

UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE
School of Management
Higher Education Group

ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION AS A TOOL FOR IMPROVEMENT IN HIGHER
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN GUJARAT STATE IN INDIA

European Master in Higher Education
(HEEM), a joint program provided by the
University of Oslo (Norway), University of
Tampere (Finland), and the University of
Aveiro (Portugal)

Master's Thesis
November, 2012
Supervisor: Ronald Bisaso

Sumita Sharma

ABSTRACT

University of Tampere School of Management, Higher Education

Author: SHARMA, SUMITA

Title of the thesis: Assessment and accreditation as a tool for improvement in higher education institutions in Gujarat State in India

Master's thesis:
Time: November, 2012

Key words: accreditation, assessment, higher education, quality, quality assurance in higher education, assessment and accreditation in India, quality assurance in India, NAAC

The past few decades have witnessed a sea change in higher education in India. Rapid economic growth, globalisation, emergence of the private sector in higher education and an increasingly restive middle class have made the demand for quality education louder than ever before. Higher education is gradually being perceived as a private good with benefits accruing to the recipient of higher education. As higher education competes with other core sectors for public funds, the call for 'value for money' grows. In such a backdrop, it is necessary to have an effective and efficient quality assurance mechanism in place in the country.

This thesis analyses the external institutional quality assurance mechanism in vogue in India as implemented through the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). Particularly, it analyses the QA mechanism in the light of existing theoretical precepts and some global practices employed by different countries for quality assurance in higher education.

The thesis is based on data collected through publicly available documents and through semi-structured interviews recorded of academics, administrators and a government representative belonging to the State of Gujarat, India. This ensured assessment of different perspectives on the QA mechanism in India. Convergence and divergence of their views on different issues related to QA in higher education in India has been presented.

Analysis of the collected data suggests the need for a reform of the QA process in India to make it a more meaningful exercise. Analysis shows that, at present, the gains of the QA process are very limited. The process influences only the fringes of a healthy quality higher education.

The thesis concludes with some recommendations that may be adopted by the Indian HE system. These recommendations include making the NAAC A&A process a mandatory exercise, placing a system of continuous evaluation in place and promoting transparency in the A&A process. There may also be a case for revisiting the approach of the QA process and shifting from the present stress on "improvement" as an objective to "accountability". The need for autonomy of the HEIs is also recommended.

Acknowledgements

First of all I am grateful to Jussi Kivistö for setting the ball rolling for me. I am grateful for the support and guidance he provided me at the early stages of this thesis.

I am equally grateful to Ronald Bisaso for working with me through this thesis and providing me with his prompt guidance whenever required. He gave me the confidence to ask him even some basic questions that one would normally hesitate to ask.

I am also grateful to the entire faculty and administrative staff at the University of Oslo, the University of Tampere and the University of Aveiro for the wonderful experience I have had with them. For me it was a great learning experience.

I am also privileged to be part of a very elite group of students and colleagues from across the globe, who made life all that easier. I am also proud of the friends I have made during my stay with them.

Last and not the least, I am grateful to my entire family – son, sister, mother, father and my husband – for being a great source of support, strength and encouragement for me all through the course.

Thanks, for everything!

Sumita Sharma

November, 2012

Abbreviations

A&A	Assessment and Accreditation
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
AVA	Access Validating Agencies
CHEA	Council for Higher Education Accreditation
CPE	College with Potential for Excellence
ENADE	Exame Nacional de Desempenho de Estudantes, or, National Exam of Student Achievement
EVA	Danish Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation in Higher Education
GAC	German Accreditation Council
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IAF	Institutional Assessment Framework
IEQA	Institutional Eligibility for Quality Assessment
INEP	National Institute for Education Research
IQER	Integrated Quality Enhancement Review
NAAC	National Assessment and Accreditation Council
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education
SSR	Self Study Report
UGC	University Grants Commission
UK	United Kingdom
UNE	Student's National Union
USA	United States of America
USDE	United States Department of Education

List of figures

Figure 1	- Clark's triangle of coordination	106
Figure 2	- Australian higher education quality assurance framework	107

List of tables

Table 1	- Approaches to quality	108
Table 2	- New public policy instruments for the assurance of academic quality	109
Table 3	- Operating definitions of quality	110
Table 4	- NAAC: Criteria and their weights	111
Table 5	- NAAC: Criteria and key aspects: Weights	112
Table 6	- NAAC: Grading system	115
Table 7	- NAAC: Assessment and accreditation fees	116
Table 8	- Danish QA system: Criteria	118

Table of contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Abbreviations	4
List of figures	5
List of tables	6
Table of contents	7
1. Introduction	11
1.1 The Context	11
1.2 Constitutional and statutory framework	12
1.3 The Indian academic qualifications framework	13
1.4 Indian higher education framework	13
1.5 Growth of Indian universities: A perspective	14
1.6 Constraints of Indian higher education	16
1.7 Autonomy of Indian universities	18
1.8 Indian higher education and GATS	20
1.9 Recent trends in higher education	20
1.9.1 Growing social demand for higher education	20
1.9.2 Expansion and diversification of higher education systems	21
1.9.3 Privatisation of higher education	21
1.9.4 Higher education as a private good	21
1.9.5 Deregulation and the growing demand for ‘value for money’	22
1.9.6 Influence of market forces and increased transparency	22
1.9.7 Globalisation	22
1.9.8 The effect of GATS in higher education	23
1.9.9 International market for quality assurance services	23
1.9.10 Changing nature of academic work	23
1.9.11 Competing missions of universities	24
1.10 Purpose of the research	24
1.11 Research theme	25
1.12 Research questions	25
1.13 Motivation and rationale	25

1.14	Significance and limitations	25
1.15	Research methodology	26
1.15.1	Unit of analysis	26
1.15.2	Data collection method	27
1.15.3	Sampling	29
1.15.4	Coding of interviewees	31
1.15.6	The interview guide	31
1.15.7	Ethical considerations	32
1.16	Structure of the thesis	32
2.	Theoretical framework and review of literature	34
2.1	The meaning of quality	34
2.2	Approaches to quality	35
2.2.1	The approach of Harvey and Green	35
2.2.2	Human capital approach to quality	41
2.2.3	Standards approach to quality	42
2.3	The meaning of quality assurance	42
2.4	Purposes of quality assurance systems	43
2.4.1	Improvement of education	44
2.4.2	Accountability	44
2.4.3	Public information and market transparency	44
2.4.4	Steering of the higher education system in resources and planning	45
2.5	Quality assurance: A theoretical construct	45
2.6	Forms of regulation: a theoretical perspective	48
2.7	The twin challenges of expansion and inclusive higher education	49
2.8	Review of literature	50
2.9	Global practices in quality assurance: A brief overview	61
2.9.1	Quality assurance practices in the USA	61
2.9.2	Quality assurance practices in England	62
2.9.3	Quality assurance practices in Germany	63
2.9.4	Quality assurance practices in Denmark	64
2.9.5	Quality assurance practices in Australia	64
2.9.6	The National Assessment Examination of Brazil	65

