Benchmark Driven, Data Based Assessment: A Case Study of Innovations in Accreditation Framework by NAAC, India

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Abstract

Emergence of new technology and innovations has become a key trend in the global HE such as MOOCs, OERs. These innovations are bringing the world closer beyond boundaries while adding new and complex challenges for regulatory bodies and accreditation agencies. The remarkable growth of Indian HE with over 50000 HEIs and 36 million enrolments has created new challenges in quality framework for Indian higher education. Recently, NAAC has revised its methodology from peer based assessment to ICT- data driven method of assessment which is considered as a paradigm shift. The methodology designed comprises blend of database of quantitative metrics and peer judgement on qualitative metrics. The study summarises the unique key features of revised accreditation framework (RAF) such as Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS), Data Validation and Verification (DVV), Quality Benchmarking etc.

The study discusses about design of methodology, process of assessment, pilot study analysis, feedback analysis, implementation and results of revised framework. In addition, the study also tries to highlight the challenges faced while implementing the RAF in transitioning from predominately peer driven assessment to ICT based data driven assessment and accreditation aimed at benchmark led quality improvement process.

Keywords: Revised Accreditation Framework (RAF), Quality Indicator Framework (QIF), Assessment and Accreditation (A and A), Indian HE, Innovative practices.

Introduction

Higher education across the globe has witnessed various transformations in the recent years. Emergence of new technology and innovations has become a key trend in the global HE such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs,) Open educational resources (OERs). These innovations are bringing the world closer beyond boundaries while adding new and complex challenges for regulatory bodies and accreditation agencies. This change significantly expands the role of technology integration in the accreditation process as well as minimizing through innovative quality assessment tools.

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This changing context has emphasised the need for framework that would also promote optimal resource utility, improved services, increased flexibility in operations blended with newer technology in present accreditation process.

Quality Assurance in Indian Higher Education System: The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has been established with the responsibility of Assessment and Accreditation of higher educational institutions in India. Since its inception, NAAC has been continuously engaged in restructuring and designing its methodology and assessment process as per the requirements of the changing phenomenon in HE based on its own field experience, gained knowledge from international collaborations with QAAs. Recently, NAAC has revised its methodology from Peer based assessment to ICT- data driven method of assessment which is considered as a paradigm shift in Indian HE since July 2017.

Indian HE is known for its massiveness, stands next to China and United States, a third largest HE system in the world with number of HEIs. The system has witnessed an expansion in terms of number of institutions with 903 Universities, 39050 Colleges and 10011 Stand Alone Institutions as per the AISHE report 2017-18.The enrolment in higher education reached 36.6 million during 2017-18.This remarkable growth and emergence of new institutions have created new challenges in quality framework for Indian higher education. The other challenge includes diversity, unique grading system, involvement of stakeholders, limited number of assessors, need for data verification etc.

Innovative Practices of NAAC in RAF: The methodology designed by NAAC strongly emphasises on evidence based assessments with accuracy and authenticity.

Development of RAF included the following:

- In depth study of over 7000 HEIs assessed by NAAC in past years.
- Synthesis of 50 core and desirable indicators, over 300 assessment indicators and hundreds of questions which formed part of manual.
- Referencing the key criteria and indicators used by various ranking agencies.
- Learning from best practices in Europe and other regions for features like student satisfaction survey, alumni engagement etc.

The development of new concept of Quality Indicator Framework (QIF) involved a large consultative work of various academic experts, Vice Chancellors, faculty members etc. In continuation, core working group (CWG) and sectoral working group (SWG) were constituted to deliberate the action plan.

Pilot Study: In order to get the feedback on the QIF, NAAC conducted pilot study over hundreds of HEIs across the country. Response to pilot questionnaire was considered as critical input to finalise QIF and the same was also posted on NAAC website and invited stakeholders' for feedback.

The salient key features of RAF that makes the process distinguished from the previous methodology are paradigm shift from qualitative peer judgements to data based quantitative indicator evaluation and extensive use of ICT. Some key features are discussed below.

Introduction of Qualitative and Quantitative metrics: The present methodology seems to be a unique combination of factors in the quality assurance system covering both peer judgement and quantitative data driven assessment. The framework commonly referred as quality indicator framework (QIF) of NAAC comprises of system generated scores for quantitative metrics (Q_nM) with a proportion of 70% and qualitative metrics (Q_lM) with 30 % weightage for peer judgement.

QIF Statistics

Type of HEIs	**Universities**	**Autonomous Colleges**	**Affiliated Colleges**
Criteria	7	7	7
Key Indicators	34	34	32
Qualitative Metrics (Q_lM)	38	38	41
Quantitative Metrics (Q_nM)	99	98	80
Total Metrics ($Q_lM + Q_nM$)	137	136	121

Quality Benchmarks: Benchmarks for each metrics are designed taking the consideration of academic experts' views and field testing. The benchmarks of QIF are designed on 0-4 scale and these benchmarks are tested using pilot study. A series of meetings were conducted for statistical analysis of benchmark values of quality indicator framework.

