indian higher education system is predominately an affiliating system and as such the teaching programmes (and also research) are carried out in the departments on the campuses of the university as well as in colleges. It was felt (and later on so decided) that it would be appropriate to go in the initial stage for institutional assessment and accreditation by taking the college as a unit for assessment and accreditation as well as the university campus and the university departments as an independent unit. The approach, that was followed, was to look at total quality management in each of the units at a macro level without losing the context and the reality as it exists, in colleges and universities, at the micro level. The inter-linkages between the academic, administrative and financial operations (which directly and indirectly contribute to the "quality") were to be achieved through several cross-questioning processes and checks and counter-checks of data through visible evidences. It was felt that, even

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though, this would demand elaborate collection of data (and also would demand more time) such an approach would bring in focus the true picture as far as the working of the colleges and universities are concerned so as to enable one to make a better judgement in assessment and accreditation. The adoption of such a conceptual strategy enabled the identification of as many as 10 parameters[9] which addressed different aspects related to the academic, administrative infrastructural, governance and organizational mechanisms and resource generation and financial management aspects related to the college or a university. Indeed the process of assessment and accreditation, as was accepted by the NAAC, was identical with that of the global process; in that it involved self-study, visit by the Peer Committee, and final judgement by the NAAC based on the recommendations of the Peer Committee. The difference that was brought (and it was felt necessary) was, as mentioned earlier, in the details of collection of data and the process of visit.

The enormity (and importance given to collection) of data is evident, if one goes through the early documents of the NAAC on self-study, in all the publications that were brought for conducting self-study (independent booklet for each of the 10 parameters with exhaustive questionnaire) for institutional accreditation[10].

The process, instrument and the methodology that was developed in the initial years stood the test of time and have now got further standardized. Many of the higher education institutions are now bringing out self-study reports in a very professional manner and this is quite encouraging.

Internal Quality Assurance Mechanisms

One of the most innovative approaches initiated in the early years was to promote internal assurance mechanisms in colleges and universities. This was done by design because our interaction with the institutions of higher learning, in the early years, revealed that many of them hesitated to join the march towards quality for two reasons. Firstly, many institutions realized, because of our intensive awareness campaign and exposure to the NAAC's process and instrument and methodology for quality, the drawbacks of their system and the need to invest some more time and effort to set right their mechanisms before

meeting the NAAC's "quality test". Such institutions expressed their desire to get the advice of the NAAC to initiate improvements in their system. Secondly, some institutions felt that they could not afford to pay the fees for assessment and accreditation (now they do not have to worry about this burden). We, therefore, felt that both the feelings, the desire to get ready for the process by strengthening the weak links as well as the expressed need for financial support, should be respected. We, therefore, evolved the concept of Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) to help the institutions to create an environment for "quality". The IQAC's were intended to be a permanent facet of the college or university with the aim of constantly monitoring quality of education and facilitating improvement. It is a pleasure to note that now it has become a concept accepted by colleges and universities.

NAAC and Professional Education

We realized, even in the early stages of the development process for assessment and accreditation, that the complexity and peculiarity of the Indian higher education system demands a collaborative approach for assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions involved in professional subjects. India has many professional bodies that play a significant role in licensing and ensuring quality in disciplines such as medicine, law, architecture, education and agriculture. In addition, we have councils monitoring engineering, management, pharmacy as well as distance education. Even though, each of these professional bodies and councils have a statutory role to play, the collaborative approach for assuring quality is essential for conservation of institutional resources, elimination of duplicate procedures and integration of expertise. Indeed, the NAAC took a policy decision to create a generic tool for assessment and accreditation and incorporate subject needs and the demands of the professional skills into such a generic tool independently in collaboration with each professional body. It was envisaged that it would be a jointly conducted process, by the NAAC and the professional body, for professional subjects and this idea was discussed in the joint meeting between the UGC, the NAAC and other professional bodies held in November, 1996. One more meeting was held in September, 1997 to discuss the future line of action and it was decided to forge a Memorandum of Understanding between professional bodies and

accrediting bodies. It is unfortunate that we are still struggling to go in a collaborative way for assessment and accreditation in professional disciplines. It appears to me that the collaborative approach for quality assurance is the need of the hour in the 21st century. The initiation and sustenance of quality culture is not a single act, to be executed at a particular moment of time, but is a continuous process. This requires more perseverance and pursuance towards collaborative assessment and accreditation mechanisms.

