

# *Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education*

# 12

## *Introduction*

The need for quality assurance and accreditation has been established especially in the context of globalization and financial constraints impinging on higher education. This unit provides an introduction to the twin and integrated issues of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education. There are over 250 university level institutions and over 12000 colleges, which offer various types and levels of programmes. These institutions widely differ in terms of the mandate to offer programmes and courses, student enrolment, infrastructure, delivery systems, sources of funds and governance. They are established by the Center and the State governments and, therefore, the power to award degrees/diplomas/certificates is vested in them by the respective governments. The universities and colleges are autonomous and self-governing institutions. They are responsible for the quality and standards of their programmes. Each institution has its own internal procedures for assuring and enhancing quality of its provision, and for satisfying itself that appropriate standards are maintained. These are carried out through the procedures for the design of programmes, the approval of programmes, and the monitoring and evaluation of programmes. Most institutions carry out both regular monitoring and periodic review of programmes. However, the extent to which these functions are effectively performed require validation by an external agency to ensure that all the stakeholders are duly satisfied. The major beneficiaries of (Higher Education Institutes) HEIs' activities, mainly the government, employers and students, pay for the costs of education. Therefore, they seek value for money and accountability. Further, as the quality of HEIs and their core activities are critical from the view point of both overseeing the overall educational systems as well as for providing competent manpower for accelerating the pace of national development, there are genuine concerns for quality assurance and accreditation (QAA).

## *Learning outcomes*

By the end of this unit, you will be able to

- to underscore the significance of quality assurance and accreditation, particularly in the context of recent developments in higher education and globalization of education;
- to define the concepts of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education;
- to describe the approach and methodology of quality assurance and accreditation as pursued by the institutions and apex bodies in India;
- to discuss the benefits of quality assurance and accreditation that are realized by the stakeholders;
- to present an account of recent progress and to identify the major challenges to quality assurance.

## *The quality concern*

In the recent times, several developments have taken place which have changed the perceived requirements for quality assurance in higher education. These include:

### ***Expansion and diversification of higher education***

The national efforts to ensure education for all have resulted in widening of the bases of elementary and secondary education. As a consequence, there has been a dramatic growth in higher education demand and provision over the past decades. This is also in response to growing and changing manpower requirements of the world of work, which require higher levels of technical and professional competence of the work force to be able to function in the knowledge intensive economy. Tertiary education of some form has now become a mass phenomena, as an increasingly large number of students are likely to participate in this endeavour over their life time. That higher education activities are a visible part of the society and its contribution to national development and well being are now being widely recognized by governments world-over.

The increasing volume of activity and diversity of the student population has led many institutions to review and diversify not only their course offerings, but many aspects of internal re-organization and teaching-learning process. The extent to which the relevant initiatives by institutions suitably respond to the changing requirements of the society and economy, needs to be assessed to ensure institutional accountability to the funding agencies and other stakeholders.

### ***Demand for greater transparency and accountability***

In the wake of globalization and in line with international trends, HEIs are required to strengthen their reporting and accountability procedures. As there is general paucity of funds, limited resources are to be allocated among the different sectors on the basis of cost-effectiveness of their programmes, for which enough evidence is required to be produced. These developments have sharpened interest in the nature and value of the service universities provide to the community through teaching, research and extension related functions. While the pressure for greater accountability has continued to rise, there has been a strong trend towards reducing the balance of permanent academic positions, mainly as a cost-cutting device. The number of short-term academic and administrative positions is increasing, which has long term implications for academic and administrative careers and for quality of university teaching and research.

### ***Impact of technology***

Major developments in information technology have led to changes in study requirements, teaching and learning arrangements and in areas such as research organisation, and university administrative practice. There is an increased focus on multi-media strategies for promoting teaching and learning, which call for review of the traditional arrangements for quality assurance.

