World Education Services

WES Evaluation of the Three-Year Bachelor's Degree from India

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WES Policy on *Selected* Three-Year Bachelor's Degree from India

Based on its research and review of fundamental changes in quality assurance in higher education in India, in 2006 WES revised its assessment of *selected* the three-year Bachelor's degree awarded by Indian universities. This policy takes into account specific criteria regarding institutional standing and student performance. The policy, as well as WES methodology and a brief discussion of the relevant factors that led to this revision in policy are provided below.

The WES Policy

WES now recognizes Indian 3-year Bachelor's degrees as equivalent to U.S. Bachelor's degrees *when the following conditions are met*:

- **The degrees have been earned in Division I and II**
  and
- **The awarding institutions have been accredited by India's National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) with a grade of "A" or better** (see explanation following)

Please note: this equivalency applies only to institutions accredited by the NAAC. It takes into consideration the relative standing of a university as reflected by the NAAC grade, and the individual degree holder's performance as indicated by the degree classification of the degree.

WES continues to regard all other three-year degrees from India as equivalent to three years of undergraduate study

WES Evaluation Methodology

WES recognizes that educational systems are inherently different. The task for the credential evaluator is to examine a degree and determine whether it constitutes sufficient preparation for graduate admission in the U.S. To achieve that end, it is necessary to establish a coherent set of criteria that can be used for comparing the American and Indian degrees. The main criteria that WES considers when assessing a degree are the level, structure, scope and intent of the program. Those factors are expressed in terms of: requirements for admission to the program; its contents and structure; and the function that the credential is designed to serve in the home system, respectively.

Recent Reforms in India's Higher Education System

The three-year bachelor's degree from India has usually been regarded as comparable to the completion of three years of undergraduate study in the United States and holders of the degree have are generally not been eligible for admission to graduate schools in the U.S.

This assessment is based on information on education in India from the 1970s through the mid-1980s. Since then, the education system has undergone fundamental reforms that gave rise to a uniform system

of education. By the mid 1980s the **Standard XII** award had been fully implemented across India and almost all universities had adopted the three-year bachelor's degree.

Despite the reforms, the university sector continued to struggle with the excessive rate of failure in the university-matriculation examinations, as well as the high dropout rate. The growth in the number of students impacted on the quality of university education, particularly in the social sciences and humanities. Still, Indian higher education included several centers of educational excellence.

In an attempt to address the issue of quality in higher education, the **University Grants Commission/UGC** <http://www.ugc.ac.in> founded the **National Assessment and Accreditation Council/NAAC** <http://www.naac-india.com> in 1994. The mission of NAAC is to evaluate and accredit higher education institutions on the basis of clearly defined criteria that include the curriculum; teaching and student assessment; infrastructure and resources; student support; and institutional management. Institutions that complete the process successfully and qualify for accreditation are graded as follows:

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

The grading scale is heavily weighed (70%) toward teaching and learning resources with the remaining 30 points given for student sport and institutional management. Accreditation is voluntary and so far 120 institutions have been accredited.

Issues Affecting Degree Recognition and Equivalency

Quality Assurance -- By instituting a quality assurance and accreditation mechanism, Indian higher education has addressed a major impediment that prevented the recognition of most university degrees. As a result, universities in the UK (including the Universities of Bath, Reading, Sheffield, Sussex, Southampton, to name a few) now admit holders of three-year bachelor's degree from India who graduated with high grades directly into master's degree programs.

Absence of General Education -- General education at the undergraduate level is unique to U.S. higher education and does not exist in most other countries regardless of the length of undergraduate degree programs. Although it is often cited as a reason for not recognizing three-year degrees for graduate admission, U.S. universities readily admit students from those very systems if they complete at least four (4) years of study. This essentially contradicts the argument that the absence of general education renders a degree inadequate preparation for graduate studies because the fourth year is spent on further specialization.

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Practical Information

Education in India

By Nick Clark, Editor *WENR*

INTRODUCTION

The Indian system of education has its roots in the system inherited from the British at independence in 1947. Although the structure left by the British provided for educational opportunities from primary school to university, the system was highly exclusive and available to only a select minority within Indian society. Jawaharlal Nehru and the members of the Constituent Assembly responsible for framing the Indian Constitution (1950) sought to deal with the social and educational inequalities of illiteracy and discrimination by explicitly prohibiting discrimination in education on the grounds of religion, caste, sex, race or birth. To prevent such discrimination certain rights are guaranteed, including the right for Indian citizens to enter any institution of education and to receive instruction in their native language.

Current education policy as related to structure and access is based on the objectives of the National Education Commission (NEC), which, in its 1968 Education Policy, called for a standard educational structure based on a 10+2+3-year model. The first ten years were to be non-selective and provide a well-rounded general education available to all children. After the first ten years of general education the system would become highly selective and provide opportunities in both the academic and vocational streams. In addition, the NEC stressed the importance of advancing opportunities in science and technology.

The 1968 Education Policy has been reformed on two occasions, the 1986 National Policy on Education (NPE) and a revision in 1992 called the Programme of Action. The NPE re-stresses the need for a system of education that grants all students up to a given level — irrespective of caste, creed, location or sex — access to education of a common educational structure and comparable quality. Particular emphasis is placed on achieving universal primary education for all and universal adult literacy. Within the school system, NPE goals are based on a National Curriculum Framework with common core subjects supplemented by elective components, and a structure based on ten years of general primary (lower and upper) and lower secondary education. The exact breakdown of the primary and lower secondary stages varies by state, however, all states follow a model based on ten years of general education followed by two years of pre-university or upper secondary education and (in a majority of cases) a three-year bachelor degree (10+2+3).

The system of education at the tertiary level is vast and full of contrasts, making it a highly complex system for the outsider to come to grips with. While quality standards run the gamut, from world class to dysfunctional, the number of institutions operating in the country grows unabated year after year as the system strives to meet burgeoning demand. At independence, there were 25 universities and 700 colleges enrolling approximately 200,000 students; in 1984, there were 121 universities, 15 deemed universities, 5040 colleges and 10 institutions of national importance enrolling 3.1 million students; today (2005) there are 234 universities, 95 deemed universities, 17,625 colleges and 13 institutions of national importance enrolling almost 10.5 million students.

Quality standards have undoubtedly suffered as a result of this growth, however, at the top tier, India has a collection of institutions to rival any in the world. Institutions such as the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore and, above all, the Indian Institutes of Technology have been receiving lavish funding from the government for decades. As a result, they have been producing crop upon crop of highly skilled graduates who are in high demand both at home and abroad, and who have been helping to set professional standards across India.

From 1966 on the official language of instruction in India was intended to be Hindi, however, anti-Hindi protest forced the government to declare both English and Hindi official languages. At many universities today a majority of classes are taught in English, especially in professional/technical subjects and graduate studies. At the primary level instruction is largely in Hindi or regional languages. English is introduced from fifth grade (Standard V).

