

NAAC Accreditation... A Commitment to Quality

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Quality is an essential prerequisite for any system or organization to survive and higher education is no exception. Continued effort to improve any institution of higher learning through introspection, innovation and improvisation can alone bring in quality and accountability. Any attempt at introspection, leads to self-evaluation. Comparative review of such an analysis and renewed attempts to achieve excellence. Quality is not a goal, but a moving target, for which benchmarking is necessary and a sincere attempt to achieve such landmarks on the way to quality alone can result in excellence.

National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), is an autonomous body set up by the UGC in the year 1994 in Bangalore, assigned with the job of assessing and accrediting institutions of higher learning: besides playing the role of a **leader in quality sustenance programmes**. NAAC came into existence because of the concern among the academics to ensure quality in higher education. The amount of success and awareness that NAAC has achieved in a short span of time is truly encouraging, given the stupendous task of assessing and accrediting the institutions of higher learning in India. The year 2002 has been declared as the **“Year of Quality in Higher Education”** by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, and it is very much appropriate to take a closer look at NAAC and the process of accreditation.

The **prime agenda** of NAAC is to **assess and accredit** institutions of higher learning, with an objective of helping them to work continuously to improve the quality of education. Assessment involves the performance evaluation of an institution based on **Self-study and Peer review** using defined criteria. Accreditation refers to the certification given by NAAC, which would be valid for a period of five years. NAAC follows an internationally accepted system with certain modifications to suit the Indian context.

NAAC's quest for quality has yielded results and with renewed vigour NAAC has triggered a quality movement, motivating institutions of higher learning to get NAAC accreditation. The University Grants Commission has made it mandatory for all colleges to get NAAC accreditation before December 2003, and has linked the funding of colleges to such certification. Hence it is time that colleges work with vigour to get NAAC accreditation and benefit from the quality programmes that NAAC initiates for quality sustenance. NAAC accreditation certifies the credibility of an institution and "...is an expression of confidence in an institution's mission and goals, its performance and its resources" (Dr. Rajasekharan Pillai, Director, NAAC).

NAAC has formulated a three-stage process for assessment and accreditation:

- Preparation of Self-study Report by the institution based on the parameters defined by NAAC.
- Validation of Self-study Report by a team of Peers through on-site visit; presentation of detailed quality report to the institution and
- The final decision on assessment and accreditation by the Executive Committee (EC) of NAAC.

NAAC functions through its General Council and Executive Committee and other academic advisory and administrative sub-committees. NAAC draws its expertise from senior academics and people of eminence connected to higher education. The **philosophy of NAAC** is ameliorative and remedial rather than punitive or judgemental. It Enables institutions of higher learning to realize their own strength and weakness and empowers them to maximize their resources, opportunities and capabilities.

The first and the most important step in the process of accreditation is the preparation of the Self-study report by the institution along the guidelines formulated by NAAC. The institution has to prepare the Self-study Report in two parts. Part I contains the organization data, and Part II must contain the self-analysis based on part I. This will be an internal institutional exercise expected to be done with honest introspection. It must help the institution to realise its own strengths, weakness, potentialities, limitations and possible steps to be undertaken to overcome

the limitations. It is a process aimed at ‘**know-thyself**’ and such awareness is looked at by NAAC as the backbone of the process of assessment and accreditation. The self-study report must contain the factual details of all the aspects of its functioning like the inputs, processes and the product generated, in a meaningful way. After much soul-searching and introspection, the self-study report must be prepared and submitted to NAAC.

NAAC will constitute the panel of peers and inform the institution and in turn the institution can record its views in case it has any reservation against any of the members of the Peer group. During its visit, the peer group will look for evidences to validate the self-study report. The peers will interact with the various constituents of the institution and also check the documentary evidence to understand the functioning of the institution. The peer team in collective judgement would arrive at criterion-wise scores and along with the descriptive report, present it to the Executive Committee of the NAAC for the final decision about the grading of the institution. A copy of the descriptive report will be handed over to the head of the institution. The grading will be valid for a period of five years.

NAAC has a set of defined parameters based on which, the assessment of an institution would be made, viz,

- 1) Curricular Aspects
- 2) Teaching-learning and Evaluation
- 3) Research, Consultancy and Extension
- 4) Infrastructure and Learning Resources
- 5) Student support and Progression
- 6) Organization and Management
- 7) Healthy Practices.

The seven criteria have been assigned different weightages; based on which the score of an institution is arrived at. If the overall score of an institution is more than 55%, it would be notified as having attained “Accredited Status” and an institution which gets below 50% will get “Not Accredited status”. NAAC has adopted the nine-point scale in place of the earlier Star-status mode and based on the score of an institution, an appropriate grade will be awarded:

Grading System of NAAC

Institutional Score (upper limit exclusive)	Grade
95-100	A++
90-95	A+
85-90	A
80-95	B++
75-80	B+
70-75	B
65-70	C++
60-65	C+
55-60	C

The grade will also be supplemented by a qualitative report by the team that would highlight the strengths and weakness of the institution under various criteria.

The institutions must first submit a letter of intention along with the profile of the college, for assessment and accreditation. After scrutinizing the information NAAC will respond regarding the eligibility of the institution. After receiving the positive response, the institution must send the prescribed fee and NAAC will in turn provide the manuals and guidelines to enable the institution to initiate the process of self-assessment.

Under the stewardship of the Director, NAAC has renewed its commitment to quality in higher education with new thrust to quality improvement and excellence. NAAC has increased

its activities and as a result of many seminars, conferences and meetings of higher education officials, academics, Secretaries of State Higher Education, NAAC has roped in many people to evolve a shared concern. The National seminars conducted at various places by the MHRD, have facilitated NAAC to draw up the National Action Plan for Higher Education Institutions for different states.

The Action Plan identifies a multi-pronged strategy for Quality assurance and accreditation, involving four stages and all components of the higher education system. Various stages of the plan involve SWOT analysis (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) by an expert committee. Implementation of quality sustenance activities in accredited colleges, Self-study Report, Assessment and Accreditation of colleges, Remedial measures in case of weak and less privileged institutions.

NAAC's renewed commitment to quality in higher education, has triggered a "silent revolution in higher education" (The Statesman, 22nd Nov 2001).

It is time to act, and improve the system of higher education and colleges must make sincere attempts for Total Quality Management, and get NAAC accreditation for the benefit of all the stakeholders in the system of higher education, and NAAC's accreditation is a statement of commitment to quality.

References

NAAC Annual Reports (Various years)