### ***Emergence of non-traditional providers of higher education***

The advent of non-traditional providers of higher education - for example, the emergence of open and virtual universities, the growth of private institutions, the growth of multi campus and trans-national institutions and franchising - has fragmented the higher education sector. Thus, quality assurance mechanisms which have stood the test of time for a system of essentially national, government funded self accrediting, traditional and distance education institutions, need to be reviewed to take account of this rapid diversification of provision, and to ensure that the new arrangements are of adequate standard.

### ***Global competitiveness***

Most higher education institutions have proved themselves highly effective and entrepreneurial in expanding their student intakes both from within and beyond national borders. As there is an explicit policy for taking higher education abroad, this has become a major factor in India's external accounts through fee-paying foreign students and the sale and promotion of services. Universities from many other countries are also in the market for enrolling students and providing services. In a sense, there is thus import as well as export of educational services. India now faces an international environment in which success would depend on the quality of tertiary level of teaching and research.

Many countries have therefore moved to develop national system of QAA and India is no exception. The prospective international students, faced by a plethora of possibilities for studies, may well feel such a hallmarking process of external validation tips the balance in favour of enrolling in accredited institutions.

In fairness to HEIs as a whole, many believe that India would do well to establish a comparable, national system of external validation. Accordingly, steps have been taken to assist the higher education sector through development of **performance indicators** and **benchmarking** systems. These developments give rise to questions about the specific aspect of universities that bear comparative analysis including the value of measures relating to different categories of institutions. Such exercises lend perspectives on the extent to which the institutions are successful in improving internal and external efficiency.

In this context, in a period of rapid growth and change, attention is being paid to such matters as selection procedures for admission, curricula, students' attrition rates, length of study, staff qualification, financing and costs of study and research capability. It is in the interest of higher education to be able to present evidence systematically on the ways in which these and like matters are being addressed.

### ***Weakness of existing system of quality assurance***

The existing system of quality assurance in higher education operates at a variety of levels and comprises both long standing elements and recent developments towards national approach. The current practices and its weaknesses may be described below:

#### ***Current practice***

The basic plan for quality assurance framework lies in the establishment of HEIs, mainly universities as self-accrediting institutions through legislation and regulation, and the accreditation of other higher education courses by the statutory bodies. Academic Boards and Governing Councils have major responsibilities for the quality of educational provision including academic standards.

A number of external mechanisms for reviewing aspects of internal university activities are of long standing among the universities. These include the use of external examiners for higher tasks done by research and some honours degrees, the role of professional bodies and associations in accrediting professional courses such as Medicine, Law, Management, Engineering and Architecture, peer review mechanisms in relation to research funding and the use by the universities of a wide variety of internal/external review and reporting procedures for faculties, departments, centers and whole institutions.

#### ***Major shortcomings***

There are however several weaknesses in current mechanisms. These are: (i) lack of a clear mechanism for ensuring comparable standards of judgments in different states and for different institutions; (ii) The criteria for recognition as a university such as the Central, State, 'deemed' to be universities, institutions of national importance, etc. widely differ and therefore it needs to be reviewed; (iii) lack of transparency in the existing system of independent external verification of standards and quality of universities or self-accrediting institutions.

#### **Self-assessment**

- 1. Discuss the recent changes that have propelled the move for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in higher education?*

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### *Principles of quality assurance*

A common approach based on the following principles needs to be evolved such that: (a) The system should be transparent and it should encourage rather than constrain diversity and be sensitive to distinct mission of each institution; (b) External quality assurance process should be consistent with the existing practices such as to complement institutional process rather than duplicating or replacing them; (c) Criteria and processes should be adoptable to a change in global environment and change in communication processes; and (d) It should facilitate progressive improvement in standards. It should provide for rigorous external verification of quality assurance strategies through peer review.

Quality assurance should cover the academic affairs of institutions, relating to courses, staff qualification, research, academic administration and decision making mechanisms, and services and facilities in support of academic processes. It is necessary that the system be able to deal with several different classes of institutions, which currently operate in the country, which encompass non-university institutions, accredited by the Councils.