Literacy and Enrollment

At independence an estimated 85 percent of the population was illiterate and just 30 percent of children were enrolled in primary school. Of those enrolled in school, half dropped out before completing a primary education. As a result, literacy and primary enrollment rates have been constant targets of government policy. In recent years the central government has launched a series of wide-reaching literacy campaigns, and in 1988 the National Literacy Mission (NLM) was established with the goal of achieving functional literacy for 80 million illiterates aged 15-35. The Mission's current goal is to achieve a sustainable threshold literacy rate of 75 percent by 2007. It has extended its target demographic in recent years to include out-of-school children in the 9-to-14 age group.

Meanwhile, local governments at the district and municipal level have been given much greater autonomy over the management of primary education. At present, 271 districts in 18 states have launched district specific plans under the joint state/center sponsored '*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*' (campaign for universal education) initiative, which builds on existing programs such as the District Primary Education Program designed to promote universal primary education up to Standard VIII by 2010.

Although enrollment and literacy rates remain low in comparison to other developing nations, it should be noted that great progress has been made. Literacy rates have increased from 44 percent in 1981, to 52 percent in 1991, and 65 percent in 2001. In the 1990s alone, an additional 20 million children entered school, and from 1950 to 1998 the number of schools in India quadrupled while enrollment rates increased sixfold.

Despite these achievements, India's primary education sector continues to face considerable challenges, as underlined by the concluding remarks of India's Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-2007): "Our performance in the field of education is one of the most disappointing aspects of our developmental strategy." Access to education remains stratified across and within states, with educational opportunities and outcomes differing considerably between girls and boys; between the poor and the better-off; and between children of scheduled castes/tribes and other children. High drop out rates remain a reality of the education system as children from poor families are required to earn an income, while large numbers of rural areas still do not have reasonable access to schools.

PRIMARY EDUCATION

The primary cycle lasts seven to eight years and is divided into two stages: lower primary (Standards I to V) and upper primary (Standards VI to VIII). In fifteen states the primary cycle finishes at standard VII, in the others it ends at Standard VIII. Municipal boards administer education at all levels and either the school or the board sets examinations held at the end of each semester and school year.

The language of instruction at the lower primary level is generally the mother tongue, either Hindi or a regional language. From upper primary other languages are introduced: English and/or Hindi (if Hindi is not the mother tongue). At some private schools, English is used almost exclusively.

Children begin formal schooling at the age of five or six and compulsory education is guaranteed by the constitution as a fundamental right until the age of 14. The current reality, however, is that 60 percent of all students who enter the primary cycle drop out by Standard V, while an estimated 23 percent receive no formal schooling at all.

Duration: Eight years (seven in a few states).

Curriculum: The primary school curriculum emphasizes general education and covers basic subjects such as reading, writing and arithmetic, supplemented by history, geography, general science and civics. At state schools, English is required from Standard V.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Secondary education is divided into two, two-year stages: lower (Standard IX to X) and higher (XI to XII). After both stages students take examinations controlled by state and central examination boards. In addition to administering the Standard X and Standard X+II examinations, the boards are responsible for setting curriculums and issuing school-leaving certificates at affiliated schools. The boards receive academic and research support from the government-sponsored National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), while overall administration of school education is shared by the Central Department of Education and the state ministries of education.

At present, 34 secondary boards exist. Three boards operate at the national level, while the remaining 31 boards have jurisdiction within a state or part of a state.

The three All-India (central) boards are:

- **Central Board of Secondary Education** (CBSE)
- **Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations** (CISCE)
- **National Institute for Open schooling** (NIOS)

Schools offering CBSE and CISCE curriculums are generally considered to attract the more academically gifted students. Schools affiliated with these boards — and offering their curriculums — must undergo an accreditation process which is designed to ensure that teaching staff and facilities meet prescribed standards. In addition, CBSE and CISCE marking procedures are considered to be more rigorous than those of state boards of secondary education. The 8278 schools that currently subscribe to CBSE follow a common national curriculum based on the 10+2 model. Subscribing schools tend to be private or operated by the Central Government, while their students tend to come from more affluent backgrounds. Because of the exacting standards of the CBSE curriculum and examinations, many consider CBSE standards the bar by which to judge the curriculum, examinations and results of state secondary school boards. Students may also study the CBSE curriculum independently and take the exam at one of many national and international testing centers.

A list of all **31 recognized state boards of secondary education** is available from the Department of Higher and Secondary Education at: www.education.nic.in/circulars/boards.asp.

The average academic week consists of 45 periods of 40 minutes duration, and the school year runs a minimum of 200 teaching days. While the academic year begins in different months in different states, it most commonly runs from June/July to March/April and is divided into three terms. In some of the northern hill states, the long recess is in winter rather than summer.

Regarding the language of instruction, the National Curriculum Framework, issued by NCERT in 2005, stresses that “a renewed effort should be made to implement the three-language formula, emphasizing recognition of children’s home language(s) or mother tongues as the best medium of instruction. These include tribal languages,” while “English needs to find its place along with other Indian languages.” The medium of instruction at all schools affiliated to the CBSE is English or Hindi.

Lower Secondary

Lower secondary school generally begins at Standard IX and lasts two or three years. In keeping with the first eight years of Indian education, lower secondary education emphasizes general education with no, or little, specialization.

Students take one of various Secondary School Certificate Examinations at the end of Standard X. If successful, students are awarded the Secondary School Certificate (or its equivalent) by the relevant State or All-India Board. A mark sheet listing courses and grades is issued with the award of all secondary school certificates.

Duration of Program: Two or three years

Curriculum*: Two languages (13 periods total), of which one must be Hindi or English; mathematics (7); science and technology (9); social science — including history, civics and geography (9) — work education or pre-vocational education (6); art (2); physical education and health education (2); electives that can include commerce, painting, music, home science or information technology.

** Department of Education, "Secondary School Curriculum 2002-2004, Vol.1 Main Subjects."*

Lower Secondary Certificate: Secondary School Certificate (SSC)

NB: Lower secondary qualifications may also be known as:

- **Indian Certificate of Secondary Education** (awarded by CISCE)
- **(New) Secondary School Certificate** (awarded by NIOS)
- **Secondary School Leaving Certificate** (awarded by some states)
- **All-India Secondary School Certificate** (awarded by CBSE)
- **Matriculation Certificate** (no longer awarded)

Upper Secondary

Upper secondary education (sometimes referred to as 10+2) is dual track (academic, vocational/professional). The second stage of secondary education is designed to allow for diversification and specialization, while also preparing students for higher education. Broadly speaking, there are three standard majors or specializations in the academic stream: science, business and humanities.

Instruction is offered at higher secondary schools, two-year colleges and university-affiliated colleges. Non-governmental bodies manage an estimated 58 percent of higher secondary schools, while the rest are public institutions.

The State or All-India Boards of Secondary Education determine curriculum at the higher secondary level. The curriculum that a particular school follows will be determined by the State or All-India board to which it is affiliated. Those schools affiliated with the new-Delhi-based Central Board of Secondary Education, for example, will follow its curriculum and offer All India Senior School Certificate Examinations administered by the Board.

