



# International Journal of Contemporary Research In Multidisciplinary

## Review Article

# NAAC Accreditation: Indian Higher Education

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14765893>

### Abstract

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) was founded to assist volunteer organizations with self-evaluation. Through accreditation and evaluation, NAAC has been attempting to raise the standard of higher education for the last two years. It has had a major influence on raising the standard of higher education. In its updated accreditation system, NAAC has made it more robust, transparent, objective, ICT-enabled, and surmountable. The self-study report has been transformed into a matrix that is both qualitative and quantitative. Additionally, starting in the academic year 2023–2024, AQAR is being recommended as a qualitative and quantitative matrix. This article discusses various aspects of the Indian higher education system's accreditation process using parts of the NAAC's updated accreditation framework. This framework takes into account various enhancements and revisions to the accreditation process. An updated accreditation framework refers to the evolving standards and practices that accrediting bodies adopt to improve the accreditation process and better meet the needs of institutions, industries, and society. With the growing emphasis on quality assurance, accountability, and continuous improvement, accreditation systems worldwide adapt to changing educational, organizational, and regulatory environments. These updates may involve new evaluation criteria, more flexible processes, and a focus on outcomes-based assessment.

### Manuscript Information

- ISSN No: 2583-7397
- Received: 09-12-2024
- Accepted: 19-01-2025
- Published: 29-01-2025
- IJCRM:4(1); 2025: 76-79
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- Plagiarism Checked: Yes
- Peer Review Process: Yes

### How to Cite this Article

Singh AK. NAAC Accreditation: Indian Higher Education. International Journal of Contemporary Research in Multidisciplinary.2025;4(1): 76-79.

### Access this Article Online



[www.multiarticlesjournal.com](http://www.multiarticlesjournal.com)

**KEYWORDS:** Assessment and Accreditation (A&A); Higher Education; Quality Assurance; Higher EI; and the Revised Accreditation Framework (RAF)

### INTRODUCTION

According to the University Grants Commission (UGC), acquiring academic knowledge, developing one's personality, and contributing to society are the three primary goals of higher education. The four pillars of education, according to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), are: Learning to know o Learning to do o Learning to be kind (to fellow humans), and learning to live together (with other family members and society). Education should not be in

terms of examination and marks. It must be fulfilled with emotions to accept the challenges in society to serve them. Education is not like a bucket to fill up. It is like a fire to kindle *i. e.* "Tamaso Ma Jyotirgamaya". Some great thinkers expressed their thoughts about Education. Aristotle thought that "The roots of Education are bitter but the fruit is sweet". Mahatma Jyotiba Fuley expressed that, "There is no path to success in life without Education, it is only a tool to become smart and live as a human". Mahatma Gandhi advised "Study as if you were to live forever,

live as if you were to die tomorrow". Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar said that, "Education is the milk of tigress, one who will assimilate it roars". Dr. Bhausaheb Panjabrao Deshmukh stated that 'Education is the prime source of living life' and Swami Vivekananda expected that 'Education must be human being creator'. Indira Gandhi advocated that "Education is a continuous process from the minute we are born until we die". In Bhagwat Gita shloka, it is stated that "You have a right only to action, never the fruits thereof; let not the fruit of your action be your motive nor let there be any attachment to inaction". Upanishada says that "Na Hi Dhnyanen Sadrushyam Pavitramiha Vidhya Te". Thus, Education is only the means that teaches us a lot and leads to humanity. Higher education plays a versatile role in emerging knowledge economies all over the world. Quality education is defined as an education that effectively meets the requirements of students, prepares them for the future, and provides them with the skills, information, and values necessary to thrive in life. It includes not just academic knowledge, but also the cultivation of critical thinking, creativity, social skills, and emotional intelligence. Quality education is a fundamental right for all people and is necessary for personal growth, social fairness, and economic prosperity. NAAC is investigating the possibility of introducing excellence into the Indian educational system through accreditation innovations. All Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must now go through the NAAC's Assessment and Accreditation (A&A) process. Accreditation and Evaluation (A&A); Educational Institutions (HEIs)

### Reformation Objectives

Reformation objectives are often the goals or aims that drive initiatives to reform or enhance systems, institutions, or behaviors. Historically, the term "Reformation" is most closely linked with the 16th-century religious movement that aimed to rectify alleged corruptions within the Roman Catholic Church, resulting in the formation of Protestant churches. However, in a broader sense, reformation objectives can apply to changes and improvements in numerous sectors such as education, healthcare, governance, and social systems. Reformation objectives are deeply rooted in a desire for change and improvement. Whether in religious, social, economic, or political contexts, the goals of reformations are often centered around addressing injustices, modernizing systems, promoting human rights, and ensuring that institutions serve the needs of all individuals. These objectives seek to create a fairer, more inclusive, and efficient society that reflects the values and needs of contemporary times. Maintaining higher-quality education in the country has become more difficult due to the quantity of HEIs and enrollment capacity. Over the next ten years, the Indian higher education sector will undergo an extraordinary shift. Economic and demographic shifts are driving this development; by 2020, India's economy will rank third in the world, and its middle classes will have grown significantly. India will surpass China as the nation with the greatest tertiary-age population by 2020, with more than half of its people under 25. (2014, British Council). India has 903 universities, 39,050 colleges, and 10,011 stand-alone