In this backdrop, the framework of quality assurance and accreditation, as evolved by the institutions and regulatory bodies become important to realize the mandate of HEIs.

### *What is quality assurance and accreditation ?*

Quality assurance refers to the policies, attitudes, actions and procedures necessary to ensure that quality is being maintained and enhanced. Accreditation refers to an evaluation of whether an institution qualifies for a certificate status. The status may have implications for the institution itself (eg. permission to operate) and/or its students (eg. eligibility for grants) and/or its graduates qualified for certain employment.

In fact, the underlying purpose of accreditation is to determine the extent to which institutions are discharging their responsibilities for realizing their goals and for the quality of education provided to enable the students to attain standards. Thus, accreditation is the process of examining institutional procedure for assuring quality and assessing the arrangements for effective implementation of strategies for achieving stated objectives.

There are two major purposes which accreditation serves: one is quality assurance; determining standard of quality and performance for minimum acceptability in the interest of public; and the other is quality improvement: providing the service that is designed to improve institutions and programmes through an external review process.

### *Current criteria and procedures for QAA*

The principle elements of our existing system for accreditation and quality assurance in higher education are as follows:

Universities are established by the State under legislation with authority to accredit their own programmes and are primarily responsible for their quality assurance.

The Center and the State governments have responsibility for establishment of institutions or for approving new applications from institutions wishing to operate as universities within a well defined jurisdiction. And the proposals from other service providers wishing to offer higher education programmes are evaluated by the peer group, constituted by the statutory bodies to ensure that the proposed institutions are comparable to those of existing public universities. The Government bodies like **University Grants Commission (UGC)** and **All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)** have evolved norms and guidelines for establishment and operationalisation of higher education institutions. The information collected and analysed by these bodies can be used to inform quality improvement and assurance decision. The qualifications framework provides clear descriptions of awards offered in higher education, and the apex bodies maintain registers of approved programmes and providers.

Universities have internal processes to assess new course proposals and promote staff development, and most have entered into relationship with other universities to facilitate staff exchanges, collaboration in research, and benchmarking of standards of course delivery.

Standard course approval mechanisms involve consultation with relevant industry or professional bodies, and formal consideration and approval by academic boards. Normally, courses are reviewed for re-accreditation on a five year basis.

A variety of arrangements are in place for assessments and improvement of teaching and staff publication and research records are reported and scrutinized. Promotion criteria normally focus on quality of teaching, research activity and community service contributions.

For various reasons, it has become a common practice to arrange programme reviews carried out by external assessors to compare the quality of academic activities with other leading institutions. The quality assurance mechanism, as evolved by external reviewers, depend on one or a combination of a number of methodologies, the most important of which are self studies or self-evaluation, peer review by panels of experts, use of relevant statistical information and performance indicators and service of key groups, such as students, graduates and employers. At the national level, the most common forms of assessment are horizontal review of disciplines and vertical evaluation of institutions.

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#### Activity

1. Discuss the procedure for approval of programmes/courses adopted by your college/institution. Do reflect and state how it effects quality.

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### *National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and issues of QAA*

The approach and methodology evolved by the **National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)** incorporates all these essential elements of quality assurance and accreditation, as we shall discuss here in below. At the outset, the major aims and objectives of NAAC may be described.

NAAC is an autonomous institution, established by the UGC in 1994. The primary objective of NAAC is to assess and accredit institutions of higher learning with an objective of helping them to work continuously to improve the quality of education. The process of accreditation is as under :

“NAAC has formulated a three-stage process for assessment and accreditation as given below:

- Preparation of the self-study report by the institution to be submitted to NAAC;
- Validation of the self-study report by peers visiting the institution; and
- The final decision of NAAC based on the self-study report and the recommendations of the team of peers.