The **vocational stream** prepares students for a variety of occupations through vocational studies and training at technical high schools and technical high school centers. Programs are offered in 160 fields such as agriculture, commerce, technology, paramedical services and home economics. States have a high degree of autonomy in determining the focus of vocational high school offerings as determined by their particular manpower needs. However, the Central Institute of Vocational Education (CIVE) and the Joint Council on Vocational Educational (under the Central Ministry of Human Resources Development) regulate and set curriculum standards for the secondary vocational sector. Transfer from the vocational stream to the academic stream is generally not encouraged, although vocational high school qualifications do grant access to related higher education programs.

Examinations are administered by the All India and State boards of vocational education. The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations offers the **Certificate of Vocational Education** (Standard XII)

examination, which is taken on completion of two years of (English-language) studies following the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (or equivalent).

Duration of Program: Two years.

Curriculum: In the **academic stream**, students are prepared for university-level studies in a number of specializations. The Central Board of Secondary Education posts the syllabi of its various subject offerings on its website at: http://cbse.nic.in (click 'syllabus' on sidebar). NIOS makes available its suggested curriculums at: www.nios.ac.in/syllabus.htm. The National Center for Educational Research and Training recently published its latest (2005) recommendations and guidelines for curriculum design across all major subject areas (for all levels of Indian schooling) at: www.ncert.nic.in/Syllabus/Syllabus_contents.htm.

In the **vocational stream**, students normally receive broad-based training in a range of occupational areas. Thirty percent of the CIVE-recommended curriculum consists of language and general foundation courses. Theory and practice, including on-the job training, make up the rest of the curriculum. CIVE makes its curriculum recommendations available at: http://psscive.nic.in/vep_curr.htm. Students graduating from high school vocational programs often go on to do apprenticeship training. More information on apprentice options is available at: http://psscive.nic.in/act_cources.htm.

Upper Secondary Certificates (Current):

- ***National Boards:*** **All India Senior School Certificate** (CBSE), **Indian School Certificate** and **Certificate of Vocational Education** (CISCE), **Senior Secondary Certification** (NIOS).
- ***State Boards:*** Most states award a **Higher Secondary (School) Certificate** (HSC/HSSC), while a lesser number of states award the **Intermediate Certificate** and the **Pre-University Certificate**.

Other (Defunct) Certificates:

- **Pre-University Examination Certificate** - Awarded by a university after one year of study beyond SSC prior to 1976.
- **Intermediate Examination Certificate** - Awarded by a university after two years of study beyond SSC.

Higher Secondary Grading Scales

The state grading scale for the Higher Secondary School Examination is as follows:

Score	State Grading Scale
60+ %	First Division or Class
45 - 59 %	Second Division or Class
30 - 44 %	Third Division or Pass

CBSE grading scale:

CBSE Grading Scale	Score
A	75+ %
B	60 - 74 %
C	53 - 59 %
D	45 - 52 %
E	33 - 44 %
F	15 - 32 %
G	>14 %

HIGHER EDUCATION

The Indian higher education system is based on the British model consisting of a three-tier degree structure (bachelor, master, doctorate) and a system of affiliated colleges or universities, based loosely on the nineteenth century structure of the University of London. The three founding universities in India were established in the mid 19th century in Madras (Chennai), Bombay (Mumbai) and Calcutta.

According to the Department of Secondary and Higher Education, there were 342 degree-granting institutions and over 17,000 colleges in India in 2005. A majority of the nation's degree-granting institutions maintain large networks of affiliated colleges that, at the largest universities, number upwards of 200. At most universities instruction takes place at affiliated colleges, but the affiliating university is responsible for setting the syllabus, conducting examinations and awarding degrees.

English is used as the language of instruction at many higher education institutions while at others up to four different languages (including English, Hindi and regional languages) are used, depending on the program. At the graduate level courses are largely taught in English.

Ministry figures for academic year 2004/05 estimate the total enrollment of tertiary-level students at 10,481,000 and faculty at 457,000.

Private Institutions

Most Indian universities are public institutions. The central government provides just one quarter of funding for higher education, with much of rest made up by the states. Regarding the establishment of private universities, the central government attempted to regulate the industry through the introduction of the 1995 Private Universities Bill. The bill came unstuck, however, because of protest from the private sector over the onerous financial and academic requirements contained within the bill, in addition to provisions for continued government regulation.

Still, a number of states have passed their own legislation regarding the establishment of private universities, often without adequate scrutiny. The 2002 passage of the Chattisgarh Private Universities Act was the first such legislation and was quickly followed by similar legislation in other states such as Uttaranchal. However, after the almost immediate establishment of close to 100 universities, many of dubious standing, the legislation was publicly discredited and in 2005 overturned by the Indian Supreme Court, which declared the 95 private institutions operating in the state illegal. In other states, especially in

the south and west, there has been a rapid increase in the number of private medical and engineering colleges many of which are said to be of dubious standards.

Despite the proliferation of sub-standard private colleges, the top private colleges are beginning to meet the unmet demand for technical and managerial education. NIIT and Aptech are two examples of private multi-campus institutions serving the technical training needs of India's rapidly developing economy. A number of private institutions have in recent years been awarded deemed-university status. A high-profile case in point is that of the pioneering Manipal Academy of Higher Education which was awarded deemed university status despite its model of complete financial self-sufficiency.

The University Grants Commission

Established in 1956, the **University Grants Commission** (UGC) advises the government, both state and central, on the establishment or upgrade of degree-awarding institutions of higher education. The UGC maintains a database of government-recognized institutions eligible to award degrees, which is made available on its website at: www.ugc.ac.in/inside/university.html.

The UGC sets the minimum standards that institutions must meet in order to earn degree-awarding powers. In addition to setting curriculum standards for degree programs, the commission has oversight of the various institutions charged with maintaining quality standards in the Indian tertiary education sector. The UGC also derives a degree of control over quality assurance through the distribution of grants and development funding for institutions of higher education, as well as the implementation of special projects designed to promote greater levels of academic rigor, as described here: www.ugc.ac.in/policy/quality_assurance.html.

ACCREDITATION

Established in 1994 by the UGC, the **National Assessment and Accreditation Council** (NAAC) is responsible for evaluating and accrediting institutions and academic departments. As in the United States, the accreditation process is voluntary. Accredited institutions are awarded an overall grade (with a pass/fail threshold). At the time of writing, a total of 122 universities and 2558 colleges had been accredited.

NAAC accreditation is a three-stage process:

- Preparation of a self-study report by the institution.
- Institutional visit by an external evaluation team.
- Grading, certification and accreditation based on the results of the previous two stages.

The commission's assessment criteria are available from its website at: www.naac-india.com/criteria.asp.

The NAAC grading scale has been revised on a number of occasions. It has mutated from a pilot A to E grading pattern, to a five-star scale, to its current nine-point alphabetical scale that ranges from A++ to C. Both the star system and the current system are based on a 100-point scale. Institutions are graded according to the score they receive:

NAAC Grading Scale:

Score	NAAC Current Grading Scale	Original Star Scale
95-100	A++	A*****
90-95	A+	A*****
85-90	A	A*****
80-85	B++	A*****
75-80	B+	A*****
70-75	B	A****
65-70	C++	A***
60-65	C+	A**
55-60	C	A*

A score below 55 percent is considered a failing grade and accreditation is not awarded. Accreditation is good for five years. In 2005, the first round of reaccreditations began.

