

Best Practices in Higher Education for Quality Management



राष्ट्रीय मूल्यांकन एवं प्रत्यायन परिषद
NATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION COUNCIL

NAAC

Vision

To make quality the defining element of higher education in India through a combination of self and external quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance initiatives.

Mission

- ❖ *To arrange for periodic assessment and accreditation of institutions of higher education or units thereof, or specific academic programmes or projects;*
- ❖ *To stimulate the academic environment for promotion of quality of teaching-learning and research in higher education institutions;*
- ❖ *To encourage self-evaluation, accountability, autonomy and innovations in higher education;*
- ❖ *To undertake quality-related research studies, consultancy and training programmes, and*
- ❖ *To collaborate with other stakeholders of higher education for quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance.*

Value Framework

To promote the following core values among the HEIs of the country :

- ❖ *Contributing to National Development*
- ❖ *Fostering Global Competencies among Students*
- ❖ *Inculcating a Value System in Students*
- ❖ *Promoting the Use of Technology*
- ❖ *Quest for Excellence*

Best Practices in Higher Education for Quality Management

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1. Introduction

Quality has become the defining element of education in the 21st Century in the context of new social realities. The information communication revolution, the knowledge economy, and globalization are greatly influencing the “next society”, to borrow the expression of Peter Drucker, that has emerged. This networked complex and competitive society places a great premium on education for development. The Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations (MDGs, 2002) consider knowledge as the prime mover of development in the new millennium. How to provide quality education to large numbers at affordable costs is the primary concern of developing countries. Quality, as all of us are aware, makes education as much socially relevant as it is personally indispensable to the individual. In this sense quality becomes the defining element of education. In this context quality and excellence should be the vision of every higher education institution. Acquisition of quality and excellence is the great challenge faced by all higher education institutions.

2. Best Practices as Institutional Quality Index

Best practices, the practices which add commendable value to an institution and its various stakeholders, are considered as reliable benchmarks or standards of quality. The best

institutions are those which widely use them. To put it differently, institutional excellence in higher education is the aggregate of the best practices followed in different areas of institutional performance. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is advocating the best practices benchmarking approach for quality enhancement in higher education.

The benchmarking, the systematic means of measuring and comparing the work processes of an organization with those of others is widely used in industry and the service sector for quality measurement and improvement. The prevailing quality management systems in higher education also can benefit from this tool. The best practices as benchmarks help institutions to find their anchor for self-improvement.

Establishing benchmarks through best practices is not a new concept in higher education. The NAAC uses the best practice benchmarking in the form of criterion statements to assess the level of performance of higher education institutions. In 1996 Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service (CHEMS), a sub system of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) launched an international “University Management Benchmarking Club” for universities from the Commonwealth. This club focuses on the effectiveness of university-wide processes. The CHEMS approach to benchmarking goes beyond the comparison of data-based scores and conventional performance indicators; it looks at the processes by which results are achieved. By using a consistent approach and identifying processes which are generic and relevant, irrespective of the organization and how it is structured, it becomes possible to benchmark across sectoral boundaries (e.g., geography, size etc.). The overall purpose and intent of the Best Practices benchmarking can be summarized as the:

- ❖ development of an understanding of the fundamentals that lead to success,
- ❖ focus on continuous improvement efforts, and
- ❖ management of the overall change process to close the gap between an existing practice of the institution and that of the best-in-class institutions with reference to the most relevant key performance variables.

3. Stages in the application of Best Practices: Four I and D Model

The successful application of the best practices approach depends on our ability to adopt the following five-stage strategy i.e.

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 approach can be described as “Four I and D Model”. Let us briefly elaborate the key elements of the approach.

3.1 Identification of best practices

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. Peter Drucker rightly observes that there is an incongruence between how we teach and how students learn. All these add to the complexity of choice of best practices. What might be considered as ‘best practices’ are limited in a number of ways. Firstly, what we consider to be the ‘best’ education practice depends on our own limited knowledge, perspectives, contexts, interests and values. The interests and values on which the practices are premised may be contested by others. In that case, many of the assumptions on which the practices are premised will not hold. Secondly, ‘best practices’ are contingent, context dependent and defy generic description. If these practices are to be useful at all, we need to identify the ones that can be so restated as to be clearly seen to contribute to value addition to the institution or the stakeholders. Only then can they become context-free and less subjective. This requires a predominantly ‘fitness for purpose’ judgement and one cannot write an ideal typification of ‘best practices’ applicable to all contexts.

The input factors, the process factors and output factors should be taken into account in identifying the criteria of best practices. The criteria of economy, efficiency and effectiveness may also be used in identifying them. Another way of identifying the best practices is the inductive approach. The practitioners may be asked to describe their best practices and the criteria they have applied in their identification, justifying their

choices logically. From this, one can discuss the benchmarks of the best practices as perceived by them. 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 dominance of one specific view or approach; and
- ❖ promote quality of performance.

These principles should be interpreted and applied appropriately to different contexts, while identifying the practices.