Agenda of the Future

The NAAC has now become a reality. It will continue to do well even in future but we may have to prepare ourselves for bigger challenges. The challenges, for a nation like India, are entirely different from the challenges faced by similar accrediting agencies in other nations. Let us try to understand our challenges.

Our first and the foremost challenge is to accelerate the process of assessment and accreditation so as to cover all institutions of higher education in our country. And as we know we have here to tackle institutions, which are 10,000 and more in number. It is a very time-consuming process and the NAAC simply cannot think of any "reduced and lowered process for quality" to complete the task. This would be very detrimental for India in 21st century. The question is: how shall we go about it?

We are in an era of rapid change. Rapid change in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and a parallel growth in development of these technologies for education is a hallmark of early 21st century. These technologies have provided very easy and competent approaches to acquire and analyse data. It is, therefore, essential for us to work out an instrument and methodology which would use technology more intensely for doing self-study and also, thus, make the process of "judgement of quality" by innovative permutation and combination of data for arriving at the critical judgement of quality. The data should be very exhaustive with internal linkages among the various "parameters" so as to enable one by using technology (and appropriate software) to do checks and balances through an "electronic assessment process". This process should eventually allow one to take a macro level judgement (arrived through electronic assessment of data at micro level) on the "quality"

of the higher education institutions. In a way I am suggesting e-assessment and accreditation in virtual mode (virtual because this way of taking judgement is sans Peer Team visit). I am not underestimating the importance of the Peer Team visit. In fact, the Peer Team visit is the most sacrosanct aspect of the assessment and accreditation process. However, I am of the opinion, that the judicious use of technology would allow one to take "first level judgement on quality" for higher education institutions. We have to accept the challenge of numbers and use of technologies could be the answer. We should, in parallel, continue with the normal process of assessment and accreditation.

The NAAC has one more difficult task. I am referring to the assessment and accreditation of teaching programmes run by institutions. We will have to address this question but I feel after having successfully addressed the difficult and the complex process of institutional assessment and accreditation, it would not be beyond the capacity of the NAAC to come out with a compact instrument and methodology for assessment and accreditation of teaching programmes and here again one can use technology innovatively. The NAAC, in future, should go for assessment of research activities in institutions.

I would like to bring, in the end, one more challenge. We have, in the last one decade, come to grips with the Internet age and the emergence of e-education which has given a transformation in educational pedagogy and learning paradox with every change in technology. We now talk of blending of face-to-face education with e-learning mechanism. There are a host of new and effective delivery mechanisms that are taking "teaching" to a higher level of "learning and understanding". We are now talking of flexible seamless education. This change is happening the world over and is also happening in India. The NAAC needs to develop the instrument and methodology for judgement of quality in a flexible seamless higher education system. It is a challenge not only devising the process but also creating structures for sustaining quality in such a flexible education mode.

The NAAC was the most fruitful accomplishment of my academic career. I believe it is the encouragement and non-threatening environment that was created by my colleagues in the NAAC and all those who were deeply interested in change across the country that allowed me to achieve something tangible for

the Indian higher education system. I am aware that there are gaps and lacunae in what we have created. But I am also aware of the enormous talent in this country, which will take the process of quality to a much higher level and strive to make Indian higher education a benchmark at the global level.