The current list of accredited and reaccredited institutions is available at: www.naac-india.com/accreditedall.asp.

Established in 1945, the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) is responsible for planning, formulating and maintaining norms and standards in technical and professional fields. It works with the relevant technical and professional boards to issue regulations for the establishment of new institutions/programs, and sets academic standards for postsecondary courses. Through the affiliated National Board of Accreditation (NBA), AICTE assesses quality standards at institutions that volunteer to undergo the accreditation process.

Programs that receive a score greater than 650 on a 1000-point scale are accredited for a three-year period. Those scoring above 750 are accredited for a period of five years. Those scoring below 650 are considered to have failed the accreditation process.

To date, the NBA has accredited 1019 programs at 200 technical institutions. The complete list of accredited programs is available at: www.nba-aicte.ernet.in/nmna.htm.

Professional councils are responsible for the recognition of professional programs, promotion of professional institutions and the providing of grants to undergraduate programs. The statutory professional councils are:

- All India council for Technical Education (AICTE)
- Distance Education Council (DEC)
- Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR)
- Bar Council of India (BCI)
- National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)
- Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI)

- Medical Council of India (MCI)
- Pharmacy Council of India (PCI)
- Indian Nursing Council (INC)
- Dentist Council of India (DCI)
- Central Council of Homeopathy (CCH)
- Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM)
- Council of Architecture
- National Council for Rural Institutes
- State Councils of Higher Education

ADMISSION TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Students who have successfully completed 12 years of secondary education and have passed the Higher Secondary School Certificate (or its equivalent – see above) are eligible for admission to university first-degree programs. Entry to certain disciplines and institutions is by competitive entrance examinations. For entry to medical or engineering programs and some agricultural and computer science programs, students must sit state or national examinations.

Admission to the prestigious and highly competitive Indian Institutes of Technology is based on the results of the centrally administered **Joint Entrance Examination (JEE)**. Two other institutions — Institute of Technology - Banaras Hindu University and Varanasi School of Mines, Dhanbad — also use the JEE for admissions. Every year approximately 200,000 candidates are tested in physics, mathematics and chemistry, from which just 5,000 students are accepted to the nine schools that administer the JEE. Therefore, just one in every 40 candidates who takes the JEE is successful, making it one of the world's most selective university admissions examinations.

The Central Board of Secondary Education conducts the **All-India Engineering/Pharmacy/Architecture Entrance Examination (AIEEE)** for admission to degree-level programs in engineering, pharmacy and architecture at Central Universities, National Institutes of Technology, Deemed Universities (other than those covered by the JEE), and at some State Universities. States conduct the **State Engineering Admission Test (SEAT)** for admissions to engineering programs at State Universities.

Special provisions (or quotas) are set aside for candidates from disadvantaged groups, such as those from scheduled castes and tribes, or those with disabilities. For competitive examinations such as the JEE, students from these groups generally receive a five percent leeway in the marks they must achieve for admission.

At the **graduate level**, admission is normally based on the completion of a relevant bachelor's degree with a Second Class pass or better. The most competitive institutions admit students with First Class degrees only. In the fields of engineering and technology applicants are normally required to take an admissions test such as the **Graduate Aptitude Test for Engineers**, or an institutional equivalent. Many business schools require students to take entrance examinations such as the **Management Admissions Test (MAT)**. The six highly prestigious Indian Institutes of Management conduct their own admissions test known as the **Common Admissions Test (CAT)**.

Further Information on the various admissions examinations can be found at: www.indiastudycenter.com/univ/examinfo/default.asp.

INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Degree-Granting Institutions

The 342 degree-granting institutions in India can be broken down into three main categories: Institutions of National Importance, Deemed to be Universities, and Universities (Central, State, State Legislature and Open). University status and degree-awarding powers are issued by state and central acts of parliament.

The geographical jurisdiction of each university is established by law and may change according to the educational needs of the region. For example, the University of Madras describes itself as the 'mother of almost all the Old Universities in Southern India,' and it its original jurisdiction covered the entire Indian

sub-continent. Today, however, its jurisdiction is confined to just three of 30 districts in the state of Tamil Nadu, within which it maintains a network of 84 affiliated institutions. Indira Gandhi National Open University, on the other hand, maintains a national network of affiliated colleges. Other universities have statewide jurisdictions. Most commonly, however, universities have jurisdictions covering a number of districts within a state.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) currently lists 95 **Deemed Universities** on its website: www.ugc.ac.in/inside/utype.php?st=Deemed%20University. Although falling under the category of 'university,' most deemed universities are actually called institutes and operate as specialist institutions, rather than multi-faculty universities. The range of specializations among deemed universities is broad, however, approximately one quarter specialize in technology and engineering education. The central government awards the 'deemed to be' title based on the recommendations of the UGC.

The 13 **Institutes of National Importance (INI)** receive funding directly from the Central Government and count among their number the seven internationally renowned and extremely competitive Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). The IITs are based in Chennai www.iitm.ac.in/, Delhi www.iitd.ac.in/, Guwahati www.iitg.ernet.in/, Kanpur www.iitk.ac.in/, Kharagpur www.iitkgp.ernet.in/, Mumbai www.iitb.ac.in/, Roorkee www.rurkiu.ernet.in/. The Ministry for Human Resources Development www.education.nic.in/ (MHRD) is currently considering the upgrade of seven existing engineering colleges and universities to IIT/INI status. A decision is expected by March 2006.

The other six Institutions of National Importance are:

- All India Institute for Medical Sciences, New Delhi
- Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha, Hyderabad
- Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta
- National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research, Mohali
- Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh
- Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology, Thiruvananthapuram.

The third category of degree-granting institution, the **University**, is further divided into four sub-categories: **Central, State, Open** and **Specialist**.

Central Universities are established by individual acts of the National Parliament. Funding comes from the Central Government and is administered by the UGC, which currently lists 18 Central Universities on its website: www.ugc.ac.in/inside/utype.php?st=Central%20University.

State Universities are established by acts of state parliaments. All 211 State Universities receive funding from the respective state government, and just over half receive additional funds from the UGC. A majority of the universities maintain, run and award degrees at a large number of affiliated colleges that generally offer teaching at the undergraduate level. Graduate and postgraduate instruction is usually offered via the university's constituent colleges or through the university faculties. There are a smaller number of **unitary** institutions that do not have affiliated colleges and offer both undergraduate and graduate-level courses themselves, and are self-governing. In this respect they more closely resemble North American universities. The UGC lists all state universities at: www.ugc.ac.in/inside/utype.php?st=State%20University.

The UGC also lists five institutes of medical science that it categorizes **State Legislature Universities**: www.ugc.ac.in/inside/utype.php?st=State%20Legislature.

There are currently 10 **Open Universities** in India: Indira Gandhi National Open University (also considered a Central University (IGNOU)) and nine State Open Universities. Headquartered in Delhi, IGNOU was established in 1985 and offers a broad range of programs from certificate to master's level in both the academic and professional tracks. IGNOU is responsible for coordinating and monitoring distance education throughout India.