2.9.7	Summary of global quality assurance practices	66
3.	Quality assurance in higher education in India	68
3.1	National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)	68
3.2	Vision and mission	68
3.3	New methodology for assessment and accreditation	69
3.4	The process of institutional assessment and accreditation	70
3.5	Fees	71
4.	Institutional perspectives on quality assurance in higher education in India	73
4.1	General information and professional profile of interviewees	73
4.2	The objectives and purpose of NAAC's A&A	75
4.3	The effect of NAAC's A&A process on the decisions of stakeholders	78
4.4	Incentives of accreditation to institutions	81
4.5	Improvements to an institution as an outcome of the NAAC A&A process	83
4.6	Improvements suggested by interviewees to the NAAC process	87
5.	Discussion, conclusion and recommendations	91
6.	References	100
7.	Annexure I	
Figure 1	- Clark's triangle of coordination	
Figure 2	- Australian higher education quality assurance framework	
8.	Annexure II	
Table 1	- Approaches to quality	
Table 2	- New public policy instruments for the assurance of academic quality	
Table 3	- Operating definitions of quality	
Table 4	- NAAC: Criteria and their weights	
Table 5	- NAAC: Criteria and key aspects: Weights	
Table 6	- NAAC: Grading system	

Table 7 - NAAC: Assessment and accreditation fees

Table 8 - Danish QA system: Criteria

9. Annexure III

Interview guide

119

1. Introduction

1.1 The Context

India is fast emerging as an important economic and political power in the 21st century. The Indian economy registered a growth as high as 9.4% in the fiscal year 2006-07 (Reddy, 2007). A large base of scientific and technical manpower, significant advancements in software, space and nuclear technology, a stable democratic set up and a new global perception post 26/11 has gradually pushed the country in a position of political prominence and a sustained demand for inclusion as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. In this backdrop, the country is increasingly feeling the need for the development of the knowledge sector and the development of an all-inclusive “knowledge economy”. Consequently, the development of higher education, as the driver of this knowledge economy, has received a lot of attention in the recent past.

However, even as the demand for quality higher education grows with time, the Indian higher education finds itself at cross-roads in respect of funds as well as direction. Higher education, which is largely publicly funded, faces competing demands for funds from other core sectors of the economy – primary education, primary health care, etc. Consequently, the public share in higher education is getting reduced over the years. The reduction in public funding has led to the growth of the private sector in higher education. In addition, there is gradual penetration of the external higher education providers into the country. From another aspect, there are strong equity concerns – between regions, between religions and between castes. In this background, the enforcement of quality standards not only becomes a necessary concern but also requires a sensitive political balancing act to be performed. These raise important questions regarding quality – its definition suitable to the Indian context, its approach and its enforcement.

This research makes a critical analysis of the existing Indian higher education external institutional quality assurance mechanism. Given the constraints of time and resources, the thesis shall confine itself to external quality assurance processes in universities imparting general education.

1.2 Constitutional and statutory framework

India has a quasi-federal set up with disparate States and a strong Centre. Under the Constitution of India, as originally enacted, education, including those in the universities, was primarily a State subject. However, the Constitution was subsequently amended in 1976 and education became a concurrent subject, i.e. a joint responsibility of the Union and the State governments. In addition, the Constitution of India gives exclusive powers to the Union government for the “Co-ordination and determination of standards in institutions of Higher education or research and scientific and technical institutions.” (Constitution of India, List I, Entry 66). Promotion of the educational interests of the weaker sections, especially the Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes, finds special mention in the Constitution of India. The National Policy of Education, 1986, and the Programme of Action, 1992, lay down the broad policy in education, including higher education.

The Universities Grants Commission (UGC) was inaugurated in 1953 following a decision by the Government of India to refer to it all cases pertaining to the allocation of grants-in-aid from public funds to the Central Universities and other Universities and Institutions of higher learning. However, the UGC was formally established only in November 1956 as a statutory body of the Government of India through an Act of Parliament for the coordination, determination and maintenance of standards of university education in India. The UGC has its head office in New Delhi and six regional centres at Pune, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Bhopal, Guwahati and Bangalore.

The UGC is the only grant-giving agency in the country which has been vested with the twin responsibilities: providing funds and coordinating, determining and maintaining standards in institutions of higher education. The UGC mandate includes (i) promoting and coordinating university education; (ii) determining and maintaining standards of teaching, examination and research in universities; (iii) framing regulations on minimum standards of education; (iv) monitoring developments in the field of collegiate and university education; (v) disbursing grants to the universities and colleges; (vi) serving as a vital link between the Union and state governments and institutions of higher learning and (vii) advising the Central and State governments on the measures necessary for improvement of university education. (UGC, *Mandate*).

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is an autonomous body established by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India to assess and accredit institutions of higher

education in the country. It is an outcome of the recommendations of the National Policy in Education (1986) that laid special emphasis on upholding the quality of higher education in India. The NAAC functions through its General Council (GC) and Executive Committee (EC) where educational administrators, policy makers and senior academicians from a cross-section of the system of higher education are represented. The Chairperson of the UGC is the President of the GC of the NAAC, the Chairperson of the EC is an eminent academician in the area of relevance to the NAAC.

State Universities and colleges are established by respective state governments, which also provide plan grants for their development and non-plan grants for their maintenance. The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) looks after coordination and cooperation between the Union and the States in the field of education.

1.3 The Indian academic qualification framework

There are three principal levels of qualifications within the higher education system in the country: the Bachelor (Undergraduate) level, the Master's (Post-graduate) level and the Doctoral (Pre-doctoral) level. The duration of the Bachelor degree is three years and that of the Masters, two years. A pre-doctoral programme – Master of Philosophy (M. Phil.) may be taken after the completion of the Master's degree. This can either be completely research based or may include course work. Ph.D. is awarded at least two years after the M.Phil or three years after the Master's degree but generally takes longer.

In addition, Diploma Courses are also available at the undergraduate and postgraduate level. The duration of diploma course varies between one to three years while postgraduate diplomas are normally awarded after a year of study. Moreover, a scheme to provide career orientation to education at the first degree level was launched in 1994-95. Under the scheme, a university or a college could introduce one to three vocational courses in 35 identified subjects.

1.4 Indian higher education framework

India has the one of the largest higher education systems in the world. As of 2009, the total enrolments stood at 13.6 millions. India has 26,418 institutions – 467 universities and 25,951

colleges (UGC, 2011, p. 3). This is a substantial increase from the year 1950 when the number of universities stood at 25, the number of colleges at 700 and the number of students at 100,000.

The network of universities in India primarily consists of Central Universities and the State Universities and Colleges. The country also has a large network of institutions under the Open and Distance Learning system. State universities comprise the bulk of the university system. “The current structure of the Indian university system has a large number of affiliated colleges associated with either a Central or State university, where bulk of the enrolment takes place.” (Yash Pal Committee report, 2009, p. 30).

During the past two decades, there has been a significant growth of the private sector in higher education. A large number of colleges and university-level institutions, including ‘deemed universities’¹, and private universities established through State legislations, have come up. This has raised serious concerns regarding “programme focus, regional balance, and ownership pattern, modes of delivery and degree of regulation quality and credibility as well as social concerns of inclusiveness.” (Yash Pal Committee report, 2009, p. 29).