End notes

1. This practice was followed in the beginning but later on the Chairman of the UGC was made the Chairman of the General Council and such a change, I understand, was necessitated because of the different views (and opinions) held by the then General Council and the Chairman of the General Council and the then Chairman of the UGC and the officials of the UGC over the appointment of the Director of NAAC (after I left the Directorship for joining as the Vice-Chancellor of University of Pune) and also because of the legal tangle that delayed the appointment of the Director of the NAAC. Looking back, it appears to be a very unfortunate situation, which could have been avoided by bringing the Chairman of the UGC as the Chairman of the Search Committee and giving power to the Chairman to appoint the Director of the NAAC, rather than making the change in the provision of appointment of academicians of repute as the Chairman of the General Council of the NAAC. Such an arrangement would have, in all probability, reduced the difficult and uncertain period the NAAC had to pass in the absence of a full-time Director. I may hasten to add that this is my personal view and now that the system is fully stable there is no need for further discussion on this issue.

2. Shri Arjun Singh was the Minister for Human Resource Development and Shri S.V. Giri was the Secretary of the MHRD and both of them played a very significant and important role in the establishment of the NAAC.

3. I was very fortunate to have Dr. (Ms) Latha Pillai, who was deputed as a special officer on loan by the UGC, as a first colleague in the early years of the NAAC. We had to negotiate with the Government of Karnataka, who had agreed to provide rent-free accommodation for the NAAC. We were immensely helped during this period by Shri J.V. Sharma, the then Principal Secretary, Education Department of the Government of Karnataka and also by his predecessor Shri H. Nagaraj Shetty and Shri Sudhir Kumar, Commissioner of Collegiate Education. We were also supported by Dr. N.R. Shetty, the then Vice Chancellor of Bangalore University, who also was generous to complete the formalities of giving five acres of land for the new premises of the NAAC on the campus of the Bangalore University.

4. I also distinctly remember we rented a few tables and chairs to start the office of the NAAC and UGC, in the initial stage, provided Rs. 5 million as a grant-in-aid and the money was transferred to the NAAC by the end of February, 1995 and the rented building provided by the Karnataka Government became functional in May, 1995.

5. I was very clear about this and that is why, in the early years, the NAAC created bridges of co-operations with many nations by becoming a Member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). So much so, in a short time period, the NAAC carved a definite role for itself in the world arena of quality in higher education. The NAAC's process and details were internationally acclaimed and many Asian nations, I remember, desired to adopt it. Thus the NAAC acquired an international image right since its inception with a well focused strategy.

6. In 1995, the UGC agreed to support the cost, but that was done only for universities and not for colleges. In the VIII and IX Plan the UGC provided Rs. 5 lacs as a supporting grant, in the general development grants to the universities, for meeting the costs of assessment and accreditation. Recently the UGC has agreed to meet the entire costs both for colleges and universities. This is applicable to all colleges and universities that are funded by the UGC.

7. In the first three years, my colleagues and I, visited as many as 70 universities and 800 colleges to create awareness on quality as well as for presenting the method for assessment and accreditation. Two incidents, one in a university in the North and the other at a university in the South are worth recounting. In one university I was giving the presentation and half way through, the Vice Chancellor, who was presiding over the lecture, got up and said that "the idea that is being presented (concept of quality and taking judgment on quality) is not workable in the Indian higher education system and I suggest that the teachers may go back to their respective departments and spend their time on more meaningful activity". In the Seminar Hall, as everybody left the Hall, I was left alone wondering what to do next. In another university, I witnessed almost a similar experience and to a certain extent the audience made fun of me (and they also threw paper balls at me) for promoting such a non-workable concept in India. However, at many places there was a very positive response and people were deeply interested in the concept of quality and it was such type of responses that kept us going ahead.

8. Our direct communication with teachers, Principals and Vice Chancellors did create a lot of enthusiasm among the academic community. We decided to create a list of persons, both serving and retired, who were willing and would participate in the NAAC's awareness-cum-orientation programmes. The response was very heartening. Out of 159 conventional, open and deemed universities and 4628 colleges recognized by the UGC (in 1994-95), 105 universities and 1322 colleges responded to our call. We had to send four sequential reminders to get such a response.

9. Later on these 10 parameters have been merged into 7 parameters without losing the context in totality. However, and this is my personal observation, the details in relation to working of the institution got very much blurred because of curtailment in seeking finer details at micro level. As has been brought out in the earlier part of this article, it is very essential in case of Indian higher education institutions to seek data and evidence at the operative level

more in details so as to cross-check facts and figures. It is also necessary to create several checkpoints for the Peer Team. It may appear to be a demanding process with a lot of hard work but for our higher education system, which is an emerging system and which has to compete with global challenges, such a scrutiny would certainly prove to be rewarding in the long run.

