

INSTITUTIONAL BEST PRACTICES: AN OVERVIEW IN CONTEXT OF NAAC

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ABSTRACT

“Best” implies the unique or the “topmost”, however, “Best Practice”, implies according to the Oxford dictionary, not something unique to an individual or an institution but a “way of doing something that is the usual or expected way in a particular organization or situation: common/ current/ standard practice”. The connotation of “best practices”, as used by the NAAC, is broader. According to NAAC ‘best practices are quality enhancing academic/ administrative/ infrastructural strategies adopted by highly accredited institutions of higher learning in the present instance’. Best practices are those which add value to human life and support the main cause of an institution. Institutions undertake different types of best practices as per their institutional environment and try to bring about innovations and new ideas. Emphasis on the use of technology has become the driving force in today’s education system. NAAC consider it as one of the significant best practice which can boost the educational atmosphere and could instill the scientific approach to issues or problems of society. Conclusively, best practices are the agents of positive change for a particular educational institution and society as well. NAAC firmly believes that quality and excellence should be the vision of every higher education institution.

Keywords: *Accreditation, Best Practices, HEI, Mission, NAAC, Value Framework, Vision*

INTRODUCTION

NAAC is a national-level rating agency for HEI. As an autonomous institution, NAAC assesses and accredits HEI through an informed review process. The main objective of NAAC is to make ‘quality- as the defining element of higher education. The process of assessment and accreditation by NAAC is very significant in the sense that it helps an institution to know its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. Our experiences with NAAC suggest that whatever may be the outcome/result, it brought qualitative changes in the overall performance of an assessed institution. Therefore, the institutional preparedness for NAAC’s assessment and accreditation in itself is perhaps the most important best practice at genetic meaning. To elaborate a bit ‘best practices’ may be viewed from three different the first place. However, in the context of NAAC ‘best practices’ are somewhat different from its genetic meaning. To elaborate a bit ‘best practices’ may be viewed from three different perspectives:

1. NAAC has provided 100 points to “Innovation and Best Practices” under a separate Criteria (Criteria-VII);
2. NAAC has seven criteria of assessment. Under each one of the seven criteria of assessment, the NAAC has identified the elements of the best practices that contribute to the efficient and effective functioning of the institution. They are called criterion statements. The criterion statements focus on the norms that generate the practices; and
3. Description of at least two institutional best practices (as per NAAC format: Title of the practice, Objectives of the practice, the context, the Practice, Evidence of success, and Problems encountered and resource required.

VISION, MISSION & VALUE FRAMEWORK OF NAAC

VISION: Qualitative development of higher education in India through a combination of self and external quality evaluation, promotion, and sustenance initiatives.

MISSION: To arrange periodic assessment and accreditation; to promote quality teaching-learning and research; to encourage self-evaluation, accountability, autonomy, and innovations; to undertake quality-related research studies, consultancy, and training programmes; and to collaborate with other stakeholders of HE for quality evaluation, promotion, and sustenance.

VALUE FRAMEWORK: Quest for excellence to promote core values, e.g. National development, Global competencies among students, inculcating value system in students, Use of technology, etc. among the Indian HEIs.

BENCHMARK OF BEST PRACTICES

The practices which add commendable value to an institution may be considered as benchmarks of best practices. In other words, institutional excellence is the aggregate of best practices followed in different areas of institutional performance. The purpose and intent of the best practices benchmarking can be summarized as the:

- Understanding the fundamentals that lead to success,
- Focus on continuous improvement efforts, and
- Close the gap between existing practice and that of the best-in-class institutions.

BEST PRACTICES: STAGES IN APPLICATION

Application of best practices largely depends on our ability to adapt the five-stage strategy:

1. Identification of best practices
2. Implementation of best practices
3. Institutionalization of best practices
4. Internalization of best practices
5. Dissemination of best practices

The above five-stage can be described as the “Four I and D Model” which may briefly be summarized as under:

The **identification** of best practices depends on many variables such as institutional goals, pedagogic requirements, global concerns, local contexts, nature of learners, competencies of staff, infrastructure facilities, and governance requirements. All these should be kept in mind while identifying the best practices.

The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) suggested some guidelines for the identification and application of good practices. The best practices should

- be dynamic and revisited periodically;
- recognize diversity and cultural and historical contexts;
- not lead to the dominance of one specific view or approach; and
- promote quality of performance.