### **Stage I: Preparation of the self-study report**

The first and the most important step in the process of assessment and accreditation is the preparation of the self-study report by the institution along the guidelines formulated by NAAC. The institution has to prepare the self-study report in two parts, where part-I is the organization of data and part-II is the self-analysis based on part-I. This will be an internal exercise by the institution expected to be done with honest introspection. It aims at providing an opportunity for the institution to measure its effectiveness and efficiency, and to identify areas of its strengths and weaknesses. NAAC believes that an institution that really understands itself - its strengths and weaknesses, its potentials and limitations - is likely to be more successful in carrying out its educational mission than those without such self-awareness. Self-study is thus envisaged as the backbone of the process of assessment and accreditation.

It is through the self-study report that NAAC understands the institution. In fact, the self-study informs and orients the peer team to assess the institution during the visit. Hence the institution needs to present the factual details of all the aspects of its functioning, viz., the inputs, processes and the product generated, in a meaningful way. As the entire exercise would be based on this document, it should be prepared with utmost care. The self-study report gives details, which will help make the exercise effective.

### **Stage II: Visit to the institution**

On receiving the self-study report from the institution, NAAC will decide on the panel of peers and inform the institution. If the institution has any reservation against any of the members, it can record its objection, without suggesting alternatives. Choosing from among the other panel members, NAAC will constitute the peer team. The team will visit the institution and look for patterns of evidences to validate the self-study report. The peers will interact with the various constituents of the institution and also check documentary evidence to understand the functioning of the institution. At the end of the visit the Chairperson of the team will present a detailed report on the quality of education offered by the institution to the head of the institution and a copy of the report with the acceptance of the head of the institutions will be forwarded to NAAC.

### **Stage III: Final decision of NAAC**

The Executive Committee of NAAC will review the report and take a decision about the grade of the institution. The grade will be valid for a period of five years.

### **Units of Assessment**

To assess and grade the institutions of higher education following the three step process mentioned above and make the outcome as objective as possible, NAAC has developed an instrument. Though the methodology and the broad framework of the instrument are the same, there is a slight difference in the focus of the instrument depending on the Unit of Assessment. There are two types of accreditation - institutional and departmental. With reference to the **type of accreditation**, the following are defined as **units of assessment**:

#### **Institutional Accreditation**

**University:** University Central Governance structure along with all the under graduate and postgraduate departments.

**College:** Any College - affiliated, autonomous or constituent - with all its departments of studies.

#### **Departmental Accreditation**

**Department:** Any department/school/center of the university (e.g. Department of Physics, Economics etc..)

Separate instruments (Manuals) have been developed to suit units of higher education such as the Universities, Autonomous Colleges, Medical Institutions, Distance Education Institutions, Department Accreditation and Self-appraisal of Teacher Education Institutions.

### ***Criteria for assessment***

Any assessment and subsequent accreditation should be made with reference to a set of criteria. NAAC has identified the following seven criteria to serve as the basis of its assessment procedures:

- Curricular Aspects
- Teaching-learning and Evaluation
- Research, Consultancy and Extension
- Infrastructure and Learning Resources
- Student Support and Progression
- Organisation and Management
- Healthy Practices

The highlights of the criteria are as given below:

#### **Curricular aspects**

This aspect deals with the mission of the institution, its relevance and translation to the programmes offered. The goals and objectives of the institution, should define its distinctive character and address the needs of the society and students, it seeks to serve. It has to reflect both the tradition of the institution and its vision for the future. It requires information on how the curriculum design of the institution offers diversity and flexibility to learners. It also seeks information on the practices of the institution in initiating and redesigning courses that are relevant to the regional and national needs.

#### **Teaching-learning and evaluation**

This criterion deals with the efforts of the institution in providing appropriate teaching-learning experiences to learners. It also looks at the adequacy and competency of the faculty who handle the various programmes of study as well as the efficiency of the evaluation methodology of the institution.

#### **Research, consultancy and extension**

This part of the format seeks information on the activities of the institution with reference to research, consultancy and extension. It also deals with the facilitating aspects of the institution to promote the same and their outcome.