1.5 Growth of Indian universities: A perspective

India, with its size, social structure and democratic tradition, is a unique country. The country had a central planned model until the mid-1980s, when it began to open its economy to market forces amidst a lot of circumspection. The process of economic reform and a substantial shift towards economic reform was more visible after 1991. Government policies towards a new economic regime found its reflection in the nation’s education system. A number of national committees were established in the mid-1980s and despite a number of suggestions, ideas, recommendations and policy proposals, no significant change could be seen in the higher education system (Maassen & Cloete, 2006).

The behaviour of the Indian higher education system finds its roots in its colonial past. Generally, higher education in Europe has been regulated and funded by the state. There was no direct interaction between the society and the university. The state took upon itself the responsibility of meeting the societal needs by framing policies for the universities that would benefit the society.

¹ Institutions of higher education may be declared as “deemed to be universities” or simply “Deemed Universities” by the Central Government on a recommendation of the UGC.

This model was transplanted by the European countries on to their colonies. Even after independence, the newly formed countries continued with the same system of higher education (Altbach, 2004).

A diverse Indian culture only made things more difficult. It was not very easy to frame a policy that would reconcile the needs and demands of the various sections of society in the higher education system. Every group within the system developed a vested interest and sought to maintain a kind of 'status quo', thereby, making it very difficult to bring in major changes in the system. A lack of political will also meant that the system did not go beyond the ordinary rhetoric (Maassen & Cloete). The inability of the higher education system to change should be seen in this light.

Successive governments also went 'soft' on initiating major reforms fearing a backlash from the various interest groups. This was made convenient because there is no pressure from the society to bring about a comprehensive reform of the higher education system. Individual demands of quality higher education from more influential sections of the society were met by opening new world-class institutions. As for the rest of the society, they were "assured" of the extreme sensitivity of the government towards higher education by "a regular exercise of 'compensatory legitimisation' where the state engages in commissions and investigations that count as action, rather than implementing the recommendations" (Maassen & Cloete, 2006, p. 39). Consequently, the growth of higher education in India has been confused and unplanned. Recommendations of the several commissions and committees remained only on paper and were seldom implemented.

The creation of numerous statutory bodies for controlling and regulating different disciplines of higher education is a mere extension of compensatory legislations. Whenever the need for reforms in any discipline arose, instead of revamping and reinventing the existing infrastructure, it was found easier and politically more expedient to create new governing bodies. These institutions did not go beyond the conventional bureaucratic control mechanisms and failed to initiate sustainable goals for development. As a result of this large scale mismanagement, the teaching-learning process suffers.

1.6 Constraints of Indian higher education

Concerned with the deterioration of higher education in the country, the Government of India set up a “Committee to Advise on the Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education” also commonly known as the Yash Pal Committee. The Committee went into the basic aberrations that plague HE in India. Much of this diagnosis are either directly related to or have implications on the quality standards of HE in India.

The Yash Pal Committee (2009) has expressed concern at the financial position of the universities. It has found out that exceptions apart, universities in India face a serious shortage of funds. “This has led to a poor infrastructure as well as the introduction of low quality self-financing programmes that have no relationship with the university curriculum.” (p. 41). Funds provided to the universities are inadequate, irregular, inflexible and inordinately delayed. Consequently, universities are unable to come up with long term development plans. As a result, the quality suffers.

Another factor of great concern that has been highlighted by the Yash Pal Committee, is the lack of qualified faculty. The teaching profession has a low status and, therefore, ranks low on the priorities of the people. The best brains no longer get into academia. The university atmosphere and the severe controls imposed on it severely restrict academic freedom. “Higher education has lost a generation of academics due to the inability of universities to find place for their scholarship.” (Yash Pal Committee, 2009, p. 44). The severe constraint on funds only compounds this problem. Universities have stopped recruiting faculty even on approved positions. Retired academics are re-hired and are paid measly sums to teach.

There is very little autonomy enjoyed by the universities as various vested interests seek to find room for themselves. The Knowledge Commission has expressed concerns over the erosion of autonomy of the universities by government interventions and political interferences. The Yash Pal Committee has warned against corrupt practices in higher education. It has observed:

Interference, from various political or commercial vested interests, in the functioning and priorities of the universities comes in many different forms and intensities. It touches all aspects of higher education and involves improper admission of students, pressures in selection of teachers, manipulation in appointment of senior functionaries like vice-

chancellors, registrars and deans, purchase of equipment and allotment of construction contracts and so on.

To add to this general apathy is the disconcerting fact that there is no resistance from within the academic community against the role played by socio-political forces to manipulate and subvert the normative structures of the university systems.

The Yash Pal Committee has also been critical of the current structure of the Indian university system, which consists of a large number of affiliated colleges associated with either a Central or a State university. This structure has burdened many universities with the management of academic content, examination and quality of these colleges.

The Yash Pal Committee has also been critical of the poor management of the universities. Universities have not evolved over the years to adapt themselves to present day organisational requirements, technological needs and rules of business. Decision making in universities is highly centralised and there is very little involvement of faculty and students in most policy decisions affecting academics.

A great concern exists in the case of 'Deemed Universities'. In the recent past, the country has witnessed a sharp rise in the number of Deemed Universities. The provision of deemed universities was introduced for a few truly outstanding education and research institutions with the objective that they could retain their unique and distinct character. However, in the past two decades institutions have been granted the status 'deemed university', indiscriminately. While between 1956 and 1990, only 29 institutions had got the status of "Deemed Universities", the number now stands at 130. Institutions were granted the status of deemed universities indiscriminately. Educational standards in many of these deemed universities are abysmally low and the ordinary student gets cheated.

The situation in case of private universities is even worse. There is no policy or guideline to measure the competence of private investors in starting and managing a technical institution. The only requirement is that they should be registered as a non-profit or charitable trust or society. This has allowed family managed trusts having little or no educational background to enter the higher education sector. The HEIs run by these trusts are not professionally managed. Teachers are appointed at minimal salaries and treated with scant respect: They are asked to work at more than

one institution owned by the trust, are paid salaries only for nine months in a year and are given substantially lower payments than promised. Moreover, very often their passports and certificates are impounded to prevent them from seeking employment elsewhere. They are often compelled to award marks based on extraneous factors and without consideration of merit. It is also suspected that many of them are serving as channels for legitimising the unaccounted wealth of these families.

It can be visualised that the Indian higher education terrain is thus quite challenging and faces problems on several fronts. An effective quality assurance mechanism would go a long way in solving a few of these problems.

1.7 Autonomy of Indian universities

The autonomy enjoyed by a university is a very crucial aspect in understanding the approach of the higher education institutions to quality. A survey of current global quality assurance practices reveal that the first responsibility for ensuring quality lies with the institution itself. The state places itself in the role of “steering at a distance”. The discharge of this responsibility by the university can only be achieved if the institutions enjoy at least a substantial of autonomy. Hence, it becomes necessary to understand the autonomy enjoyed by the universities in India.