institutions, according to the AISHE report 2017–18. An estimated 36.6 million students are enrolled in higher education overall, with 19.2 million being boys and 17.9 million being girls. During this time, the students' Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) increased to 25.8% in 2017–18. (AISHE, 2017–18). China has a GER of 43.39%, while Canada has an 88% GER, the USA has an 80.9% GER, Australia has a 79.8% GER, the UK has a 52% GER, and France has a 50% GER. Ahmad and Singh (2011). A total of 12,84,755 educators are employed. In India, only 3.6% of colleges provide Ph.D. programs, while 36.7% offer PG-level programs. In 2017, 34,400 students received Ph. D. degrees. NAAC's expertise in A&A, which aims to continuously improve educational quality, has had a significant influence. NAAC is continually working to improve its review and accreditation process, taking into account altering trends in higher education, the rapidly changing global landscape, stakeholder feedback, and lessons learned from experience. The fundamental purpose of the NAAC assessment is to improve the quality of the nation's higher education institutions. To create the assessment parameters, the NAAC organized various brainstorming sessions with higher education professionals to design the technique. It has also organized a number of seminars and workshops to increase awareness about assessment and accreditation. The UGC has made accreditation a requirement for all higher education institutions. As of September 26, 2018, the NAAC had certified 11,616 colleges and 554 universities. This includes 3,321 colleges and 159 universities for Cycle II; 737 colleges and 66 universities for Cycle III; and 11 colleges for Cycle IV (NAAC, 2018). Over 1600 higher education institutions were accredited during the 2016-2017 academic year. The NAAC is now in the process of thoroughly upgrading and restructuring its operations. By 2030, India will be one of the world's youngest countries, with an estimated 140 million college-bound students. Furthermore, one in every four graduates worldwide would have completed their education in India. NAAC: Two Decades of Experience in Pioneering In 1994, the University Grants Commission (UGC) established the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) as an independent agency to examine and certify the nation's higher education institutions, as well as to solve quality issues.

### Institutionalization of Self-Evaluation and Peer Evaluation

Institutionalization of Self-Evaluation and Peer Evaluation is the formal and systematic integration of self-assessment and peer review processes into the operation of institutions, whether in education, business, healthcare, or other organizational settings. These evaluation systems are critical for enhancing quality, maintaining accountability, and cultivating a culture of continuous improvement. The institutionalization of self-assessment and peer evaluation provides a formal approach to promoting organizational improvement, accountability, and collaboration. Organizations that integrate these procedures into their culture can achieve continuing growth and development, improve performance, and adapt to challenges with agility. However, successful institutionalization necessitates clear criteria, enough training, and a commitment to using assessments

for constructive development rather than just assessment. Every institution has an Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) that has the power to handle the accreditation and assessment procedures. IQACs carry out a number of quality initiatives and best practices. IQACs are used in the process of continuous quality improvement and quality culture. The processes for quality assurance are formalized. The results are used by the state government as planning inputs for state-level analysis. The accreditation results have been used by numerous policymakers, including the UGC, MHRD, National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE), Dental Council of India (DCI), and state governments, for funding and other decisions.

#### a) Building the Quality Indicator Framework

By surveying different stakeholders, NAAC considered their opinions. To help design the QIF, Universities, Autonomous Colleges, and Affiliated/Constituent Colleges formed a Core Working Group (CWG) and Sectoral Working Groups (SWGs), which held a series of meetings. To calibrate QIF benchmarks, a pilot study was conducted with around 100 HEIs from across the country. Finally, a national consultation was held to improve and finalize the modified accrediting system. Key Features of the QIF: For each key indicator, predetermined weights are applied to qualitative and quantitative measures. Each Metric has a benchmark range on a 5-point scale (very high to very low) or a binary scale (Yes or No). The calculation method follows the present grading pattern, except binary scale indications, where 'Yes' yields the highest value, 4, and 'No' yields the lowest value, 0. Indicators are expected to be accompanied by a data sheet that validates the quantitative response provided by higher education institutions. Pre-qualifiers for Peer Team Visits were pioneered. Student Satisfaction Survey As part of QIF, the NAAC has attempted to conduct a Student Experience Survey, whose results will be included in the accrediting process. The students will maintain their anonymity throughout the procedure. The institution is required to give a list of total student strength, including their student identity (ID) number, Aadhaar ID number (or any other valid ID number in the absence of Aadhaar), degree course in which the student is enrolled, email address, and mobile number. The NAAC will send an online link to the student's email address or mobile number, and the student must complete the survey by a certain deadline. The questionnaire covers several areas of the teaching-learning process. (Metric Number: 2.7.1) The student poll will be examined with custom software that aggregates responses and assigns a score.