#### **Infrastructure and learning resources**

This aspect requires data on the adequacy and optimal use of the facilities available in the institution to maintain the quality of the academic and other aspects of the campus life. It also seeks information on how every constituent of the institution - students, teachers and staff, benefit from these facilities.

#### **Student support and progression**

The highlights of this criterion are the efforts of the institution to provide the necessary assistance for good student experiences in the campus and to facilitate their progression. It also seeks information on the student and alumni profiles.

## Organisation and management

This criterion requires data on the policies and practices of the institution in the matter of planning, human power requirement, recruitment, training, performance appraisal and finance management.

### Healthy practices

This criterion should focus on the **innovative** and **unique practices** of the institution that add to its academic ambience. Healthy practices vary from institution to institution. These are some examples:

- Educational innovations
- Working with specific mission and goals
- Master plan for the institutional growth
- Feedback from stakeholders for improvement of the institutional functions
- Innovations in management and communication
- Quality enhancement strategies

The self-study report should conform to the criteria chosen for assessment. If the inputs from the institution under these criteria are collated, it should give adequate details on all the features of an institution such as its policies, practices, programmes, resources and performance. This would facilitate the institution to appraise itself of its standing besides helping the assessors to make a proper assessment.” (NAAC Handbook)

### The Grading System

The weightages attached to different parameters for different types of institutions are as under:

**Table 1 : Parameters and weightages adopted by NAAC**

S.No.	Criteria	University	Affiliated/ continuing colleges	Autonomous Colleges
1.	Curricular aspects	15	10	15
2.	Teaching-learning and evaluation	25	40	30
3.	Research consultancy and extension	15	5	10
4.	Infrastructure and learning resources	15	15	15
5.	Student support and progression	10	15	10
6.	Organization and management	10	10	10
7.	Healthy Practices	10	10	10

On the bases of these weightages, if the overall score is more than 55 per cent, the institution gets the “Accredited Status” and any score less than that will lead to “Not Accredited” status. The accredited institutions are graded on a nine point scale with the following rate values.



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

**Figure 1 : Grading system adopted by NAAC**

The grade is also supplemented by a qualitative report by the team that would highlight the strength and weakness of the institution under various criteria. Institutions which do not attain the minimum 55% point for accreditation, are also intimated and notified indicating that the institution is "ASSESSED AND FOUND NOT QUALIFIED FOR ACCREDITATION". The range of marks of each letter grade, and actual total marks obtained as well as criteria-wise marks are intimated to the institutions and notified.

***The approach of NBA (AICTE)***

The approach adopted by National Board of Accreditation (AICTE) for accreditation of technical, professional and management institutions is similar to that of NAAC, discussed above. A distinct feature of NBA's procedure is that it judges the institutions on the basis of both the norms and guidelines which NBA has evolved for different types of institutions as well as the institutional performance. The criteria for assessing institutional performance and the weightages attached to the undergraduate and post-graduate programmes are as under:

**Table 2 : Parameters and weightages adopted by NBA**

Criteria	Weightages	
	Under-graduate	Post-graduate
Human Resources Faculty	200	200
Students	100	100
Finance and Physical Resource	100	100
Mission & Goals	100	70
Research & Development	30	150
Industry-Institute Interaction	70	100
Supplementary Process	50	50
Teaching Learning Processes	350	250

The extent to which an institution meets the infrastructure requirements, as stipulated by NBA for different types of institutions and levels of programmes, and qualitative assessment by the peer groups determine the grade awarded by the NBA.