In addition to affiliating multi-disciplinary state universities, most states operate and fund an **Agricultural University** with statewide jurisdiction. Although agricultural universities are largely non-affiliating, most have a relatively small number of constituent colleges within the state. In the case of Central Agricultural University in Manipur, previously affiliated to Manipur University as a college of agriculture, jurisdiction

extends to the six states of the Northeast Hill region, with a view to establishing constituent colleges in each state. Many states have also developed **specialist affiliating universities** with statewide jurisdiction in fields such as law, technology and engineering, and health sciences. These institutions tend to incorporate technical and professional colleges previously affiliated to other universities within the state. Not all states operate such specialist universities; in such cases, jurisdiction over professional colleges rests with regional generalist universities.

Affiliated Colleges

The vast majority of colleges operating in India do so in affiliation with a degree-granting institution, which in essence franchises its programs to the college. Colleges operate with varying degrees of affiliation, however, depending on whether they are affiliated, constituent or autonomous. Colleges are generally affiliated to universities as arts, science or professional institutions and the affiliating university maintains control over curriculum and examinations and is the sole awarding body. The role of the college is to offer instruction and to prepare students for the examinations of the affiliating university. Most colleges offer first-degree programs only, although in some cases the university approves the teaching of master's-level programs. Although nearly all degree-granting institutions are state owned, 80 percent of colleges are privately managed and funded by student fees and subsidies from the central and state government.

Affiliated colleges offer programs in seven broad subject areas: teacher training (784); engineering, technology and architecture (1077); arts, science and commerce (11128); medical (1253); veterinary science (50); law (368); and others (671). In 2004/05 there was a total of 17,625 colleges in India, of which 5,386 are UGC recognized. More than half of the professionally oriented colleges are state or central government colleges. Central government colleges are generally considered to offer instruction of a very high quality. For the most part, however, the quality of instruction at affiliated colleges is of a much lower standard than at the affiliating university.

Constituent College

Educational standards are generally considered to be better at constituent and autonomous colleges than at most affiliated colleges. Constituent colleges are normally located in close proximity to the main university campus and associated infrastructures, and therefore enjoy a closer association with the university than the more geographically dispersed affiliated colleges. They tend to offer more master's-level programs than affiliated colleges, but a majority of their offerings are still at the undergraduate level.

Autonomous Colleges

India's 138 autonomous colleges, which are only permitted in 8 states, have a much higher degree of control over the design and restructure of their curriculums and assessment methods, in addition to having the right to set their own admissions standards. While the affiliating university still awards the degree, the name of the college appears on the degree certificate. Autonomous colleges offer programs from certificate to postgraduate and M.Phil. The UGC must approve the establishment of an autonomous college and it also maintains a degree of quality control over academic standards, which are generally considered to be very high. The country's 138 autonomous colleges count among their number the 17 highly prestigious Regional Engineering Colleges, which are currently in the process of being upgraded to the status of institutes of national importance.

Programs and Degrees

Stage I: Programs leading to the award of **Bachelor Degrees** in arts, science, commerce and social sciences are nearly always three years in length. Bachelor awards are defined as Pass (general) or Honors degrees. The award of Pass degrees in the arts, sciences or commerce is based on the study of English and one Indian language in addition to two or three other subject areas. Students who complete the three-year program are awarded a **Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science** or **Bachelor of Commerce (BA, BSc, BCom)**. In Honors programs, students focus on an area of specialization in the third year after completing core courses in the second year. Honors programs are not offered at all universities.

Professional Bachelor Degrees require longer periods of study than the standard arts, science or commerce degrees. Degrees awarded following these programs are professional as well as academic

qualifications. With the exception of the bachelor of education, laws and library science, all are first degrees. In education, law and library science, applicants most hold a first bachelor's degree in order to be admitted to the second degree program. Four- or five-year professional bachelor's degrees are awarded in the following fields:

Degree	Level	Length	Qualification
Architecture	First degree	4 or 5 years	Bachelor (BArch)
Dentistry	First degree	4 years	Bachelor (BDH, BDM, BDS)
Education	Second degree (Honors)	1 year	Bachelor (BEd Hons)
Engineering/Technology	First degree	4 years	Bachelor (BSc – Eng/Tech, BE, BTech)
Law	First/second degree	5 years/3 years	Bachelor (BL/LLB)
Library science	Second degree	1 year	Bachelor (BLSc/BLib/ BlibSc/BLISc)
Medicine	First degree	5.5 years (includes 1-year rotation)	Bachelor (MBBS, BAMS, BUMS, BHMS)
Pharmacy	First degree	4 or 5 years	Bachelor (Bpharm)
Veterinary science and animal husbandry	First degree	4 or 5 years	Bachelor (BSc – Vet.)
Agriculture	First degree	(Normally) 4years	Bachelor (BSc + area of specialization)

** For a complete list of the degrees specified and recognized by The University Grants Commission: www.education.nic.in/htmlweb/ugc_degrees.htm

Stage II: Programs leading to the award of **Master Degrees** in arts, science and commerce (MA, MSc, MCom) require two years of full-time study and prior completion of a bachelor's degree. Most programs are assessed on the basis of coursework and end-of-year examinations only, and do not require the completion of a thesis.

Most of the **Master of Engineering (ME)** and **Master of Technology (MTech)** programs are one and one-half years in length and require a bachelor's degree in engineering for admission. Engineering programs frequently require candidates to qualify through the Graduate Aptitude Test for Engineers. **Master of Laws (ML)** programs are two years in length and require an LLB as a prerequisite for admission. Master's degrees are normally pursued in the same field as the preceding undergraduate degree. **Master of Computer Science and Applications (MCSA)** programs are always three years in length. **Master of Education (M.ed)** programs are always one year in length and in most cases the Bachelor of Education is required for admission. Most **Master of Agriculture (MAg, MScAg)** programs are two years in length. The **Doctor of Medicine (MD)** and **Master of Surgery (MS)** degrees are normally two or three years in length and build on the **MBBS**.

Entry to **MBA** and other management programs is based on a bachelor degree in any field of study. **Three-year Master of Science** degrees requiring a thesis have been introduced by a small number of universities in a limited number of disciplines.

In contrast with the non-research based arts, science and commerce master's degrees, the **Master of Philosophy (MPhil)** is a one-year degree based on examination and thesis. Entry to the MPhil requires the completion of a regular master's degree and may be required by some universities for admission to a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) program, which requires a minimum of two years of study.

Postgraduate Diplomas (PGDip) within the university sector almost always require a minimum of a bachelor's degree for admission. However, this may not be the case with non-university institutions. Programs range from six months to two years, although most require one year of full-time study. PGDip programs are generally professionally oriented. The Association of Indian Universities recognizes **Post Graduate Diplomas in Management (PGDM)** from a small number of non-university institutions as equivalent to an MBA from an Indian university.

Stage III: Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) programs are a minimum of two to three years in length and require a master's degree or MPhil in a related field for admission. Some universities admit candidates holding MBBS/ME degrees. Programs are based on research, dissertation and (oral) examination. Many universities offer the **Doctor of Letters (Dlitt)** and **Doctor of Science (DSc)** two to three years after the Ph.D. based on a body of published research.