It was mentioned in the last section that higher education in India inherited a colonial legacy of strict governmental control. There was no virtually no academic freedom for the universities. Altbach (2004, p. 17) has observed

The purpose of the colonial universities was to train a loyal civil service and a small number of doctors, lawyers and others to serve the colonizers – not to establish universities in the full autonomous sense of the term. ... This historical tradition of subservience and a lack of full autonomy and academic freedom created problems for the emergence of modern universities in post-independence Asia.

This applies to India as well. This lack of autonomy suited all interest groups within the higher education system. It allowed the policy makers to retain control over an important sector without

any questions being raised. It placed very little accountability on the university set up, especially, in respect of quality of the teaching-learning process.

The status of Indian universities may be analysed in the framework of the “Steering models” proposed by van Vught (as cited in Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000, p. 269) – the “rational planning and control model” and the “self-regulation model”. These models have also been referred to as the “state control model” and the “state-supervising model” (Neave & van Vught, 1991, as cited in Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000, p. 269). Indian higher education system would fit in the “state control model”. “In this system, governmental actors try to steer an object by using stringent rules and extensive control mechanisms. They see themselves as omniscient and omnipotent actors able to steer a part of society according to their own objectives”. (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000, p. 269).

The status of the Indian universities may also be analysed against the four state (or steering) models proposed by Olsen (as cited in Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000). The “sovereign, rationally-bounded steering model” proposed by Olsen would reflect the Indian higher education system. This model envisages a tight control over universities and colleges. Higher education is seen as a governmental instrument for reaching political, economic or social goals. Universities and colleges are accountable to politicians and are a tool to achieve political objectives in the higher education policy agenda. There is a well defined superior-subordinate hierarchy in the interaction of the state with the universities. “Decision-making is centralized and top-down.” (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000, p. 270).

The answer to the problem of the lack of autonomy of the Indian universities lies in transforming the ‘State-University relationship’. This would involve a process of decentralization. The state must give up its role as rule producers or policy makers. The state needs to support and facilitate new developments rather than dictate them. There is a need to introduce more actors into the arena of policy making so as to break the monopoly of the state on higher education. Funding also needs to be diversified.

While autonomy of the universities is an important factor in the growth of the universities, it must be accompanied with appropriate procedures to ensure their accountability and quality assurance. Quality would also need a definition since what is perceived as “quality” by the university may not be so in the eyes of other external players. Therefore, it is important that such parameters or guidelines be drawn out for an efficient accountable university.

1.8 Indian higher education and GATS

One of the recent developments in the higher education sector across the world is the emergence of GATS in education. India has made no commitments under the Uruguay Round in higher education services. However, India included higher educational services in its Revised Offer to GATS in August, 2005 (Department of Commerce, p. 17). 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in higher education services on the automatic route is allowed in India. Foreign participation through twinning, collaboration, franchising, and subsidiaries is permitted. India has received requests from several countries.

1.9 Recent trends in higher education

Higher education has witnessed major transformations in the last quarter of the 20th century. While previously, access to higher education was limited to the privileged few, the rewards of higher education have led to an increasing demand both in terms of expansion and in terms of exclusiveness.

1.9.1 Growing social demand for higher education

Social demand for higher education has been growing over the past decades. Countries have been striving towards the massification of higher education. This is especially so in the developing countries. The financial capacity of countries, particularly the developing countries, to respond to this demand is often inadequate.

Another significant trend, connected to the expanding enrolment in tertiary education, is the growing diversity in the social and economic background of the students. Previously, higher education was considered a privilege of the elite. However, with a governmental push towards massification, students with different backgrounds, interests, circumstances and reasons for pursuing advanced studies have joined the movement towards higher education. This has triggered increased differentiation in the types of institutions that offer higher education programmes (El-Khawas, 2002).

1.9.2 Expansion and diversification of higher education systems

In order to cope up with the sharp increase in the demand for higher education, systems have been expanded and diversified. A non-university, post-secondary sector has emerged. More courses and academic programmes are now being offered through distance education. While this has increased the access of higher education, it has also raised serious concerns about the quality of education being imparted in such programmes and through such modes.

1.9.3 Privatization of higher education

The rapid growth in enrolments to higher education has put enormous pressure on the resources of the state. This is especially pronounced in the developing countries where higher education has to compete for funds with sectors like primary education, primary health care, poverty reduction, environmental degradation, rising urbanisation, etc., that are considered equally if not more fundamental to the state besides being a political necessity. In addition, higher education itself has become more expensive across all countries with the emergence of new challenges and improved technology. This financial situation has led the state to look away from the conventional model of state-run institutions towards institutions run in the private sector. Many countries have adopted legislation allowing for the development of private provision of higher education. This has led to a tremendous growth in the number of privately run institutions catering to higher education. In addition, the state-run public higher education institutions (HEIs) have also undergone major privatisation processes and have resorted to cost-sharing arrangements and other income-generation measures. Privatization processes, in general, have made the provision of HE more unequal in terms of quality.

1.9.4 Higher education as a private good

There is an increased perception and increased acceptability of HE being a private good. This is particularly true for professional degrees. This is because the biggest and immediate beneficiary of the recipient of higher education is the recipient himself. Acquiring a higher education degree brings to an individual better economic returns and better non-monetary benefits in terms of social status, greater job satisfaction, greater self-esteem, etc.

1.9.5 Deregulation and the growing demand for ‘value for money’

In many countries, governments have adopted the New Public Management model of governance. This has led them to redefine their roles as public authorities. NPM model of governance involves greater reliance on deregulation and decentralization of power from the Government to institutions. The NPM model allows for increased self-regulation and autonomy. The state adopts a strategy that provides quality control from a distance with a focus on accountability. In this new emerging NPM model, HE is steered indirectly: the state limits its role to setting guidelines and providing resources and incentives. The state negotiates with the institutions more detailed objectives in terms of activities and outputs. Demand for accountability and trust occupy the political agenda. The state expects HEIs to guarantee and exhibit ‘value for money’ and be accountable to their customers and the public at large.

1.9.6 Influence of market forces and increased transparency

The steering mechanisms for the HEIs adopted by the state are putting greater reliance on market mechanisms. In countries like the USA, which have a long standing tradition of highly diversified and market-oriented systems, providing information on the HEIs to the consumers (students, parents and other stakeholders) and the public at large is a commonly accepted practice. In countries with highly centralized HE systems, there is a marked shift towards a greater institutional autonomy. In such systems, external quality assurance schemes must reconcile with the existing culture and often emphasize the control of inputs rather than the outputs.

1.9.7 Globalisation

HE systems have been significantly affected by the process of globalisation. Recent advances in regional integration processes and trade agreements have led to borderless nations. Advances in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have facilitated the transmission of educational services across the border. Trade agreements have allowed easy movement of men, goods and capital between countries. This has had a significant effect on the structure, content and delivery of higher education systems all over the world. Globalisation has put greater pressure on countries and institutions to obtain qualifications accepted and recognized by the international labour market. This, in turn, has fuelled the concern for comparability and equivalence of educational standards.

1.9.8 The effect of GATS in higher education

A direct consequence of globalisation in higher education is the ingress of 'trans-national higher education'. This has thrown up study programmes, courses of study and other educational services including the provision of distance education, in which the learners come from a country that is different from the country in which the awarding institution is based. Higher education is recognized as a global market good. Trans-national educational services are conducted primarily with a commercial aim and for profit. At present there are no regulatory forces for such services at the international level. Associated with such services is the concern for quality of the services provided by such trans-national providers of higher education.