**Self-assessment**

2. *Discuss the criteria for institutional assessment adopted by NAAC highlighting its positive as well as negative fall-outs on institutions*

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***Recent progress and the benefits of QAA***

There has been a dramatic progress in establishment of HEIs both under the public and private sectors. HEIs offer a variety of programmes through on and off-campus, adopt different strategies of teaching and learning, enroll heterogeneous groups of learners in diverse discipline and engage themselves in multifarious activities of teaching, research and extension services. The concern for quality assurance has therefore acquired paramount significance. The National Policy on Education (1986) and the Programme of Action (1986) responded to this concern by initiating action. Accordingly, the colleges and universities were encouraged to make a voluntary self-assessment of their performance. A Council, the policies stated, would then assess and accredit performance primarily on the basis of the self-assessment. This led to the establishment of NAAC in 1994, the major function of which, as mentioned above, are: (a) to act as a catalytic agent to motivate HEIs to achieve excellence in all spheres of academic activity; and (b) to promote the idea of accountability among the academics.

Since its establishment, the Council has made significant headway in evolving the procedures and criteria for assessment and accreditation of universities and colleges. In response to the UGC and MHRD notification that **all the colleges and universities have to submit self-study report for the process of assessment and accreditation before December 2003**, a large number of institutions have taken appropriate initiative in this direction. As many as 418 colleges and 94 universities have already been granted accredited status. By the end of the year 2003, these figures are expected to be doubled.

Likewise, nearly six thousand technical and professional institutions, mainly under private management have been accredited by the NBA of AICTE. It is mandatory for such institutions to undergo the process of accreditation.

***The benefits of QAA***

The following major benefits, as identified by NAAC, are derived from the process of quality assessment and accreditation.

- Helps the institution to know its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities through an informed review.
- Helps in identifying internal areas of planning and resource allocation.
- Enhances collegiality on the campus.
- The outcome of the process provides the funding agencies with objective and systematic database for performance funding.
- Initiates institution into innovative and modern methods of pedagogy.

- Gives the institution a new sense of direction and identity.
- Provides the society with reliable information on the quality of education offered by the institution.
- Employers have access to information on standards in recruitment.
- Promotes intra-institutional and inter-institutional interactions.

In view of these benefits, academics by and large concede that the pressures of mass higher education and financial constraints have changed the conditions of higher education sufficiently that formal externally validated methods of quality control must be a central component of higher education systems. There is, however, another school of thought which fears that HEIs may lose their monopoly to validate learning through accreditation done externally, and their present role as guardians of intellectual standards could be easily usurped. Further, starved of resources, their capacity to innovate could be squeezed out of them. As they are players in an academic market place which is increasingly global in its competitiveness, differences in the status and resources of universities could amplify well beyond those which currently exist. Other than these concerns, there are intense debates on approaches to quality assurance and accreditation or what procedure should be followed to ensure transparency and objectivity in the mechanism of quality assurance, so that the above benefits are effectively realized.

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### Activity

2. Do you consider the system of assessment and accreditation a threat or a boon for the higher education system in the changing times? Substantiate your answer.

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### *Challenges ahead*

The issue of how to measure educational quality will continue to pose daunting challenges on account of both the procedural aspects as well the fundamental educational issues. The recent developments, mainly globalization of education and the extensive use of educational technology have made the issue of quality measurement even more complex. The quality assurance systems have to constantly modify their procedures to address a growing variety of open and distance learning opportunities, which is stimulated by the use of information technologies. The review procedures developed for conventional system are hardly sufficient for electronic delivery methods, which has a wider reach. It would therefore require a greater clarity as to how electronic delivery can be objectively evaluated.

A large number of institutions are offering distance education programmes. They use multimedia strategies, enroll higher number of students of heterogeneous backgrounds and differ considerably in their capacities to use electronic media and delivery infrastructure. This development has serious implications for quality assurance agencies. It would require effective monitoring of distance education providers that offer courses at different learning centers and through different modes and that without ensuring adequate infrastructure as stipulated by apex bodies.