3.2 Implementation of best practices

However, difficult it may be, all of us engaged in the educational activities have some gut feeling of what best practices are. The implementation is the Achilles heel. Academic world generally suffers from two limitations. Firstly, we are fond of debates and discussion and consider words as wisdom. Aristotle deprecated this tendency long back and considered action as virtue. He rightly observed: “Virtue is an activity not a capacity”. Mahatma Gandhi’s logic was his action. We have to move from notions of words as wisdom to action as wisdom. Jocab Bronowski wrote in **The Ascent of Man**: “We have to understand that the world can only be grasped by action, not by contemplation. The most powerful drive in the ascent of man is his pleasure in his own skill”. Secondly, when it comes to action all pervading cynicism hinders the pro-active role. There are some genuine limitations in the application of best practices, but many are imaginary. Instead of finding solutions to problems, sometimes our ‘academic eminence’ may lead us to find problems in every solution. The implementation strategies include planning, resource mobilization, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation. The implementation approach focuses more on performance than on promises. Here quality is considered as attention to details. Total Quality Management is an approach of implementation which focuses on quality of all aspects of operations with the participation of everyone in the organization. Management pundits propose many approaches of implementation strategies like management by objectives, management by results etc. Mahatma Gandhi very aptly captured the spirit of action

and the spirit of leading by example when he said, “we must be the change that we wish to see in the world”.

3.3 Institutionalization of best practices

Institutionalization is the process of making the best practices an integral part of the institutional working. The NAAC has organized the National Conference on Best Practices in Higher Education at Goa on 26th and 27th July 2004 in which around ninety heads of colleges and universities participated and shared their experiences of application of best practices. During the deliberations of the conference for two days two major points relevant to the present discussion had emerged. Firstly, many best practices are institution-specific and individual managed. In most cases, that individual happens to be the leader or head of the institution. Leaders as innovators have been the change agents in many institutions, mobilizing and ensuring the wide-spread support of the campus community for the best practices. While this approach has resulted in commendable improvement in the quality of institutions, continuance and sustainability of those practices depends mainly on individual initiative and runs the risk of disruption or half-hearted pursuit if and when the individual is displaced for any reason. If, however, such a practice is formalized in the sense in which exams are made a formal requirement, individual identity will then be superseded by the anonymity of the function. In other words, through institutionalization this risk can be circumvented. Secondly, many best practices seem to require extra effort and it is good that many HEIs have been doing it successfully. But to sustain that effort it has to become an integrated part of the functioning of the institution, gradually. Institutionalization is an effort to make it more institution centric than leader or individual centric and also to make the best practices as a normal practice.

3.4 Internalization of best practices

What we described as institutionalization in the context of institutions may be considered as internalization when it refers to individuals in the institution. 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. Aristotle rightly observed that: “We are what we repeatedly

do. Excellence then is not an act but a habit”. Such internalization may also be looked upon as making permanent the principle and essence of the best practices as part of the characteristic performance of an institution. The aggregate of such internalized best practices principally goes to make what we loosely call the ‘ethos’ or ‘tradition’ of an individual institution. The instrumental view looks at quality as a strategy. But the intrinsic view looks at quality as a value.

Quality in many respects is an attitude of mind. There is a strong feeling among many that quality education is resource specific. The advocacy for quality education is countered many times by resource specific arguments. These arguments are only partially valid. Our experience shows that attitudes play a more critical role in quality assurance. Internalization is an attitude formation conducive to sustaining quality higher education.

3.5 Dissemination of best practices

Education is a social process. The institutions not only have the social responsibility of application of best practices, but also an equal social responsibility of dissemination of these practices for wider application in the system. Many higher education institutions do not attempt certain practices due to lack of information about the feasibility and adaptability of the best practices. It is observed that the best practices are the borrowed practices. We must learn and benefit from each other’s experience. Even within an institution, at times there are communication gaps which affect the expected outcome of the practice. It also makes building on experience and reviewing the practice difficult. Effective use of recording and reviewing is essential to develop conviction in the system for a particular practice. Institutions may have to evolve suitable strategies like database of good practices, review forums, recording evidences for success etc. to discuss within and among institutions.

The NAAC is advocating every institution to establish 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. The NAAC has recently published the report of the National Conference on Best Practices in Higher Education in which 60 best practices followed by different higher education institutions were discussed. We hope to take many more initiatives in the

coming years to promote the dissemination of best practices followed by higher education institutions in India and abroad. The President of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, in his address at the concluding day programme of the NAAC decennial celebrations held at Bangalore on 5th November 2004 advocated the recording of best practices for wider dissemination under the title “Great Institutions of Higher learning: Accredited Universities and Colleges in India”. The NAAC has brought out publications accordingly with the Peer Team Reports of the select best institutions accredited with higher grading.

4. Concluding observations

The best practice benchmarking approach is an inductive approach to quality management in higher education institutions with a focus on practice and continuous improvement. The five-stage approach will help institutions of higher education to play their role effectively in quality sustenance and enhancement. The best as an ideal should be the vision of every higher education institution in the country. Stakeholders can contribute differently for the realization of this goal by the institutions. Policy makers in education have an important responsibility of creating an enabling policy framework for effective functioning of the institutions. The Management should ensure proper infrastructure and effective governance systems. Teachers have a critical role in building competencies of learners through best pedagogic practices. Finally, students, for whom the whole system is designed, should desire and demand the best. Then everything else will follow.



BEST PRACTICES IN MY INSTITUTION

Format of Presentation

Institutions may have many good practices that add value to the quality of education they offer. For presentation of each of those practices the following format may be used. Care may be taken to avoid general descriptions and focus may be on concrete practice.

1. Title of the practice
2. The context that required the initiation of the practice (100 – 120 words)
3. Objectives of the practice (50 – 60 words)
4. The Practice (250 – 300 words)
5. Obstacles faced if any and strategies adopted to overcome them (150 – 200 words)
6. Impact of the practice (100 – 120 words)
7. Resources required
8. About the Institution
 - i. Name of the Institution :
 - ii. Year of Accreditation :
 - iii. Address :
 - iv. Grade awarded by NAAC :
 - v. E-Mail :
 - vi. Contact person for further details :
 - vii. Website :

For Communication with NAAC

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