10. The development of the instrument and methodology for judging quality at an institutional level was a very learning and enriching experience for me. The first starting breakthrough came when we went in a "reverse engineering mode" to understand the meaning of "quality" from the Indian context. We realized that there are seven stakeholders who are directly linked with higher education - students, teachers, supporting staff (both technical and administrative), parents, employers, funding agencies and society. We also realized that the stakes of all these beneficiaries in the higher education system are almost at the same level of intensity. This was a good beginning because once we realized the importance of the beneficiaries, we started raising questions "through the eyes of each of the beneficiaries" on the "expectations and also fulfilling of these expectations and accountability" by the higher education system. This gave rise to healthy practices for each of the 10 parameters. Once these healthy practices were identified then the construction of a self-study format organically came up because we started raising "questions" that will generate essential data to understand "ground reality" at an institutional level.

The entire process of creation of instrument was a fulfilling academic experience. This was done through collective thinking and deliberation with my young colleagues (who were equal novices in the arena of quality) everyday for few hours for several months. Once the instrument and methodology was developed and the format for self-study was ready, it was thrown open for discussion in various awareness seminars and workshops that were conducted with academicians. The final shape for the instrument and methodology came up through several focused workshops with large number of senior academicians in the country.

My young colleagues who, in a way are the creators of the instruments were Dr. V. Krishnamoorthy, Dr. (Mrs.) Latha Pillai, Dr. (Mrs.) Antony Stella, Mr. Madhukar, Mr. Shyamasunder, Mr. Ponmudiraj and Mr. Ganesh Hegde. Mr. S.N. Ramaswamy, Mr. Ashok Nandgaonkar and Mrs. Mangala also contributed in one or the other way in this task. Dr. (Ms.) Anjana Desai of Baroda also worked as Consultant of the NAAC in the early years. It is these young academics and many other academicians have willingly contributed their expertise and time towards laying a foundation for the NAAC.

Reminiscences:
A Long Association with the NAAC

Prof. A. Gnanam

Assessment and Accreditation as an External Quality Assurance (EQA) mechanism for higher education has emerged as the most widely accepted and adopted methodology throughout the world during the past decade or so. It is the considered option, evolving out of the plethora of traditional mechanisms such as regulation, inspection, affiliation and recognition. These regulatory methods, which are by and large in-built checks and balances to oversee the system, are internal, non-comparable with other institutions and fragmentary in nature. When the system of education was relatively small and was supported mostly by the public funds, they were possibly sufficient. But the situation has changed rapidly in the last two decades in an unprecedented manner. With the world becoming a global village, imparting higher education of nationally comparable and internationally acceptable 'standards' to a larger population of students becomes essential and urgent. This perception has resulted in the worldwide acceptance of EQA to ensure the quality of education and to make the system more responsive to the demand for accountability. In line with the worldwide trend, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) was established in 1994. As one who had associated with it for almost eight out of its ten years of existence, I had the opportunity of witnessing as well as being a part of its struggle to gain acceptability. I am very happy that it is completing its first 10 years of service enjoying not only acceptance among the academia but also the international appreciation.

It is well known that educational institutions are by nature homeostatic and are therefore unable to innovate or accept changes. R. G. Havelock, a leading group-behavioral analyst, lists several factors for the malady. Some of them include besides the general human tendency to resist any change, teacher defensiveness,

incomplete linkage between theory and practice of the innovation projected, confused goals, preoccupation with current commitments and passivity. The combined effect of these and other factors has led often to a protracted time lag before any new idea gets implemented. One can therefore be legitimately happy to see that the NAAC with all the impeding factors, could gain the confidence and acceptance of the stakeholders within a short span of ten years.