NON-UNIVERSITY HIGHER EDUCATION

Institutions

Polytechnics and specialist institutes provide technical and vocational education. Polytechnics can be public or private and may be affiliated with a university. Polytechnic institutions and programs are normally approved by State technical education/examination boards. External examinations are administered at the end of each semester or year by the boards, which normally award the diplomas. In some cases, affiliating universities serve as external examining agents for diploma programs offered at affiliated polytechnics. Two such institutions are SNDT Women's University and M.S. University of Baroda.

Programs

Vocational/technical education prepares students for a variety of skilled occupations. Admission to these programs is usually based on the completion of Standard X and the School Secondary Certificate or its equivalent. Students who enter after Standard XII (HSC) are exempted from a portion of the required coursework in science and social science. Students who enter bachelor of engineering programs after completing a three-year post-Standard X diploma program in engineering technology sometimes are exempted from a significant portion of the first year of coursework. In these cases, exemptions will be clearly indicated as such on the mark sheet.

Diploma programs are offered in a range of engineering and technological fields. Students normally follow generalized curriculums in the first two years, as defined by AICTE, after which they can specialize in the third year. Polytechnics also offer higher-level diplomas, known as **Advanced** or **Post Diplomas**, based on the completion of a diploma program or a bachelor degree. Programs are generally offered in highly specialized technical fields and require from one to two years study, although programs can vary depending on the institution.

Management Education

The most popular non-university field of education in India is management. While many universities offer bachelor and master-level management programs, there are a large number of non-university institutions and university-affiliated colleges that offer two-year **Post Graduate Diplomas in Management (PGDM)**, a small number of which are recognized as equivalent to the MBA (see above). Admission is based on the prior completion of a bachelor degree.

Foremost among management schools are the six **Indian Institutes of Management** —Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Calcutta, Indore, Kozhikode, Lucknow — which enjoy a high level of respect both domestically and internationally. The **IIM PGDM** is considered much more desirable a credential in India than a university MBA. IIMs also offer a four-year **Fellow of the IIM** program, which is research and coursework based, and requires the completion of a dissertation. Admission to IIM PGDM programs is based on the competitive Common Admission Test. Admission to the Fellow program requires a master's or PGDM. While IIMs receive a blend of state and industry funding, most management education providers are strictly private.

Computer Education

Given the rapid development of computer education in India, the Department of Electronics Accreditation of Computer Courses (DOEACC) was established to "accredit, examine, and monitor computer training and education in the 'non-formal' sector."

Although computer programs are emerging at polytechnics and universities where degrees are recognized by either AICTE or DOEACC, these programs are most commonly found in the private sector. While many of these programs are designed to develop basic computer skills, numerous institutions offer specialized programs in modular format, with different levels of accreditation by the DOEACC as follows:

- **O Level** (Foundation), one-year program at the diploma level
- **A Level** (Advanced), one-year post-diploma level
- **B Level** (Master of Computer Applications equivalent), three-year program considered bachelor/master equivalent
- **C Level** (Postgraduate, MTech), 18-month program at professional master degree level

DOEACC maintains a database of accredited institutions and accreditation ratings on its website at: https://www.doeacc.edu.in/jsp/accr_rating.htm.

Two of the larger proprietary, non-university, post-secondary educational providers — APTECH and NIIT (National Institute of Information Technology) — offer their own modular formats. APTECH offers five principal programs of study, while NIIT offers three main programs, the **GNIIT** being the most commonly seen. The program is made up of four or five semesters of computer study, followed by two semesters of professional practice (internship), and requires two years of undergraduate study for admission.

Accountancy

A **Practicing Chartered Accountant** is a person who is a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), which conducts examinations, grants certificates and exercises disciplinary control over members. Candidates wishing to train as accountants must pass the **Entrance Examination of the Institute** (with the exception of BCom/BLaws holders), and undergo 3 to 4 years of practical and theoretical training, while preparing for **Intermediate** and **Final Examinations**. Candidates who pass both examinations become registered as an **Associate Member** of ICAI. Many Indian universities accept associate membership as adequate preparation for admission into MPhil and Ph.D. programs.

TEACHER TRAINING

Pre-School/Nursery

The minimum academic and professional qualifications for pre-school teachers is either a Secondary School Certificate (Standard X) or its equivalent, or a diploma/certificate in pre-school teacher education from a program of a duration of no less than one year, or B.Ed (Nursery). If teaching at the pre-school level and the first two years of elementary, teachers are required to have a High School Certificate (Standard XII) or its equivalent with a passing grade of at least 45 percent, or a diploma/certificate in nursery teacher education from a program of a duration of no less than two years.

Primary

Primary school teachers are trained at state run **Teacher Training Institutes** (TTI) or **Primary Teachers' Colleges**. In some sates, TTIs are known as **Junior Basic Training Institutes (JBTIs)**.

Prospective **lower primary** teachers (Standards I-V) enter two-year programs after 10 years of schooling (SSC). **Upper primary** teachers (Standards VI-VIII) complete two-year programs upon completion of upper secondary education (HSC). Graduates from both programs are awarded the **Teacher Training Certificate**.

Some universities run bachelor-level education programs with specializations in elementary or early childhood education **(BEl.Ed, BEd)**. The National Council for Teacher Education lists institutions recognized by the States to run teacher training programs: www.ncte-in.org/recoginst.htm.

Secondary/Upper Secondary

Teachers at the secondary level are required to have a bachelor's degree in education **(BEd)**, which requires one year of full-time study following the bachelor degree. Prospective teachers also have the option to enroll in four year integrated programs after Standard XII. Upper secondary teachers (Standards XI-XII) may be required to have **master's degree** in their area of specialization.

WES GRADE CONVERSION GUIDE

Suggested scale for India:

Scale	U.S. Grade Equivalents
60-100	A
55-59	B+
50-54	B
43-49	C+
35*-42	C
0-34	F

*At selected institutions, a lower grade may be considered passing.

By Division	U.S. Grade Equivalents
I (First Division)	A
II (Second Division)	B/B+
III (Third Division)	C/C+

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Feature

Quality Assurance in Indian Higher Education

By Jagannath Patil

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), India's premier higher education quality assurance agency, today stands at a crossroads after 11 years assessing quality standards in Indian higher education. As an autonomous body established by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1994, the Council has assessed and accredited more than 2500 institutions and has gone from being viewed somewhat skeptically and suspiciously to being acclaimed for facilitating a culture of academic quality. In its early years, the NAAC moved cautiously to popularize the concept of external quality assurance, and to encourage voluntary internal quality assurance and self-improvement mechanisms at the institutional level. As the pace of NAAC operations accelerate in its second decade of existence, new sets of challenges are emerging which are paving the way for internal policy shifts.

