

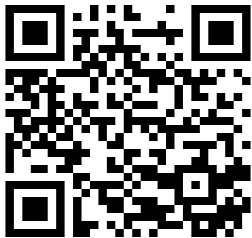


## Quality Assessment in Higher Education in India: With Special Reference to Curricular Aspects

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### Abstract:

In order to evaluate the "Quality Status" of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the nation, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) was founded in the year 1994. The HEIs are graded by NAAC according to a systematic procedure that determines their level of quality. In the meantime, NAAC updated and altered its manual to conform to the shifting conditions in the educational system. The current study sheds light on how curricular aspects are assessed and the recent changes made in its assessment. According to the study, NAAC streamlined the assessment and accreditation process by lowering the number of metrics. The NAAC gave colleges' free rein to put in the writing effort relevant to the concerned metrics by converting a few quantitative metrics into qualitative metrics. Although, NAAC eliminated few metrics, due to their repetition and lack of significance. In the revised manual, the metrics for common grounds are combined and presented as a single metric.

**Key words:** NAAC manual, Accreditation, Assessment, Affiliated colleges, Quality, Curricular Aspects.

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### 1.1 Introduction

The rising concern on the quality of education and its relevance in the late 20th century necessitated the existence of an Independent National Accreditation Agency. With the vision "to make quality the defining element of higher education in India", National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) came up in the year 1994, as an autonomous institution under University Grants Commission (UGC).

NAAC follows a systematic procedure to evaluate the quality of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and assigns appropriate grades to them. The

foundation for the entire NAAC assessment is Quality Indicator Framework (QIF), which consists of seven criteria. A few Key Indicators (KIs) are identified for each criterion. To assess the HEI quality in depth, metrics are developed for each Key indicator. Metrics are further subdivided into Quantitative Metric (QnM) and Qualitative Metric (QIM). For QnM, quantifiable facts and figures are required in NAAC-provided templates. QIM, on the other hand, requires brief writeup within the NAAC specified word limit.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) operate in a dynamic environment around the world. The need

to expand the higher education system, the impact of technology on educational delivery, the increasing private participation in higher education, and the impact of globalisation (including liberal cross-border and trans-national educational imperatives) have all necessitated significant changes in the Indian higher education system. In this backdrop, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) revised the Assessment and Accreditation Framework (A & A) in the year 2017 and made the whole A and A process transparent, ICT enabled, and Robust. Although, in compliance with the NEP-2020 recommendations, various revisions and enhancements were made to the NAAC manual later in 2017, Further, based on the feedback received from higher education stakeholders and a request from the Ministry of Education and the University Grants Commission, In January 2022, number of metrics, including both QnM and QIM, were decreased to simplify the NAAC's Assessment and Accreditation process for Affiliated/Constituent Colleges while maintaining

higher education quality. The new revised manual made effective from 1st June 2022.

The present study limits the assessment pattern followed by NAAC to assess the affiliated colleges in India. The assessment component of “curricular aspects” and changes brought in recent times.

### 1.2 Objective of the study

- To understand the changes brought in the NAAC assessment framework.
- To trace the changes in the assessment of Curricular Aspects.

### 1.3: Assessment Framework of NAAC

The whole assessment process is divided into three main components: Self Study Report (SSR), Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS) and The Peer Team Report. NAAC assigned 70% weightage to QnM metrics which is evaluated by the Data Verification and Validation (DVV) partner and the rest 30% is assigned to QIM metrics which is verified by the assigned peer team through onsite visit or hybrid mode.

**Table 1: Overview of changes between 2017 RAF and 2022 RAF**

Entries		2017 RAF	2022 RAF	Changes Traced
Assessment Weightage		1000	<b>1000</b>	No change
Criteria		7	<b>7</b>	No change
Key Indicators (KIs)	<b>UG</b>	31	<b>32</b>	Kept 32 KI for both UG and PG Affiliating Colleges
	<b>PG</b>	32		
Quantitative Metrics (QnM)	<b>UG</b>	58	<b>34</b>	Reduced the number of QnM
	<b>PG</b>	60		
Qualitative Metrics (QIM)	<b>UG</b>	35	<b>21</b>	Reduced the number of QIM
	<b>PG</b>	36		
Total metrics	<b>UG</b>	93	<b>55</b>	Total metrics reduced and kept same for UG and PG Affiliating Colleges
	<b>PG</b>	<b>96</b>		

**Source: NAAC Manuals**

In the 2017 manual, NAAC has bifurcated affiliated colleges into two groups as; UG and PG affiliated colleges. Keeping the total weightage same for both colleges, little difference was maintained in number of Key Indicators, key indicators wise weightage, number of metrics and metrics weightage.

After the feedback received from HEIs and Ministry of Education, University Grants Commission, in 2022 NAAC removed the bifurcation and brought uniformity in the assessment framework for UG and PG affiliating Colleges. Further it simplified the process by reducing the total number of metrics.