Implementation of best practices strategies includes planning, resource mobilization, capacity building, monitoring, and evaluation. The implementation approach focuses more on performance than on promises.

Institutionalization is the process of making the best practices an integral part of institutional working.

Internalization refers to making things a part of one’s nature by conscious learning and assimilation. Internalization of best practices means making excellence an integral part of one’s habit and nature.

The NAAC is advocating for every institution to establish an Internal Quality Assurance Cell, with one of the functions of recording and **dissemination** of best practices followed by that institution. The recording of practices is also a means of quality improvement.

CRITERION-WISE BEST PRACTICES

Experiences of the NAAC: As pointed out in the beginning, the NAAC has identified the elements of the best practices Under each one of the seven criteria of assessment, that contribute to the efficient and effective functioning of the institution, and they are called *criterion statements*. Under ideal conditions, the best practices

we can expect an ideal institution to adopt are identified as *criterion statements*. The Criterion-wise best practices may be noted as under:

Criterion I—Curricular Aspects

- The institution should clearly state goals and objectives
- Academic programmes consistent with its goals and objectives.
- Wide range of programme with adequate academic flexibility.
- Feedback from academic peers and employers is used in the initiation, review, and redesign of programmes.

Criterion II— Teaching-Learning and Evaluation

- Facilitating the effective running of teaching-learning programmes.
- A well-conceived plan for monitoring student progress continuously.
- Reliable and valid student assessment procedures and systems
- An effective mechanism to recruit qualified and adequate faculty.
- An open and participative mechanism for evaluation of teaching, research, and work satisfaction of the faculty.
- opportunities for continued academic progress and professional development of faculty

Criterion III— Research, Consultancy, and Extension

- Promoting research culture among faculty and students.
- Encourage faculty to publish in academic forums.
- Promoting faculty participation in consultancy work.
- Responsive to community needs and conducts relevant extension programmes.

Criterion IV—Infrastructure and Learning Resources

- Adequate physical facilities to run the educational programmes efficiently.
- Infrastructure keeps pace with the academic growth of the institution.
- Effective mechanisms for maintenance and optimal use of infrastructure.
- Adequate library and computer facilities and other learning resources with easy access for all its constituencies.

Criterion V—Student Support and Progression

- Clear information to students about admission and completion requirements for all programmes, the fee structure and refund policies, financial aid, and student support services.
- Sufficient and well-run support services to all its students.
- Effective monitoring of student progression
- An effective mechanism to use student feedback for quality enhancement.

Criterion VI—Organization and Management

- Functioning of offices and departments on the principles of participation and transparency.
- Academic and administrative planning move hand in hand.
- Welfare schemes for all stakeholders.
- Fair and expeditious grievance redressal mechanisms at all levels of the institution's functioning.
- Effective resource mobilization and planning development strategies.
- Judicious allocation and effective utilization of financial resources.
- Regular and standardized Budgeting and auditing procedures.

Criterion VII—Healthy Practices

- Sensitivity to changing educational, social, and market demands.
- Promoting an ambiance of creativity and innovation.

- Adopting quality management strategies in all academic and administrative aspects.
- Strives to promote value-based education, social responsibilities, and good citizenry.

EXAMPLES OF TWO INSTITUTIONAL BEST PRACTICES

As per NAAC format the two best practices selected by the institution needs to be elaborated under the heads: Title of the practice, Objectives of the practice, the context, the Practice, Evidence of success, and Problems encountered and resource required. It is quite obvious that the two best practices of institutions significantly vary due to their institutional distinctiveness on different parameters. Examples of such best practices from some of the highly reputed colleges are cited here for ready references.