A Complex System

The NAAC quality assurance process has benefited from a thorough study of established accreditation mechanisms worldwide. It is, however, designed to meet the needs of one of the world's largest, most diverse and most complex systems of higher education, which comprises 17,967 institutions catering to the needs of some 10.5 million students. The profile of institutions that have been accredited runs the gamut at the university level, a sector in which over 300 institutions are categorized according to the nature of their college affiliations and jurisdictions (affiliating vs. unitary), their funding (state vs. central) and their specializations (deemed universities and institutes of national importance). There is also great variety within the college system where schools can exist as affiliated, constituent and autonomous institutions. With such a diverse variety of institutional type, the NAAC has had to make a concerted effort to develop generic formats and standards of assessment that are applicable across the board. The instruments of assessment and accreditation adopted by the NAAC are based on internationally compatible models and have so far received general acceptance in the Indian higher education community. Assessment tools such as the institutional self-study report, on-site visits, and the strengths/weaknesses descriptive reports have been recognized to offer a fair degree of transparency in the accreditation process. In addition, the NAAC has been successful in triggering healthy competition for better accreditation results in a system that is sometimes characterized by not only its complexity, but also its complacency.

The NAAC Assessment & Accreditation Process

Methodology

In conducting the assessment process, the NAAC follows a four-stage process:

1. Developing the national criteria of assessment, which varies by institution type;
2. Preparation and submission of a self-study report by the institution;

3. Site visit by an external peer team, which includes the validation of the self-study report and the drafting of recommendations for the assessment outcome (the report is shared with the head of the institution at the end of visit and is reported to the NAAC along with a confidential recommendation on grading);
4. Final decision by the Executive Committee of the NAAC.

The self-study report and peer-team validation form the backbone of the assessment process. The NAAC distributes manuals that prepares higher education institutions with detailed guidelines on the preparation of the self-study report and the specifications of the assessment and accreditation process.

Criteria for Assessment

The NAAC has identified the following seven criteria to serve as the basis for its assessment procedures:

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

In completing the self-study report, an institution is expected to detail its operational performance with reference to these criteria. These criteria are assigned different significance for different types of institutions (see table below). They are further subdivided with core indicators or criterion statements which provide assessors a complete breakdown of the assessment requirements.

Criteria Weighting by Institution Type

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 and Learning Resources	15	15	15

Criteria	University	Autonomous Colleges	Affiliated/Constituent Colleges		
Student Support and Progression			10	10	10
Organization and Management			10	10	10
Healthy Practices			10	10	10

Assessment Outcome

After the self-study report and external visits are completed, criterion scores are issued with a detailed assessment report. The criterion scores are used to arrive at the overall institutional score. If the overall score is more than 55 percent, the institution is awarded “Accredited Status” and assigned an institutional grade on a nine-point scale:

Score	Institutional Grade
95-100	A++
90-95	A+
85-90	A
80-85	B++
75-80	B+
70-75	B
65-70	C++
60-65	C+
55-60	C

Institutions that do not attain the minimum 55 percent score are notified that they were “Assessed and Found Not Qualified for Accreditation.” Provisions within the NAAC assessment framework for institutions that do not meet the 55 percent threshold require that they be reassessed after three years or face the rare possibility of closure. The particular consequences of a negative assessment, however, are left to the key stakeholders — management, government, funding agencies and the public at large. To date, just 13 institutions (0.5%) have been found not qualified for accreditation. This low figure is partly explained by the voluntary nature of the accreditation process, and that colleges applying for accreditation must have a university affiliation plus five years of operational experience. A successful accreditation outcome is valid for a period of five years after which the institution is expected to volunteer for re-accreditation.

Re-accreditation

Building on the field of experience of other quality assurance agencies, an Indian methodology for re-accreditation has been developed. The improvements (or degradations) that have occurred during the

five-year accredited period and the action taken on the assessment report are the focus of re-accreditation. To make optimum use of information and communication technology for effective data management, part of the re-accreditation process is done electronically. The first round of re-accreditations began in 2005 and approximately 20 institutions have so far been reassessed and re-accredited by the NAAC.

Continuous Quality Improvement

To achieve the goal of making quality assurance an ongoing focus and priority integral to the functioning of Indian institutions of higher education, a number of post-accreditation activities have been developed. The NAAC has for the last two years been promoting the establishment of Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQAC) at all higher education institutions as a post-accreditation quality sustenance measure. IQACs are composed of administrators, academics and community stakeholders, and they are responsible for a range of activities designed to promote and develop internal cultures of quality control. With its belief that qualitative changes should come from within, the existence of an IQAC is now required by the NAAC as pre-requisite for re-accreditation.

Two additional priorities topping the NAAC policy agenda are initiatives designed to 'promote best practices' and 'student participation in quality assurance'. The NAAC is developing a database of best practices at accredited institutions and disseminating it through a promotional campaign that includes a series of seminars and publications. The NAAC has developed a Student Charter to be adopted by institutions. It outlines the importance of student feedback and participation in the promotion and internalization of an institutional culture of quality. Currently, the NAAC is leading an international project group on Student Participation in Quality Assurance with the support of the Asia Pacific Quality Network.

Wider Participation and Acceptance

From the initial phase of apprehension surrounding the philosophy of external review, the NAAC has gradually been able to build a greater appreciation from the higher education community for the intrinsic benefits of accreditation. For example, the wider participation of academia in NAAC policymaking has been of great benefit in building a greater acceptance of the assessment process. This has been achieved in part by organizing hundreds of seminars throughout the country. As mentioned above, it is now the intention of the NAAC to expand student participation in the process to further widen representation. In addition to organizing seminars, the NAAC's publication program has ensured effective dissemination of information about assessment and accreditation, while the development of manuals and guidelines through national consultations and workshops, involving a wide cross-section of academia, has lead to a greater acceptance and appreciation of the NAAC methodology of assessment and accreditation. NAAC manuals and publications are made available at: www.naac-india.com/publications.asp.

APPREHENSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

While the list of NAAC achievements in its short ten-year history is encouraging, the list of apprehensions and concerns is also quite long. There are a few concerns that have haunted the NAAC from its inception and now, even with increased acceptance from academia, new challenges are emerging. A brief summary of some of these challenges follows:

The Numbers Game: It is often asked whether it is possible for all Indian higher education institutions (HEI) to be accredited by the NAAC in a reasonable time frame? If yes, then what is that time frame? In response, the NAAC maintains that because accreditation is voluntary it is unrealistic to expect all 17,000 of the country's HEI's to undergo the accreditation process. Therefore the Council has restricted its focus to institutions that receive development grants from the UGC. This number comes to approximately 6,000, which is well within the reach of the NAAC in a five-year cycle with its proven capacity of assessing 1,500 institutions per year. The NAAC is of late advocating the formation of regional and/or specialized accreditation agencies that will operate under NAAC guidelines and be responsible for accrediting different HEI categories. In this respect, the NAAC would operate as an umbrella organization for accreditation organizations not unlike the U.S. Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

To Grade or not to Grade? The debate over the desirability of grades as an assessment outcome is ongoing, however, the NAAC has justified grading, almost from the outset, as a necessary element of a

system chocked with regulatory mechanisms where a mere Yes/No status provides insufficient feedback. Grading has been proven as a motivating factor in large higher education systems where the quality of providers varies to extreme degrees: from below average operators to world-class institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology. Knowing where you are on the quality scale can help institutions and students plan for the future.