Nonetheless, the NAAC has had its share of teething problems in its formative years. When the NAAC started its mission in 1994, not many were aware of the concept of quality assurance and its relevance and importance in higher education. Very few came forward to get assessed and accredited, possibly due to a combination of some of the factors outlined by Havelock. The NAAC was also busy preparing the frameworks, procedures and formats besides initiating awareness activities. By late 1997, there were a few nibblers like the Pondicherry University of which I happened to be the Vice-Chancellor. Being an honorary Chairman of the NAAC, I ventured to commit the university for the NAAC assessment. It was a challenging experience. My colleagues at the university complained that the instrument for preparing the self-study was too cumbersome and complex. Details had to be hand filled in some format, a cumbersome manual labor that everyone in the university detested. The Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) established at the instance of the UGC in 1996 was given the responsibility to prepare the self-study report. Though the IQAC found it difficult to collect all the information required for the self study report to be submitted to the NAAC, over a period of nearly one year, it successfully culled out the data from the archives, and prepared the self-study report. The report was forwarded to the NAAC on 2 August 1997. The peer team visited the university from 16-20 September 1997. At the exit meeting, the Chairman's observations were generally positive covering up the dilemma underneath.

Apparently, being the first exercise, the reporting strategy was still evolving. Integrating the department level evaluations to provide a single institutional grade was not comfortable to the peer team. Therefore, the peer team wanted to discuss the assessment outcome further and hence the team's final report was delayed. After a few months when the draft report finally came, the university did not agree with many of the evaluative remarks. There seemed to be a lack of coherence and the critical remarks were not supported by evidence. I had to send my feedback that was longer than the original report. That exercise

gave me an insight into the system. It was a valuable lesson for me and it helped the NAAC also in revising the assessment protocols to make them more user friendly. The importance of looking for evidence, sharing the issues of concern with the institution, sharing the draft report before leaving the institution, and substantiating the critical remarks with appropriate data came to the forefront. These experiences made us realize that the NAAC should concentrate on peer team training and also simplify the data collection procedures.

By early 1998, the NAAC was really in a quandary on many fronts. Institutions continued to resist EQA, the parent body (UGC) wanted to know why the NAAC was not performing and the MHRD committees noted in their reports that the NAAC was a non-starter and alternative models were projected. Many failed to note that for the complex higher education system we have, developing the quality assurance framework was a stupendous task and that it was not possible to expect immediate results. The media came out with their 'league table' of quality institutions for the students to choose from. I, on behalf of the NAAC, sent a rejoinder to some of their references to the NAAC in their articles. Meanwhile, the NAAC continued its campaign with awareness activities to convince the academia. By then four more colleges submitted the self-study report. Based on the lessons of the first few assessment exercises and on the feedback from the institutions, the NAAC was trying to fine-tune the data sheets and formats and the site visit to guide peer assessment.

By April 1998, the first director of the NAAC had left to head the Pune University and a new director could not be hired due to a legal tangle. As an honorary Chairman, I was performing ceremonial functions all along. Suddenly I was asked to hold the fort. As there was no light at the end of the tunnel about finding a new director, we slowly started moving the system. The officers and I traveled far and wide carrying forward the awareness campaign about the NAAC and its mission and tried to remove the apprehensions among the academic community about external assessment. The effort was worthwhile and rewarding. We have had our share of hardships but in the final analysis everything turned out to be positive. I recall how we had to travel almost 10 hrs by jeep from Ranchi to Ambikapur crisscrossing the states of Bihar and UP in the thick of their tribal belts. Likewise, we cannot forget our visit to one of the universities where everything worked out well except our accommodation in the guest facility of an attached college. We were there in the thick of winter

and it was raining. The rooms were leaky with no heating facility. It was an endurance test and we had to move out to a hotel that was not any better. All those hardships were adequately compensated by the enthusiasm and efforts of the academia who were very receptive to the concept of quality assurance. I remember the enthusiasm of the government officials in Bihar, especially the State Education Secretary (Mr. Jha) who even displayed posters all round with catchy 'quotes' exclusively handpicked by him for the occasion. The State Governor, the Education Minister and the minister of State spent hours with us on the mission. Likewise, I can never forget an incident at Delhi where we had made elaborate arrangements at the India International Centre with the help of colleagues from Sri Venkateswara College for an interactive session with the academic community but none of them turned up to interact with us. We could not make any dent with the Delhi academia then. Even now they are hesitant though all the states around the Union Territory of Delhi have undergone assessment enthusiastically accepting the mission. Even the fiat from the UGC has had no effect; the behaviour of the Delhi academia is an enigma to me.