Table 1 provides the changes noticed between the 2017 Revised Accreditation Framework (RAF) and 2022 RAF. As per 2017 RAF, The total KIs for UG and PG colleges were 31 and 32, QnM were 58 and 60 and QIM were 35 and 36 respectively. However, in 2022 RAF, the difference was removed and uniformity maintained in the introduction of New Education Policy (NEP). For both affiliating colleges 32 KIs, 34 QnM metrics and 21 QIM metrics are retained.

Overall, NAAC simplified the entire procedure by reducing the count of metrics. It has removed a few metrics on the grounds of non-relevance and duplication. The metrics of common grounds are merged and presented as one metric in the revised manual. Further, by converting few QnM into QIM, NAAC has given freehand to colleges to put forth the efforts in write ups, related to concerned metrics.

**1.4: Curricular Aspects as one of Criterion in NAAC assessment**

Any educational institution's foundation is its curriculum. The duties that individual HEIs are responsible for in this regard, however, vary according to their administrative status. That is to say, an Affiliated College effectively functions as a teaching unit that is reliant on a bigger body. Specifically, the University for legalizing its academic and administrative procedures. Their relationship with the implementation of curricular

components is key, while engagement in the curriculum is secondary.

By understanding the importance of HEIs' role in following aspects; curricular planning and its implementation, adoption of academic flexibility at institution level, integrating cross cutting issues and efforts in improvisation of curriculum, NAAC incorporated a key indicator named “Curricular Aspects”.

NAAC Seven criteria framework includes Curricular Aspects as Criteria one, and allotted with 100 weightage. That represents 10% in total assessment weightage. The criteria covers the practices of an institution in launching a wide choice of programme options and courses that are in line with developing national and international trends and pertinent to local needs. Along with diversity and academic flexibility, career orientation, the development of multiple skills, a feedback mechanism, and the involvement of stakeholders in curriculum revision are all evaluated.

Table 2 shows the overview of criteria 1. It clearly depicts the total number of QnM and QLM are reduced to 4 from 8 and 2 from 3 respectively, to simplify the process. However, Key indicators are retained as it is.

**Table 2: Overview of Criteria 1 as on 2017 RAF and 2022 RAF: Curricular Aspects**

Entries	As per 2017 RAF	As per 2022 RAF
Total weightage	100	100
Key Indicators	04	04
Qualitative Metrics	3	2
Quantitative Metrics	8	4
<b>Total Metrics</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>

**Source: NAAC Manuals**

### 1.5: Key Indicator wise Analysis of Criteria One

NAAC has identified four Key indicators, namely; Curricular Planning and Implementation, Academic Flexibility, Curriculum Enrichment, and Feedback System, in order to evaluate the performance of the HEIs under Curricular Aspects. Irrespective of the revision in the manual, NAAC retained the four Key Indicators as it is and weightages are adjusted within. This section on Key indicator wise analysis will help to understand the changes brought in the assessment of curricular aspects in detail and the background for the revision.

The Affiliating Colleges' contribution to developing and designing curricula is quite minimal. They adopt the curriculum that the corresponding universities offer. Depending on its resource potential, institutional aims and concerns, and other factors, each college implements the

curriculum within the overall framework in a unique way. That is, each college plans its own calendar in accordance with the university calendar of events and visualizes the way the curriculum has to be carried out – activities, who, how, when etc.

The core of the KI is to assess how effectively an HEI is engaged in implementing the curriculum and how well it's executing its academic calendar. On the ground of existence of interconnection between two aspects, NAAC merged the both in 2022 RAF and lenience is given to colleges to present it in detailed manner combining both in specified word limit. Further, understanding the limited scope/opportunities for Board of Studies or Board of Examination, and mandatory rules of university for faculty to be a part of evaluation process, in the 2022 revised manual the metric 1.2.1 has been dropped.

**Table 3: 1.1 Curricular Planning and Implementation (20)**

Metric number and name as per 2017 RAF		Changes	Metrics number and name as per 2022 RAF	
1.1.1	The Institution ensures effective curriculum delivery through a well-planned and documented process	<b>Merged 1.1.1 and 1.1.2</b>	1.1.1	The Institution ensures effective curriculum planning and delivery through a well-planned and documented process including Academic calendar and conduct of continuous internal Assessment
1.1.2	The institution adheres to the academic calendar including for the conduct of CIE			
1.1.3	Teachers of the Institution participate in following activities related to curriculum development and assessment of the affiliating University and/are represented on the following academic bodies during the last five years	<b>Removed</b>		-

**Source: NAAC Manuals**

Academic flexibility is the freedom to choose how long a course should last, as well as horizontal mobility, possibilities for studying across disciplines, and other things made possible via curricular exchanges. This important indication also considers the colleges newly launched supplemental enrichment programmes, the credit system, and the curriculum's choice alternatives in

terms of programme, curricular transactions, and timeframes.

All over India, all the Universities implemented the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) for all the programmes. Therefore, the metric 1.2.1 is taken back in the 2022 revised manual. The metrics related to the add on/certificate programme and percentage of students enrolled are retained as it is.