In practical terms, less than 1 percent of NAAC grades have been challenged before the grievance redressing committee set up by the Council, and no lawsuits have been filed to dispute an NAAC grade. These facts help to demonstrate that the relevant debate should not be about whether or not to grade, but about how to use the accreditation status and the grade awarded by the NAAC. For instance, NAAC efforts to promote the use of the assessment outcome for decision-making purposes can be witnessed in the UGC's decision to link the outcome of assessment and accreditation to the award of a portion of its institutional development grants. Furthermore, NAAC accreditation with a suitable grade (B++ and above) is now linked to the granting and continuation of 'autonomous' status and 'deemed-to-be' university status.

Different organizations are now using the NAAC grading system for a variety of regulatory purposes. The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), for example, has made it mandatory for all teacher-training institutes to secure a minimum of a B+ grade before they are allowed to expand or implement new courses. In the state of Karnataka the government requires all its aided colleges to secure a minimum of a B grade in order to receive state subsidies, while in the state of Maharashtra, institutions must have undergone accreditation (with a positive assessment of 55%+) in order to continue operations. Thus the perspectives vary according to the stakeholder, and more decisive efforts are expected in this direction. In addition to the use of NAAC assessment outcomes domestically, it would be interesting to see how overseas agencies differentiate or relate accreditation grades given to particular higher education institutions.

***Program vs. Institution**:* Because the NAAC is engaged in institutional accreditation, it is often difficult to address international queries regarding the status of programs offered by accredited institutions. One justification given is that institutional accreditation takes into consideration the standards of all constituent departments and programs offered at a particular institution. In reality, the problem with individual program accreditation is one of capacity in terms of manpower and infrastructure which the NAAC does not currently have, even though it has the expertise. Independent program accreditation is an NAAC consideration for the future.

Top Institutions are not Undergoing Accreditation: Another issue that concerns the NAAC is the reluctance of a few publicly funded institutions, including a handful of elite universities, to come forward for assessment and accreditation. Even though the total number is relatively small, and primarily in and around Delhi, it is worth noting that despite directions from the UGC, these universities have not complied thus far. This is partly because the UGC and NAAC lack the necessary teeth to require institutions to undergo the accreditation process. However, given the fact that approximately 60 percent of Central Universities and most State Universities — including bastions such as the University of Calcutta, Mumbai and Madras — stand accredited by the NAAC, there is no general concern within the Council surrounding the acceptance of NAAC assessments. The NAAC maintains that it is the concern of top policymakers to decide whether to insist on accountability from institutions receiving a large portion of public funds.

State or Center, Who Has the Influence? Any central monitoring or uniformity initiative in Indian higher education involves painstaking efforts owing to complex legal provisions. In the federal structure of Indian governance, higher education is under the regulatory and financial control of both state governments and the Central government. Of the 17,000 higher education institutions in India, more than 90 percent receive funding from their respective state governments, while approximately 6,000 are recognized and receive development grants from the UGC. These development grants constitute only a minor portion of institutional operating budgets in relation to grants from state governments. As the NAAC accreditation process is a central initiative, it is widely considered that unless state governments intervene to make accreditation compulsory, higher education institutions will be less likely to volunteer to undergo the accreditation process.

Foreign Operators — the Looming Business Opportunity: With just 12 percent of the tertiary student-age population enrolled in higher education, India is seen from abroad as a tertiary education market with great untapped potential. The Indian government is yet to declare a policy position on the entry of foreign operators into the country, however, draft legislation based on the recommendations of the CNR RAO

Committee — established by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) — is currently in the consultation process. According to the findings of a recent study by the NAAC and the National Institute of Educational Planning, there are currently just a few dozen foreign institutions of education operating in India through various arrangements such as twining, mutual recognition and study center modes. Considering the stand taken by the Association of Indian Universities to oppose the entry of foreign providers, many stakeholders — including potential foreign operators and their Indian counterparts, and students wishing to earn a foreign degree without having to leave India — are waiting for the union policy declaration with crossed fingers.

Preempting the possible entry of greater numbers of foreign education providers into India, the NAAC established a committee two years ago with representatives from the UGC and the MHRD to advise on a proposed quality assurance framework for international accreditation.

***Towards a Quality Assurance Framework*:** The multiplicity of accreditation agencies in India is another concern. At present, the NAAC, established by statutory authority, is the country's premier external quality assurance agency. Other accreditation bodies tend to be in-house mechanisms of different statutory authorities, e.g. the National Board of Accreditation of the All Indian Council of Technical Education, and the accreditation boards of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and the Distance Education Council. While these agencies conduct assessment and accreditation of programs or institutes within their respective domains, many specialized institutes that they accredit also volunteer for institutional accreditation by the NAAC. Quite a few engineering, medical, fine arts, law and management institutes, for example, have been accredited by the NAAC. This trend points out the need for a national quality assurance framework which will coordinate and integrate the functions of the various players engaged in assuring the quality of the diverse range of educational opportunities offered by the Indian higher education system. Establishing this single point of reference for the status of any Indian higher education institution or program, serving the needs of the Indian public as well as the international community in terms of informing/authenticating higher education offerings, represents one of the greatest challenges for the future.

Indian higher education policymakers have an uphill task ahead of them in coming up with convincing answers to such concerns and adopting enduring strategies as the liberalized Indian economy moves to new global frontiers.

NAAC AT A GLANCE:

- The NAAC performs institutional accreditation based on self-study and peer review.
- Accreditation on nine-point scale is valid for a period of five years.
- Assessments reports and grades are available to the general public: www.naac-india.com/accreditedall.asp.
- It is still a voluntary process, but a few states have made it mandatory.
- Assessment and accreditation is viewed as a development oriented process.
- Assessment & Accreditation processes by the NAAC have triggered several innovations and healthy initiatives on campuses.
- Accreditation is not pre-condition to operate in India. It is a periodic quality assurance mechanism over and above the regulatory checks and balances built into university and government agencies.
- The consequences of failing an accreditation assessment or not volunteering for accreditation are left to the Government and funding agencies.
- The NAAC has so far accredited 122 universities and about 2500 colleges, probably the largest accreditation figure in a cycle by any QA agency.
- The second cycle of accreditation commenced in 2005.

NAAC Achievements after a Decade of Assessments:

- The NAAC has established the capacity to handle a large number of institutions. The last two years consecutively, it assessed and accredited more than 1000 institutions.
- In partnership with stakeholders, the NAAC has been encouraging institutions to be proactive in promoting quality cultures. By way of example, many states have established State Quality Assurance Cells to promote assessment.
- The NAAC has published nine statewide Analysis of Accreditation reports providing policy inputs to state governments, universities and other key policymakers. Thus moving beyond accreditation, the NAAC has expanded its scope by strengthening its advisory role.
- Collaborations with other national professional bodies for accreditation of specialized subjects have been initiated. The National Council for Teacher Education has an MoU with the NAAC for accreditation of teacher training institutions. The NAAC is working with regulatory bodies from other professional/specialized fields to explore potential avenues of collaboration.
- The NAAC is active in international forums. As a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), the NAAC organized the sixth bi-annual meet of the member agencies in 2001 in Bangalore. In addition to being on the Governing Board of INQAAHE, NAAC Director Prof. V S Prasad is the Vice-president of the Asia-Pacific Quality Network, a regional network of the INQAAHE.

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