We tried to understand as to why we could not take off. Learning from various inputs and experiences, we started adopting a set of cardinal principles like 1. Assessment and Accreditation cannot be the answer to all quality related issues, 2. It should be based on available information and data and should not ask for details that do not exist, 3. Institutional self-improvement cannot be promoted through mandatory assessment, 4. User-friendly instruments and methods should be used, 5. Make a good beginning and improve on field experience, 6. Do not rely heavily on quantitative inputs, 7. Leave the contextualization to peer judgment and 8. Focus the assessment on education and not on the individuals. We trimmed the instruments accordingly and made them user-friendly. A useable ICT format was developed with in-house expertise as an alternative option. It was an instant success with those who had the resources. With these efforts, a few more institutions could be enticed and the increased assessment exercise gave the feedback to further fine-tune our tools. Those few who underwent the accreditation process became the promoters and their active involvement had further cleared the doubts of the others. National panels of trained chairs and assessors were built and the work snowballed towards gathering a better momentum. We continued both awareness campaigns and the assessment work concurrently, each one enhancing the effectiveness of the other. The INQAAHE international conference in 2001, as a part of the strategic

plan had helped to make further dents in gaining the confidence of the target groups. By the April 2001, we had completed the assessment of about 200 institutions with another 100 or so in the pipeline with their self-study reports at various stages of completion. A new director took over and carried forward the tasks.

As early as in 1999 a strategic plan was evolved at EC to reach out to the national academia. One of the plans was to make the NAAC and its mission constantly visible through the media. The NAAC officers were asked to write articles in the press and ensure the coverage of all the assessment works and awareness activities. *NAAC News*, an in-house newsletter, was started. Additional promotional materials were distributed widely, including to the Academic Staff Colleges where young teachers gather routinely for training. Many articles written by the academic staff appeared in newspapers and journals. Other media like AIR and TV also came handy and the materials prepared for these media were reprinted and circulated. Published articles were compiled and published as a series of books on quality assurance and on the principles and procedures of the NAAC. All these were done by those in the NAAC family who had the talent and time to do so. Publications about the NAAC written by Dr. Antony Stella, a senior colleague became prominent. Everybody helped in their own way. The purpose was to make the NAAC visible.

In addition to regional and national meets on the NAAC and its mission, it was thought that an international conference would bring better visibility. Some in the EC suggested that instead of organizing an independent international conference, hosting the annual or other conventions of established international agencies/organizations would be a better option. The NAAC invited and hosted the INQAAHE biennial conference in 2001. That paid rich dividends in-terms of high visibility among academic leaders in the country and abroad. In fact it also had turned out to be a profitable venture financially.

It should not be construed that whatever standing the NAAC has gained were all due to our in-house efforts alone. Many have contributed to the growth of this unique national body. Madam Desai, the former Chairperson of the UGC, was a tower of strength with her unwavering confidence in the system and her help in maintaining a certain level of freedom in spite of her in-house pressures. Dr. Hari Gautam, the next Chairman, did make the assessment by the NAAC

mandatory, though he changed the character of the NAAC in many ways. Some of the changes may not augur well for the future development of the NAAC in the international arena.

I personally feel that, and that is the opinion of many international colleagues also, that basically the NAAC and other Inter University Centers (IUCs) of the UGC are not the same either in their scope or mission. As a national body that assures the quality of higher education institutions, the NAAC should be made more autonomous. However, to avoid a few other legal complications, some of the essential characteristics of an autonomous quality assurance agency have been changed. It calls for a more vigilant approach in all quality assurance related polices at least in the future. Many academic and administrative leaders have a tendency to think that they have something to say on the quality of education and the NAAC should have safeguards to protect itself from the influence of such persons. Most of them however would respectfully keep a distance from other IUCs that are related to highly specialized areas of scientific interest. It is unfortunate that everyone feels that they can shape the quality assurance policies of the country. Today quality assurance has grown as a science; it is a professional area of expertise by itself. By strengthening its research base and professionalism, NAAC should ensure that it takes its rightful place in ensuring the professionalism of its approaches.