1.9.9 International market for quality assurance services

Globalisation has not only ushered in a new perspective in higher education, but, has also brought out new and global markets for quality assurance and accreditation services. Many institutions seek recognition from international quality assurance and accreditation agencies in an effort to seek better recognition for themselves in a globally competitive world. These international accreditation agencies operate with their own perspectives and more often than not set standards and parameters on the lines of the developed countries. This puts additional pressure on the governments of the receiver countries to establish their own structures that cater to the preservation of their own national values and interests.

1.9.10 Changing nature of academic work

The nature of academic work has undergone a significant change in the last quarter of the 20th century. This has weakened the effectiveness of the existing internal quality assurance mechanisms in higher education. "The exponential growth of academic knowledge and the increasing specialization of research have made the traditional reliance on disciplinary norms a less reliable means of assuring academic standards in subject fields within colleges and universities." (Clark, 1996 as cited in Dill & Beerkens, 2010, p. 5). "Studies of academic work at the subject level in the USA confirm the existence of an increasingly fragmented, atomistic, academic culture." (Dill & Beerkens, 2010, p. 6). The nature of academic work has become so specialised and narrow in spread that professors in many "micro-areas" work almost in isolation. As a consequence, it is very difficult to discuss their teaching in their peer group and even more difficult to review and assess

their work. Under such circumstances, “the field’s diversity prevents achieving a consensus on what students should be taught. This lack of agreement is exacerbated by the rapid expansion of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary subjects, because in these emerging fields the academic staff can no longer rely upon disciplinary norms to define academic standards.” (Dill & Beerkens, p. 6).

1.9.11 Competing missions of universities

Universities are faced with competing missions of research and teaching. The personal priorities of the academic staff tend to lean towards research rather than teaching for reasons of interest, better career prospects. (Fairweather, 2000, as cited in Dill & Beerkens, 2010). Financial and reputational awards are being increasingly linked to research activities. In such a situation, though it may be difficult to gauge the extent to which research and teaching are competing with each other, it is clear that the adoption of internal quality assessment policies putting greater stress on research than on teaching will negatively affect the teaching mission of universities. In the extreme case, quality research performance of the institution has the potential of taking public attention away from the quality of the teaching mission of the institution. It is in these circumstances that an external well-balanced academic quality policy may help present a correct overall picture of the academic institution.

Current quality assurance practices – both, internal and external – have been found to be inadequate to address their objectives in the changed environments of the universities. Consequently, policy makers are experimenting with many innovative forms of academic quality assurance. The debate begins with what should be treated as “quality”. Another question is whether quality is to be treated in the local, national or international context.

1.10 Purpose of the research

The overall purpose of the study would be to analyse the external quality assurance mechanism in India and identify its strengths and weaknesses. The research would be exploratory and descriptive in its scope.

1.11 Research theme

Themes have a distinct place in qualitative research and are a starting point in a report of findings from a study. Themes for this research can be spelt out as:

1. How does an institution, undergoing the A&A, gain from the accreditation process?
2. How does an institution respond (i.e., what are the steps that it takes to improve) to meet the challenges of A&A?

1.12 Research questions

This research would address two broad questions:

1. What are the motivations for HEIs to get accredited?
2. How does the assessment and accreditation process enhance institutional improvement?

1.13 Motivation and rationale

The recent advances made by India in the economic and political field have prepared the country for a larger role in the global environment. Despite so many different constraints facing an emerging economy, the growth of a “knowledge economy” is the need of the hour for India if it is to catch up with the fast developing and competitive world. And in achieving this QA processes play a critical role. Identifying the gaps in the Indian assessment and accreditation (A&A) processes would be a first step in enforcing quality standards in Indian higher education.

1.14 Significance and limitations

While this thesis does not propose any new theory, it does provide a window into the A&A process in the complex higher education system of India. Universities, no doubt, are under a lot of pressure to enforce quality standards as the nation tries hard to piece together a QA mechanism. This research seeks to provide a way out of the maze of Indian higher education.

The research will make a thorough study and analysis of the A&A procedure in place in India in the HE sector. It will analyse the A&A procedure in view of various theoretical approaches prevalent in the understanding of quality and quality assurance. The thesis will also consider the learning

experiences of different countries in quality assurance and try to identify the gaps in the Indian A&A process.

India has a diverse system of higher education with a large number of institutions offering technical education, medical education, etc. However, given the time and resource constraints, the thesis will confine itself to the analysis of external A&A procedures in universities imparting general education.

1.15 Research methodology

This research uses qualitative research methods for data collection and analysis. Since the research depends on the perspectives, experiences and opinions of participants for data analysis, qualitative research methods were preferred over quantitative research methods. Qualitative research allows the researcher to seek “an understanding of behaviour, values, beliefs, and so on in terms of the context in which the research is conducted.” (Bryman, 2008, p. 394). It was also felt that one “can gain a more detailed understanding of the phenomena of interest than with quantitative research.” (Houser, 1998, p. 38). Moreover, qualitative research methods are also helpful in understanding or explaining unusual situations that may not get identified by employing quantitative methods. Qualitative research methods also afford the flexibility of adjusting the data collection procedures even as the data is being collected, which was experienced and employed while collecting data during this research.

1.15.1 Unit of analysis

Higher education in India is fairly diverse with a variety of institutions – universities providing general education, Colleges for general education, Technical universities, Medical Colleges, polytechnics, etc. For purposes of this research, the units of analysis are the colleges and universities providing general education. QA procedures can be either internal or external. This research focuses on the external quality assurance processes.

As in the case of higher education, India has several agencies/bodies conducting the quality assurance exercise in educational institutions. For example, quality assurance in medical colleges is carried out by the Medical Council of India. Likewise, quality assurance in legal education is the

responsibility of the Bar Council of India and QA in teachers' training is looked after by the National Council for Teachers' Education. For the purpose of this research, the quality assurance and accreditation procedure envisaged by NAAC is analysed.

Moreover, in view of constraints of time and resources, data has been collected and analysed for universities and colleges in Gujarat State in India. Thus, to sum it up, this research focuses on the external institutional quality assurance mechanism conducted by NAAC for universities and colleges providing general education in the State of Gujarat, India.

1.15.2 Data collection method

The research has been carried out based on different sources of data. Justification for all these sources have been based on established theory.

(a) Document studies

Documents serve an important source for data, especially, when used in conjunction with other sources, such as interviews. Documents can be a very instructive addition to interviews. Accordingly, this research uses texts and documents related to the QA process – policy documents, mission statement, and other relevant documents. The selection of documents was largely based on availability – the listed publications, in the public domain, of the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India, the University Grants Commission and of the NAAC were reviewed and selected. The documents were electronically retrieved from the respective websites of the concerned agencies. Since the documents used for this research are from basically archive materials, they are 'non-reactive' and therefore have an advantage in respect of validity of data provided by them. The information provided by these documents have laid the fundamental ground for this research.