Pre- qualifier for visit: Introduction of pre qualifier concept which is new in the system, where institution has to secure at least 30% in the quantitative metrics to qualify for peer team visit (PTV)

Third party data validation: In this process data submitted by HEIs is being scrutinised, verified and validated by the third party evaluators commonly referred as Data Verification and Validation (DVV) partners. This is fully system orchestrated process where HEI, NAAC Co-ordinator and DVV partner exchange data and clarifications.

Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS): Introduction of SSS blending with accreditation process is aimed to capture the student satisfaction about the teaching, learning and evaluation process which will help to upgrade the quality of higher education. NAAC will send an online link of this 'Student survey' to the email address/mobile number of the student and the student will have to fill the survey before a stipulated date. Analysis of the student survey will be done using customised software which will aggregate the responses and generate the score.

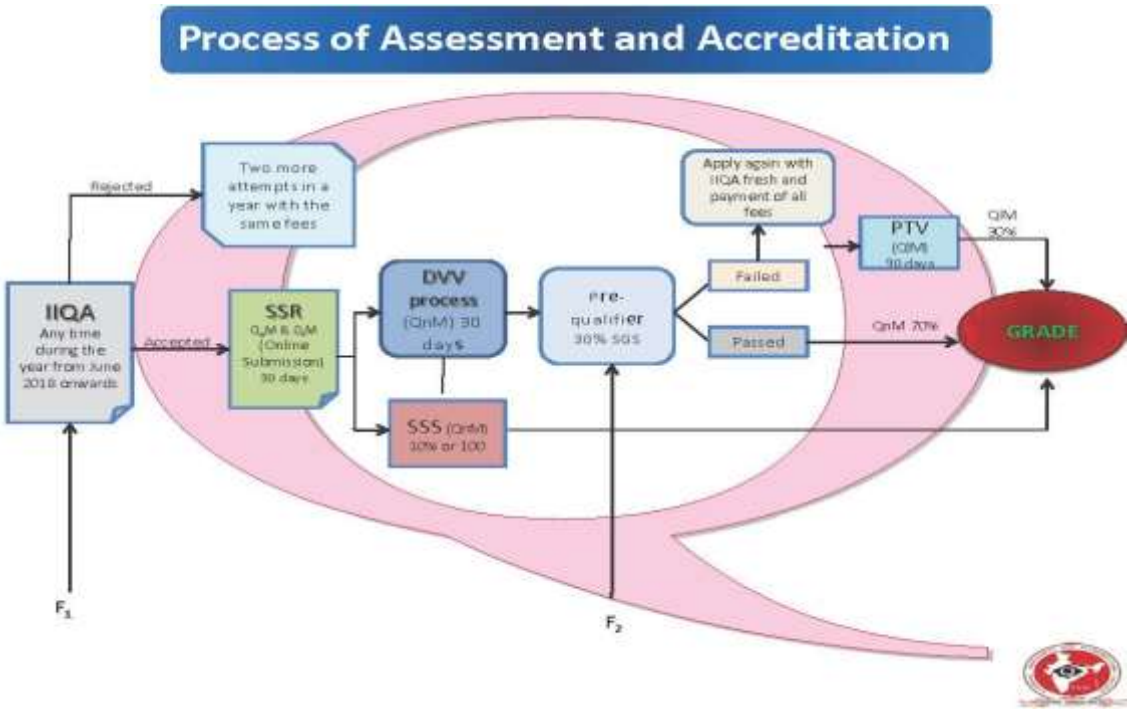
100 % ICT based Process: The entire process of assessment methodology is ICT based evaluation from preliminary stage of application called IIQA till the result declaration. The stages involved in the process are IIQA, SSR, DVV, Pre-qualifier and PTV. The final outcome is a combination of System Generated Scores (SGS), SSS and Peer team score from peer team visit on Qualitative evaluation of the institute.

Automatic selection: The system will automatically allot the HEIs to the concerned NAAC Officers (System choosing and allocation of HEIs), DVV partners for third party evaluation and assessors selection based on the type of HEI (university/ subject specialisation/ offerings, non local etc.).

QIF for special HEIs: NAAC has embarked on mission to address different categories of institutions by designing separate methodology to special category of HEIs through developing separate quantitative and qualitative metrics for variety of specialised HEIs such as Yoga, Sanskrit, Open and distance learning (ODL), Health Sciences etc.

In addition, the RAF has introduced several key indicators such as Innovation Ecosystem, Outcome Based Assessment, Alumni Engagement, Institutional Values and Distinctiveness etc. The details are discussed here.

Impact and Way forward: NAACs new methodology seems to be considered as a right step in the new era of technology driven mode of assessment. NAAC wishes to integrate RAF work with European benchmarking project on selected European and Indian Universities on "Enhancing Quality Assurance Management and Benchmarking strategies in Indian Universities" (EQUAM-BI). This project was recently sanctioned by European Commission to NAAC and University of Barcelona with partners from Europe and India.



Conclusion

The study also discusses about design of methodology, process of assessment, pilot study analysis, feedback analysis, implementation and results of revised framework. In addition, the study also tries to highlight the challenges faced in the field while implementing the RAF of NAAC in transitioning from predominately peer driven assessment to ICT based data driven assessment and accreditation aimed at benchmark led quality improvement process.

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