Sri M.K. Kaw, the then education Secretary at the MHRD, had been a tower of strength in many ways, particularly when the parent body was wavering. His regular annual visits to spend a day at the NAAC and his personal involvement were keys to the success of the NAAC. He had convened the State Education Secretaries meet at Vigyan Bhavan to promote the NAAC's mission and safeguarded the NAAC's interest wherever he had a say. Many of his officers, particularly, Sri. Champak Chatterjee, Mr. Pawan Agarwal and Mrs. Madhu Arora from the ministry pitched in their might and did help in their own ways.

The Karnataka government, its then Chief Minister, Dr. S.M. Krishna, and the Education Minister, Dr. Parameshwara, were of great help in many ways. They had bailed us out of the tight situation in which we were during the INQAAHE meet. They made the State Education Department to mandate accreditation for all the institutions of higher learning in the state. Many academic leaders from both the public and private sectors of education in the state in general and

in the cities of Bangalore, Mysore and many others, in particular, were generous all through.

The NAAC office was small with a few officers and staff and it was beautiful. We had officers who were highly enthusiastic and officers who were almost bordering on the cynical side. Some were raw and inexperienced and some claimed earlier experience. All of us were new to the game, but all were committed and competent. Differences of opinions could be seen in almost every minor issue but once accepted all differences were forgotten. It is one system where I could see two people with very little in common, work for the institution single-mindedly, an adorable and civilized attitude that helped the NAAC. No attempt was made to change minds and I took all of them as they were and it worked fine. It was tight-rope walking to get the best out of the best people. Many who matter went on record profusely admiring the small team and its complex but commendable accomplishments. Yet another strength of the NAAC was and is the senior academics - the Chairs and Peers - from all over the country who are the 'core staff' at large. Their age, maturity, experience, standing and above all unassuming nature have resulted in the confidence in and acceptability of the NAAC.

The NAAC has had its share of problem-makers and their presumptuous judgments. A few of them were habitual faultfinders about everything some body else did. Some held the view that there were no good institutions in India that deserved the top grade. Invariably they were armchair academics who never came to grips with reality. Some were confused about the concepts of quality, education and their assumed position. Little did they realize that the organizational dynamics for reforms and fine-tuning would have to come in due course as one progressed not only to correct past mistakes but also to respond to changing contexts.

There are many other dimensions of the NAAC in its pivotal function, beyond merely assessing and grading the institutions with the set formula, with the now very familiar drill. To mention a few — academic research on the details of QA, planning and designing future cycles and diversification to new modes of educational provisions, international linkage and regional leadership, credibility care in gaining mutual recognition of qualifications among the countries of the world. Quality assurance has emerged as an art and science during the past

decade or so and there are more articles and research papers published on this aspect than on all other aspects of the higher education system as a whole. The NAAC has the advantage of being an early starter in this emerging system. Though the NAAC can never assume a direct role in enhancing or sustaining the quality of higher education, except to assess and indicate the strength and weakness of the system, it can definitely help those who are responsible and have the mandate and resources to do so. It has now made the higher education institutions in the country as its major stakeholders, an unintended outcome which it should capitalize on. It is important to remember that the education system has its own long standing mission and should serve many enduring social needs. It should not jump with minor, transient social or technology drifts. When realities and limitations are in focus, there is nothing that can hamper the march of the NAAC as a leading QA agency in the region.

It was a gratifying experience. We have a solid and robust system now to talk about. I look back on how a series of accidents brought me to this long association with the NAAC and through it to a set of completely different peers, different from what I was used to. Let me wish the NAAC and its current team all success in their well-defined and focused mission.