(b) The interviews

While strategy plans and documental data make significant contributions to any research, merely relying upon them may not provide the actual field perception. The strategy plans provide a framework for action, but they do not provide empirical data of the everyday reality. "We should not use documentary sources as surrogates for other kind of data. We cannot, for instance, learn

through records alone how an organization operates day by day. Equally, we cannot treat records – however ‘official’ – as firm evidence of what they report.” (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997, as cited in Silverman, 2004). To have an insight of the actual field realities and perceptions, academics and administrators connected with higher education were interviewed. These interviews have been an important source of data for this research.

The requirements of the research could be well satisfied with a qualitative interview. “In qualitative research, there is an emphasis on greater generality in the formulation of initial research ideas and on interviewees’ own perspectives” (Bryman, 2008, p. 437). Qualitative interviews allow the researcher to depart significantly from any schedule or guide that is being used. They can ask new follow-up questions and can vary the order and even the wordings of questions. As a result, qualitative interviewing tends to be flexible. Through a qualitative interview, a rich detailed answer can be evoked from the interviewee.

Qualitative interviews, themselves, are of two types: unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews. In unstructured interviews, the interviewer typically has at the most an interview guide as a brief set of prompts to him to deal with a certain range of topics. The style of questioning is usually informal. “In a semi-structured interview, the researcher has a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an interview guide, but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply.” (Bryman, 2008, p 438). The interviewer may ask questions not included in the guide should the answer given by the interviewee throw up opportunities for such questions. However, by and large, all questions are asked and similar wordings for questions are used for each interviewee.

Semi-structured interviews, which tread a path mid-way between the structured and the unstructured interviews, were found to be most suitable for the purposes of this research. The present research started from a fairly clear focus rather than a general notion. In this situation, a semi-structured interview was deemed appropriate.

The general structure for the interview guide for the semi-structured interview can be seen at Appendix I. It concerns ... broad areas While preparing the interview guide special care was taken to create a certain amount of order on the topic areas, so that the answers help in answering the research questions. The language of the questions has been comprehensible and relevant to the

people, who were being interviewed. In particular, care has been taken not to frame leading questions.

1.15.3 Sampling

The sampling for the interviews has been purposive. This was an obvious choice for a sampling technique since no purpose would have been served by seeking sample research participants by random sampling. Moreover, it was intended that there should be sufficient variety in the resulting sample so that sample members differed from each other in their perspectives. The option for purposive sampling is well supported by most writers on sampling in qualitative research. “Such sampling is essentially strategic and entails an attempt to establish a good correspondence between research questions and sampling. In other words, the researcher samples on the basis of wanting to interview people who are relevant to the research questions.” (Bryman, 2008, p. 458).

Initially, letters of request were sent to Vice Chancellors of four Universities of Gujarat State of the Indian Union. Follow up on these interviews was also undertaken over telephone, from time to time. This was done with a strategic objective that there would be a good correspondence between the research questions and sampling. The objective was to interview only those persons, who were found relevant to the research questions since it was believed that these academics/administrators would be ‘quality conscious’ and ‘quality-aware’ and therefore, informed of the various aspects of the QA mechanism in India. The State of Gujarat in India has been taken for reasons of proximity given the time and resource constraints. It is also felt that this would not bias the outcomes of the research significantly.

However, out of the four Universities, whose Vice Chancellors responded to the request for interview, only three responded. Out of these three who responded, one Vice Chancellor expressed his inability to participate in the research since his university was new and they had not participated in the NAAC A&A procedures. Out of the remaining two, one Vice Chancellor, sent in a filled-in reply to the questions that had been sent to him. The other Vice Chancellor sent in a filled-in reply to the questions sent to him and also nominated an academic-officer, who was looking after the NAAC A&A matters in the university, to be interviewed. Since, replies had been received only from two Vice Chancellors, people from the academic fraternity and principals of colleges were contacted.

In addition, the snowball sampling technique was employed. Since there was no fixed sampling frame for the research, this method was found suitable for the present research. For this purpose, initial contact was made with a small group of people, who were found relevant to the research. These contacts were then used to establish contacts with others. Snowball sampling is generally used in qualitative research where concerns about external validity and the ability to generalize are not as great as in quantitative research. Following this technique, a broad sample of interviewees was selected from institutions lying in urban, semi-urban and rural areas. The institutions were either entirely government owned or government-aided private colleges.

All the persons, who were interviewed, were asked the same questions to elicit their opinions. The sequence of the questions, that is, the order in which the questions were asked was similar. Follow-up supplementary questions were asked depending on the responses of interviewee. The interviewees were sent the questionnaire in advance to allow them time to prepare for the interview. The interview was scheduled with prior appointment. The interviewees were also assured of complete confidentiality so that they felt free to talk on the various issues relating to the A&A processes in QA in India.

Altogether nine interviews were conducted. In addition, a response was received from a university in the form of a filled-up questionnaire. The interviews were conducted in English. The response from a university in the form of a filled-in questionnaire was also in English. The interviews were conducted between 28.06.2012 and 13.10.2012. Each of the interviews lasted for about 30-45 minutes, inclusive of pre-interview discussions and briefing. The interviews were recorded digitally either using a digital recorder or directly over the computer and transcripts of each of the interviews were prepared. A copy of the transcript was sent to the concerned interviewee to allow them to verify their correctness. No interviewee made any correction to the transcript sent to him/her.

Once the transcripts were prepared, respondent validation of the interview was carried out. Respondent validation, which is also sometimes called member validation, is often used by the researcher to seek corroboration of the account that the researcher has arrived at. For the purpose of corroboration and validation, a summary of the viewpoint expressed by each interviewee on the questions put to him was prepared separately and then sent individually to each interviewee. All the interviewees validated the summary of the responses given by them.

The response of the university that had only sent in a filled-up questionnaire has not been considered because it lacks specificity and is too general. Besides, since there was no interview conducted in this case, it was difficult to ascertain the exact viewpoint to the issues raised.

1.15.4 Coding of interviewees

Each of the interviewees has been allotted an appropriate code for confidentiality and also for the purpose of general group identification. This was also done with the purpose of seeing whether there was any difference in the perspective of different groups. The interviewees can be divided into three categories based on the nature of duties performed by them: Administrators (A1 – A4), Academicians (C1 – C4) and Government (G1). For the purpose of coding, the filled-up questionnaire received from one of the Universities has also been included under the category of ‘Administrators’. The lone interviewee belonging to the ‘Government’ category was not working with the government at the time of interview, but, has been associated with the officer of the Commissioner of Higher Education, Government of Gujarat, for a considerable period of time till quite recently. All the persons interviewed had been involved with the NAAC A&A procedures at some point of time and were generally familiar with it.

Another feature commonly seen in the Indian HE set up is that there is no separation between personnel looking after the administration and the academic faculty. In almost all cases, academic faculty look after the administration of the colleges as well. Therefore, while they carry on the administration of the colleges, they also engage classes. Therefore, all of the interviewees have some academic affiliation.