**Table 4: 1.2 Academic Flexibility (30)**

Metric number and name as per 2017 RAF		Changes	Metric number and name as per 2022 RAF	
1.2.1	Percentage of Programmes in which Choice Based Credit System (CBCS)/ elective course system has been implemented	<b>Removed</b>	-	
1.2.2	Number of Add on /Certificate programs offered during the last five years	<b>Retained</b>	1.2.1	Number of Add on /Certificate/Value added programs offered during the last five years.
1.2.3	Average percentage of students enrolled in Certificate/ Add-on programs as against the total number of students during the last five years	<b>Retained</b>	1.2.2	Percentage of students enrolled in Certificate/ Add-on/Value added programs as against the total number of students during the last five years.

**Source: NAAC Manuals**

The primary goal of the curriculum is to promote students' holistic development. While this is attempted by prescribing dynamic and updated curricular inputs, the HEI is expected to have provision for additional courses and activities that may not be directly related to one's discipline of study but help students become more aware of cross-cutting issues relevant to the current pressing concerns both nationally and internationally, such as gender, environment and sustainability, human values and professional ethics, development of creative and divergent thinking. According to each

student's preferences and interests, a progressive institution would offer a wide selection of these "value-added" courses.

The syllabi is formed by the university BOS and inclusion of any experiential learning through project work/field work/internship for courses is in their hands. Affiliating colleges merely implement what is given by the respective university. In the ground of irrelevance to continue the subjective metric which concentration is on number/count of course, the metric 1.3.2 withdrawal is supported.

**Table 5: 1.3 Curriculum Enrichment (30)**

Metrics number and name as per 2017 RAF		Changes	Metrics number and name as per 2022 RAF	
1.3.1	Institution integrates crosscutting issues relevant to Professional Ethics, Gender, Human Values, Environment and Sustainability into the Curriculum	<b>Retained</b>	1.3.1	Institution integrates crosscutting issues relevant to Professional Ethics, Gender, Human Values, Environment and Sustainability into the Curriculum
1.3.2	Average percentage of courses that include experiential learning through project work/field work/internship during last five years	<b>Removed</b>	-	
1.3.3	Percentage of students undertaking project work/field work/internships (Data for the latest completed academic year)	<b>Retained</b>	1.3.2	Percentage of students undertaking project work/field work/ internships (Data for the latest completed academic year)

**Source: NAAC Manuals**

Curricula are being revised and redesigned depending on current scenario and stakeholder feedback. Improvements to the inputs are made possible by feedback from all stakeholders regarding its applicability and usefulness in

meeting societal, economic, and environmental needs. If an HEI has a feedback system in place, it will actively collect input from all stakeholders and analyse it in order to find and derive useful insights that will improve the effectiveness of learning.

**Table 6: 1.4 Feedback System (20)**

Metrics number and name as per 2017 RAF		Changes	Metrics number and name as per 2022 RAF	
1.4.1	Institution obtains feedback on the syllabus and its transaction at the institution from the following stakeholders 1) Students 2) Teachers 3) Employers 4) Alumni	<b>Merged 1.4.1 and 1.4.2, and question reframed</b>	1.4.1	Institution obtains feedback on the academic performance and ambience of the institution from various stakeholders, such as Students, Teachers, Employers, Alumni etc. and action taken report on the feedback is made available on institutional website. (Yes or No)
1.4.2	Feedback process of the Institution may be classified as follows: Options: A. Feedback collected, analyzed and action taken and feedback available on website B. Feedback collected, analyzed and action has been taken C. Feedback collected and analyzed D. Feedback collected E. Feedback not collected			

**Source: NAAC Manuals**

Affiliating colleges having less freedom in framing the syllabus can take it as an advantage. Merely the feedback collection from all stakeholders on syllabus and its transaction at the institution is not sufficient, but a systematic feedback analysis and mandatory discussion on the same with respective University BOS members is essential to redesign the curriculum according to the changing needs. However, as it is found the metrics under 1.4 KI are duplicating the documents both are merged in the revised manual. Further, metric scope is extended by incorporating the institution ambience element. The response option is reduced for two (Yes/No).

### **Conclusion:**

The standard of higher education is becoming more and more crucial as India attempts to compete in a globalized economy in fields that call for highly skilled workers. As of now, India's

a population with a high level of education and a reserve of at least university graduates with a fair amount of training have helped, although there is strong rivalry. The neighboring countries are in the race of upgrading and modernizing their tertiary education with the goal of creating elite institutions.

The aggressive growth of higher education institutions since the 20th century increased the concern of "Quality" in Higher Education. The National Policy Mission then suggests the Accreditation unit as a way to safeguard the quality standard of higher education institutions. Based on this, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) was founded by the University

Grants Commission (UGC) on September 16, 1994, as an autonomous institution with a registered office in Bangalore, in accordance with section 12 CCC of the UGC Act (Act 3 of 1956).

Since the establishment, the institution is working hard to uplift the quality in higher education institutions by revising its framework of assessment and accreditation. In the recent revision, the assessment process for affiliating colleges is simplified by reducing the total metrics.

However, the study focus was on the assessment of criteria-1: Curricular aspects, a detailed descriptive analysis is provided. The changes brought after 2017 in the assessment of the criteria one is highlighted based on the probable reasons for the elimination of few metrics and mergers.

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