#### b) Alumni Engagement

The major indicator 'Alumni Engagement' focuses on alumni interaction with the university in academic and financial issues. Alumni play a vital role in quality improvement; this key indicator encompasses a variety of alumni contributions, such as financial aid in the form of gifts or donations to institutional growth.

#### c) Innovation Ecosystem

Because it describes novel and innovative activities, the Innovation Ecosystem is an important critical indicator for improving an institution's quality. It addresses the institution's innovative initiatives, which include an incubation center, workshops/seminars on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), industry-academia inventive practices, innovation prizes, and on-campus start-up support, among others.

#### d) Institutional Values and Social Responsibilities

The inclusion of 'Values and Ethical Practices' is an independent quality assurance parameter for the assessment/accreditation of higher educational institutions. It will give a significant boost to quality initiatives and good governance. Our regulatory organizations and networks will need to play a far larger role in sharing their knowledge and practices in order to evolve value-based ethical procedures for quality assurance. This key indicator focuses on social issues and concerns such as gender equity, attitudes toward people with disabilities, inclusion and situatedness, human values, and professional ethics. It also addresses environmental issues.

#### e) Institutional Distinctiveness

This crucial indicator describes an institution's distinctness from other institutions. An institution is defined by its purpose, vision, mission, stakeholders, access to resources, cultural atmosphere, and physical location, among other things. An established institution will be recognized for certain and distinct characteristics that distinguish it from others in terms of characterization, as evidenced by its actions.

#### f) Data Validation and Verification (DVV) and Pre-qualifier Score

At the second level, data/information submitted in the SSR will be processed to an online assessment mechanism/process, followed by an online review to establish a pre-qualifier score. Institutions that achieve a 30% score on the quantitative indicators will be eligible for on-site peer review/assessment. Pre-qualifier scores are excluded from the SSS.

#### g) Technology

Quantitative quality measurement may have limitations, which is why NAAC strives for a careful balance between Qualitative Metrics (QIM) and Quantitative Metrics. Metrics on the use of ICT and e-resources, for example, are considered critical in the context of national initiatives such as Digital India, SWAYAM, and the National Data Repository. The availability of ICT facilities (classrooms with ICT facilities) will be assessed in terms of their use. The fourth cycle of e-assessment will be carried out based on the certification input in the first two windows

#### h) RAF – Challenges and Way Forward:

While implementing the RAF, NAAC faced various obstacles during the fine-tuning phase, which are detailed and handled below. Stakeholders' resistance to fully transitioning to an ICT-

based data-driven model: NAAC has received criticism and concerns about the move from peer review to an ICT-based data-driven paradigm from HEIs in rural, hilly regions. The responsible authorities intend to establish an Educational Media Centre to reach all unreachable areas. This center will organize a series of interactive sessions with HEIs and Assessors to improve accreditation capability and teach assessors using digital communication technology. Need to evaluate feedback from the field and fine-tune the framework. Based on feedback from stakeholders/field, NAAC has undertaken an activity to amend and fine-tune the framework. The current model/methodology being used in the field is fine-tuned and tested. In the near future, the same framework will be improved and field tested to meet the needs of stakeholders. n) Applicability of framework for specialty HEIs (Sanskrit/Yoga, etc.) To cope with mono faculty/specialist program institutions, NAAC has been working on developing an accrediting framework for colleges that offer specialized programs such as Sanskrit, Yoga, dance, and music. NAAC is currently developing evaluation manuals for Yoga and Sanskrit programmes/HEIs. o) Concerns/litigation related to tying CGPA with grants/recognition/status There has been a field reaction to the difficult results, which have been downgraded compared to the previous cycle assessment, and there is also concern over the relation of NAAC results to funding from UGC, MHRD-RUSA, and so on. Better-performing institutions may receive more funding, but this has an impact on poorer-performing institutions, which are already at a disadvantage. This has raised the number of appeals and may result in a few lawsuits.

#### **I) Concerns/litigation due to linking of CGPA with grants/recognition/status**

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#### **CONCLUSION**

According to this assessment, the revamped NAAC accreditation structure is a positive step forward. The new era of digital accreditation with quality indicators provides the platform for benchmarking-led quality improvement in Indian higher education. The certification findings show that the reforms are fulfilling their primary objectives, which include better data management, more transparency, strengthened objectivity, and the use of ICT to improve quality. It suggests that initiatives should be taken to strengthen and advance its A&A policies and practices. The NAAC is currently updating its methodology and procedures to meet the demands of the digital age, after two decades of pioneering and trailblazing effort in building India's external quality certification system for higher education. The updated accreditation framework incorporates a number of quality assurance concepts, including the Student Satisfaction

Survey (SSS), Data Validation and Verification (DVV), Quality Benchmarking, Innovation Ecosystem, Alumni Engagement, Institutional Values, and Distinctiveness in the Accreditation Process. These concepts and methods must be understood by all parties. NAAC must also devise a strategy to address stakeholders' concerns about the new, data-driven accrediting system in order to establish the revised accreditation framework.

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