1.15.6 The interview guide

At the time of preparing the interview guide or questionnaire, the option was between going in for open-ended or closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions allow the respondents to answer in their own terms. The answers are not forced upon them. Open-ended questions allow unusual responses to be derived. Replies that the interviewer may not have contemplated are possible. “The questions do not suggest certain kinds of answers to the respondents. Therefore, respondents’ levels of knowledge and understanding of issues can be tapped. The salience of issues for respondents can also be explored.” (Bryman, 2008, p. 232). “Open ended questions are most useful when the

researcher needs to know what people are thinking and how they naturally view their world” (Cozby, 2009, p. 128).

For the purposes of this research, open-ended questions were presented to the interviewee to allow them to provide their own answers. Open-ended questions are common in qualitative research where the objective of the interview is to elicit the opinion of the interviewee. Since the aim of the interview is to elicit opinions on the different aspects of QA mechanisms, open-ended questions have been favoured to allow for maximum flexibility.

Open-ended questions, however, have their disadvantages. They are more time-consuming and require greater effort from respondents. Taking these disadvantages into consideration as also the time and resource constraints for the research, the interview guide had been designed to be not very long.

The interview guide has been annexed at Annexure III of this thesis. As can be clearly seen, the questions proposed to be put to the respondent interviews are open-ended and allow considerable flexibility to the interviewees to respond to them. The interview guide consists of five basic questions with suitable ‘prompts’ to each of those questions. The basic idea was to elicit the views of the interviewees on the different aspects of quality assurance in higher education in India.

1.15.7 Ethical considerations

While conducting the interviews great care was exercised over ethical considerations. All interviewees were explained the purpose of the research. All interviewees were assured confidentiality of their responses and that their responses would never come in the public domain in their names. No question has been asked pertaining to any particular institution so that they are not put to any kind of embarrassment. Interviews have been conducted only with prior appointment and with their informed consent.

1.16 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides a general introduction. It gives a brief overview of the Indian HE system and identifies its various concerns. The research problem is

formulated and the methodology adopted is outlined. The significance and limitations of the thesis is also discussed. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical framework related to quality and quality assurance. It also conducts a review of some of the existing literature in quality and quality assurance. The chapter also gives a snapshot of prevailing QA mechanisms across the globe. Chapter 3 lays down the QA mechanism in higher education in India. It discusses, in detail, the strategy and approach of the external institutional assessment and accreditation process adopted by NAAC for universities. Chapter 4 makes an analysis of the Indian assessment and accreditation process in the backdrop of global practices, existing theory of quality assurance and on the basis of data collected during the course of the research. Chapter 5 discusses the data collected during the research, draws out conclusions and makes recommendations. It also lays down areas for further research.

2. Theoretical framework and review of literature

Perhaps the most contentious issue in the QA process is the definition of quality itself. The concept of quality varies from nation to nation. Any quality assurance policy formulation in higher education has to begin with the outlining of its objectives, which in turn requires as to how a nation interprets 'quality'. The word 'quality', when applied to higher education brings in a host of definitions and widely differing concepts.

2.1 The meaning of quality

Quality is a much debated and discussed term. The word quality is derived from the Latin word *qualis* meaning 'what kind of'. The concept of quality in higher education has been one of the most dominating and influential ideas across the world in recent times. Even as the world tries to arrive at a consensus on a uniformly acceptable definition of quality in higher education, no authoritative definition of quality has emerged.

Becher (1989) viewed quality as a "creature of political fashion". Stensaker et al (2007, p. 99) perceived quality as a management idea that was "part of the 'fad and fashion' market which, sometimes, is a mandatory requirement as part of governmental reforms, in other instances, ideas voluntary adapted by higher education institutions.". Harvey and Green (1993) adopted a pragmatic approach to the definition of quality and viewed it as 'stakeholder-relative'. Quality, according to them, could not have a unitary, universal concept but was open to multiple perspectives. Different stakeholders would tend to have different notions about quality. While for students and teachers, quality would relate to the educational process itself, for the employers it would be the outputs of higher education. 'The best that can be achieved is to define as clearly as possible the criteria that each stakeholder uses when judging quality, and for these competing views to be taken into account when assessments of quality are undertaken' (Green, 1994, p. 27, as cited in Fornari, p. 3).

2.2 Approaches to quality:

2.2.1 The approach of Harvey and Green

One of the most widely acceptable approaches to quality has been given by Harvey and Green. According to them, the differing conceptualizations of quality can be grouped into five discrete but interrelated ways of thinking. The five different approaches to quality are ‘quality as exceptional’, ‘quality as perfection or consistency’, ‘quality as fitness for purpose’, ‘quality as value for money’ and ‘quality as transformation’ (Table 1).

(a) Quality as exceptional

The exceptional approach to quality perceives it as something special. There are three variations in this approach to quality. The first view is the traditional notion of quality as distinctive or exclusive. In the second view, quality is considered as being exceptional or exceeding very high standards. The third view, which is a weaker notion of quality, is it passing a set of required minimum standards.

(i) *Traditional notion of quality*

Traditionally, quality has been understood as being something distinct or ‘high class’. It has implied exclusivity. Under this approach, quality is not determined through an assessment of the services that are provided but is based on an assumption that the distinctiveness and inaccessibility of the services provided constitutes quality by themselves. In this approach, quality is not viewed as a set of criteria but as something that is separate and unattainable for most people. The traditional notion of quality, thus, does not define quality. Besides, it does not offer any ‘standards’ against which the quality of any institution can be measured. Therefore, this approach offers no definable method of determining quality. Quality is “apodictic – one instinctively knows quality”. (Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 11)

(ii) *Excellence 1: Exceeding high standards*

In this approach, quality is perceived in terms of 'high standards'. To a large extent, this approach is similar to the traditional view. While this approach identifies the various criteria that constitute excellence, it also ensures that they are difficult to attain. The approach is elitist in nature and focuses on inputs and outputs. 'An institution that takes the best students, provides them with the best resources, both human and physical, excels by its very nature. Whatever the process by which students learn, the excellence remains.' (Harvey & Knight, 1996, p. 9). Excellence 1 sees quality in terms of high standards and is about excelling in inputs and outputs. "Excellence, with its emphasis on the 'level' of input and output, is an absolutist measure of quality." (Astin and Solomon, 1981; Moodie, 1988; Miller, 1990, as cited in Harvey & Knight, p. 9). "Excellence 1 can be conceived of as 'doing the right things well.'" (Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 12).

(iii) *Checking standards*

This approach to quality reflects a weaker notion of exceptional quality and implies conformance to minimum required standards. In this approach, a product is accepted to be of 'quality' if it passes a set of quality checks based on attainable criteria. The criteria are constructed to reject 'defective' products. This approach, therefore, provides an 'absolute standard' against which any product is measured and all those items that fulfil these minimum standards are accepted to be of 'quality'. This approach to quality assumes that the prescribed standards are objective. However, the standards are subject to change with changing circumstances.

(b) *Quality as perfection or consistency*

In this approach, quality is seen in terms of consistency and focuses on 'process and sets specifications that it aims to meet perfectly.' (Ingle, 1985, as cited in Harvey & Knight, 1996, p. 9). This notion of quality has two interrelated concepts: 'zero defects' and 'getting things right first time'.