Sl. No.	Name of the College	Best Practices
1	Cotton College, Guwahati, Assam	<p>1. Cotton College Social Responsibility Cell Outcome: improvement in education and health environment, contribution to the emotional health of oldies, improvement in education in this sector, impact on policymaking, manually prepared for mobile science laboratory in remote areas, gained infrastructural grant, WWF manuals, and handbook in Assamese, forest fringe areas became environmentally aware, changes in rural agriculture</p> <p>2. ICT Enhanced Learning Experience Outcome: improved attentiveness and engagement, increased knowledge retention, interactive and fun learning environment, quick understanding, easy tracking of response, enriched overall learning experience</p>
2	M. S. P. Mandal's Deogiri College, Aurangabad, Maharashtra	<p>1. Phule-Shahu-Ambedkar Lecture Series Outcome: one of the most acknowledged lecture series in Maharashtra, participation of various strata of society, eminent and knowledgeable speakers from all over the state, an outbursting response from students, people around the campus</p> <p>2. Exhibition and Demonstration of Science Experiments for School Students Outcome: a growing number of schools visiting the college, students interest increased in learning,</p>
3	S.S. Jain Suboth PG College, Jaipur, Rajasthan	<p>1. Community based Practices Fostering Community Responsibility Empowering Women: Laying Foundations for Better Society Outcome: a large number of students involvement, connectedness towards society, breeding of values and ethics, counseling for students</p> <p>2. Skill Development Programme Outcome: students selection ratio upward turn, students winning competitions, increase in student confidence, student performance increased, classroom interaction and participation increased</p>
4	Loyola College of Social Sciences, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala	<p>1. Live Lab Outcome: conducted 40 training programmes for 300 adolescent participants, life skills sessions for parents, life skill training</p> <p>2. BEE-Live: Biodiversity and Environmental Engagements Outcome: change in attitude towards environment, plantation in the campus, improvement in biota, population of insects, frogs, birds, etc. increased, reduced carbon content, quality of harvested rainwater increased, groundwater level improved.</p>
5	Stella Maris College (Autonomous), Chennai, Tamil Nadu	<p>1. Environmental Initiatives 2. Extension and Outreach</p>
6	St. Agnes College, Mangalore, Karnataka	<p>1. Agnes Towards Community (ATC) Outcome: fundraising by students for Endosulfan victims, increase in</p>

		attendance in Gram Sabha/ Gram Panchayat, effective implementation of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan 2. The Annual Academic Audit by the Internal Quality Assurance Cell Outcome: increase in paper presentation, publication, seminar, workshop, conference, documentation improved, master plan formulation, active involvement of stakeholders, the response from students
7	Midnapore College, Midnapore, W. Bengal	1. Research Activities and Quality Teaching 2. Student Centric Learning, Sports, and Cultural Activities
8	St. Joseph's Degree & PG College (Autonomous), Hyderabad, Telangana	1. Regular Conduction of Student Centric Activities Outcome: orientation programme for UG, MA, and MBA, organization of workshops, seminars, guest lectures, festivals, special days 2. Encourage Faculty and Student Research Outcome: faculty and student development programmes, increase in articles, seminars, conferences, workshops, research activities
9	Parvatibai Chowgule College of Arts and Science, Gogol-Margo, Goa	1. Departmental Activities Outcome: a large number of students participated in these activities run by departments, help in shaping leaders in them 2. Clubs and Forums Outcome: a large number of students participate in these activities, help them in shaping their personality and academics
10	St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad, Gujarat	1. SXCA Chronicles Outcome: documentation of all events, unity, and oneness in the institution 2. Developing Leaders through Volunteerism Outcome: students' positive approach, improved management skills, better performance, started soft skill programme.
11	J N College, Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh	1. Integration of ICT resources into classroom teaching 2. Passionate involvement of College fraternity in community services to inculcate human values among students.

It is evident that the best practices of HEIs vary significantly but the institution has to defend its mentioned practices.

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

After successful completion and submission of IQA (Institutional Information for Quality Assessment) NAAC normally provides 30 days to submit SSR from the date of IQA acceptance followed by SSS and clarification, if any, required during the process of DVV. It is important to note that the 70% score is system generated and only 30% from Peer Judgement. Most of the SGS is based on quantitative metrics. The Accreditation Grading is awarded within a week from the Peer Team Visit. It is well known that the Accreditation Grade range from A++ to D i.e. CGPA ranging between 3.76 and above and 1.5 & below. The recent changes in the assessment process are visible in the sense that:

- The earlier process of periodic assessment has been virtually replaced by a continuous process through the functioning of IQAC and its report uploaded to the institutional website as well as submission to NAAC.
- Division of Quantitative and Qualitative Metrics and the system of SGS
- Limited emphasis/score on Peer Team's on-site visit
- Comparatively a quick system of assessment.

The latest trend has brought a more systematic and scientific process, yet it can't be considered free from limitations. The SGS or the DVV process doesn't have a human touch. It is completely a crude statistical

exercise. In a heterogeneous and diverse country like India, where HEIs vary significantly in terms of management, location, accessibility, student's profile, admission procedures, fee structure, appointment procedure, infrastructure, and so on.. Uniform or homogenous metrics of evaluation is certainly under question.

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