A similar concern arises in the context of international student mobility due to globalization of education. When students enroll in other countries or foreign universities offering programmes in the students' home country, the study plans must be evaluated to establish equivalence of their degree programmes. While there may be a mutual understanding between some countries and institutions for student transfer and credit recognition, there is much to be desired in so far as acceptable methods of maintenance and determination of standards are concerned. Quality assurance of programmes that are based on electronic delivery methods is further complicated by the fact that learning need not occur at the same time or place of instruction. How is this learning monitored when the instructor does not have a face to face contact with a student, and how well can learning be assessed by remote methods that are not buttressed by direct contact? With international study, learning occurs at a different time and place and the sponsoring institutions has limited control over the circumstances in which it takes place. When there are differences in instructional settings, including cultural and linguistic differences, the outcomes of instructional process, mainly in terms of what the student learns, are difficult to assess and monitor. This will continue to remain a challenge for quality assurance.

The emergence of private higher education institutions, which offer courses on profit taking basis and offer instruction in multiple sites and without permanent staff and other facilities, poses a greater problem for quality assurance agencies. In such type of institutions, the relationship between the capacity to offer quality programmes and the scale of delivery of services is hard to establish. Because of internationalization of education, the solutions to the major issues and problems concerning quality assurance should be sought through cooperation among institutions and countries. Therefore, global effort is needed to deal with the challenge to quality assurance.

### *Summary*

Quality assurance and accreditation in higher education is defined as systematic management and assessment of procedures adopted by higher education institution or system to monitor performance and to ensure achievement of quality improvement. Quality assurance aims to give stakeholders confidence about the management of quality and the outcome achieved.

The provision for education is mainly the responsibility of the Government, which is interested in educational quality assessment because: (i) the Government has Constitutional obligation to assure quality of education: (ii) accountability in use of public resources is to be assured; and (iii) provision of quality education for all the eligible aspirants is a political decision, which enjoys a strong social support. The institutions established and managed by private sector not only emulate the norms and standards set by the apex bodies and other public sector institutions but also endeavour to excel in them. In the context of **globalization**, without assuring quality of relevant programmes, it is not possible to ensure credit transfer and students' mobility, prepare a cadre of manpower, which can ensure efficient use of resources, improve productivity and competitiveness of economy. It is imperative therefore to identify the characteristics of quality, evolve strategies for fostering it, identify the factors affecting it, examine the relationship between quality and resources, and explore the measures of monitoring changes over time. To do this, a common framework is needed for gathering qualitative and quantitative data and for analyzing them, to assess quality and to assure the stakeholders of their quality.

As the responsibility of maintenance of standards of higher education is vested with UGC. The UGC has established NAAC for assessment and accreditation of universities and colleges. A three stage procedure is followed, which involves: (i) preparation of the self-study report by the institutions based on the defined parameters; (ii) validation of the self-study report by a team of peers through on-site visit and interaction with the functionaries of the institutions; and (iii) the final decision on assessment and accreditation by the NAAC.

Following this approach, a large number of institutions have already been accredited. National Board of Accreditation of AICTE follows a similar approach and procedure for accreditation of technical, professional and management institutions established by the public and private sectors.

The outcomes of accreditation exercises undertaken by the agencies like NAAC and NBA have significant impact on improvement of quality of higher education, the strengths and shortcomings of the institutions are detected for initiating appropriate action. The stakeholders - the government, students and employers - duly benefit from information and analysis of institutional performance. In the globalised environment, the emergence of trans-national institutions and use of electronic media for delivery of programmes through distance mode, pose a greater challenge to quality assurance agencies for (i) clarifying issues pertaining to the procedures for quality assurance and (ii) evolving acceptable criteria for assessment of learning attainments.

A joint effort between the institutions and the accrediting bodies would be needed to ensure good coordination and communication, so that they can adhere to an ethical code of good practice and be objective, fair and rigorous in the task of accomplishing quality assessment and accreditation.

### *Unit-end activities*

1. Discuss the global changes that have led to the emergence of accreditation and assessment as an essential requirement in higher education.

### *Suggested readings*

Ansari, M.M. (2003), 'Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Institutions in India: Some Perspectives' Paper presented in *ICDL Conference*, Hong Kong.

Antony, Stella (2001), 'Impact of Assessment and Accreditation on Institutions of Higher Education'; *University News*, Vol. 39.

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