(i) *Excellence 2: Zero defects*

In this approach, quality is defined as something that conforms to particular specifications. The quality of a product is measured by its consistency in meeting the specifications. Quality is a

measure of the absence of defects. The zero defects approach ‘embodies a philosophy of prevention rather than inspection’ (Peters & Waterman, 1982, as cited in Harvey & Knight, 1996, p. 10). This approach has been criticized as not being suitable for learning even though it may apply to administrative tasks.

(ii) *Quality culture: Getting things right first time*

A culture of quality is one in which everyone in an organization, at each stage, is responsible for quality. “In this concept, the organisation is reduced to a system of interrelated nodes (a single person or small team). Each node has inputs and outputs and has quality interfaces.”(Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 16). This approach focuses upon ensuring quality at each node. The responsibility for quality is not merely left to the quality controllers. There is no need to check the final output since in doing so, the accountability for ensuring quality of the individual nodes withers away. In essence, a quality culture advocates delegation of responsibility for quality to all levels. A quality culture ensures that things are done right the first time itself. If they are not done so, then the process or procedure that has led to an unsatisfactory output needs to be analysed and corrections introduced so that the desired results are obtained the very first time.

(c) *Quality as fitness for purpose*

This approach to quality states that quality has meaning only in relation to the purpose of the product or service. This concept is different from the concept of quality as exceptional, which postulates, by definition, that it must be exclusive. Under this approach, every product or service has the potential to do the job that it is designed for and, thus, fit its purpose. The question that arises next is “whose purpose” is to be addressed and “how is fitness of the purpose to be assessed”? “Fitness for purpose” offers two approaches – to go by the choice of the customer or the provider. (Moodie, 1986b, as cited in Harvey & Knight).

(i) *Fitness for purpose 1 (FFP1) – customer specification*

In this approach to quality as fitting the specifications, the outcome or result of the process or the nature of the product should match the specifications prescribed by the customer. This requires precise identification of those specifications as well as ensuring that the output conforms to those specifications. “Some advocates of fitness for purpose argue that providers can, or indeed should,

be more pro-active by anticipating consumer desires.” (Deming, 1982, as cited in Harvey & Knight, 1996, p. 11). In this approach, the customer is sovereign and a quality product must conform to customer-determined specifications. This approach is developmental in nature since it recognizes that purposes may change over time and this may require constant re-evaluation of the appropriateness of the specification.

(ii) Meeting requirements

In this concept, it is assumed that a quality product, in meeting customer specifications, meets customer requirements. Quality is judged on the output and not on the process. Critics of the ‘meeting customer specifications’ point out that the idea that the customer determines the specification is an idealization that rarely exists. “Customer’s specifications may ‘originate’ with the customer but are likely to be mediated by cost, available technology, time, marketing (such as advertising) and so on.”(Harvey & Green, p. 17). The service provider or the producer, after assessing the requirements of the customers and what he is prepared to buy, many a times, try to shape the requirements of the customers through massive marketing campaigns.

This approach becomes further complicated when applied to higher education. Firstly, the idea of the ‘customer’ is itself contentious. It is also not clear as to who is the customer – students, parents, government or employers? Secondly, the customer may neither be capable nor sufficiently equipped to specify what is required. Fitness for purpose, therefore, leaves open the question of who should define quality in education and how it should be assessed.

(iii) Fitness for purpose 2 (FFP2) – mission

In its alternative form to the “customer-specification approach”, the fitness for purpose avoids the issue of determining the customers and “returns the emphasis on the institution. In this case, quality is defined in terms of the institution fulfilling its own state objectives or ‘mission’. Quality becomes fitness for, and performance in, the market as defined by the institution”(Harvey & Knight, 1996, p. 12). It has been seen that this approach to quality is a significant element of the dominant model of external quality monitoring in many countries, including India.

(iv) *Quality assurance*

In this approach, there are “mechanisms, procedures and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality, however defined and measured, is delivered. ... The assumption implicit in the development of quality assurance is that if mechanisms exist, quality can be assured.”(Harvey & Knight, 1996, p. 12). This approach raises important questions. Would quality assurance mechanisms ensure that students know and get what has been offered? Would quality assurance mechanisms ensure that customer requirements are met?

(v) *Customer satisfaction*

If the mission of the institution is responsive to the needs or expectations of the ‘customer’ or the stakeholders, the previous two approaches of ‘customer-specification’ and ‘mission’, converge. In this approach, the focus is on monitoring customer (student or employer) satisfaction with the service offered. When applied to higher education, this approach leads to a pronounced emphasis on participant feedback forming the basis of a continuous quality improvement of the student learning experience.

(d) *Quality as value for money*

In this approach, quality is equated with the value for money. Following this approach to higher education, efficiency and effectiveness in education are the demands raised for the value for money. In this approach, quality is sought to be secured at a price one can afford. This has led to demands for ‘high-standards specifications’ in higher education, but, at a reduced cost. The emphasis is, thus, on efficiency and effectiveness and has led to the adoption of methodologies that reward quality and penalise unsatisfactory performance. This view, thus, draws upon a “market view of quality linked to accountability. The use of performance indicators, customer charters and league tables are an attempt to operationalize and legitimate this notion of quality by creating a pseudo-market designed to effect change through competition” (Harvey & Knight, 1996, p. 13).

(i) *Performance indicators*

Performance indicators have been developed, partly, to monitor efficiency. “Staff-student ratios, indexes of revenue and capital resources, ratios of public to private funds, market share and

examination results are principally used as crude measures of institutional (and programme) *efficiency*.”(HMI, 1990, as cited in Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 23). Performance indicators provide a measure of accountability for the Treasury. Sensicle (1991) has expressed apprehension that with this approach, “there is a danger that important qualitative aspects of performance and progress in higher education might be missed or submerged.”(as cited in Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 23).

(ii) Customer charters

Customer charters specify what customers can expect for the money they pay. A charter contains a series of service standards, which, if met, produces a quality service for the ‘customer’. Bodies acting as watchdogs often adopt this approach to inform the customer about what constitutes a ‘good deal’ and provide them with some resources in case they are not getting a good deal. It allows the customer to make more informed choices. Customer charters are designed to create a pseudo-market so as to effect change through competition. However, the application of this approach to higher education is debatable. “They may inform the criteria by which students judge satisfaction. However, as proposed student charters refer to minimum standards and are produced for, and not by students, they are likely to have little impact on improving or even maintaining quality.” (Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 24)

(e) Quality as transformation

The transformative view of quality speaks of a qualitative change – a fundamental change of form. “Transformation is not restricted to apparent or physical transformation but also includes cognitive transcendence.” (Harvey & Knight, 1996, p. 13). This transformative notion of quality raises doubts about the relevance of product-centred approaches such as fitness-for-purpose. There are limitations in applying product-based concepts of quality to the service sector and this is especially true for higher education. “Education is a participative process. Students are not products, customers, consumers, service users or clients – they are participants. Education is not a service *for* a customer (much less a product to be consumed) but an ongoing process of transformation *of* the participant.”(Harvey & Knight, 1996, p. 13)

(i) Enhancing the participant

“Quality education is one that brings about changes in the participants and, thereby, presumably enhances them.”

(ii) Value added

“Value added is a ‘measure’ of quality in terms of the extent to which the educational experience enhances the knowledge, abilities and skills of students. A high quality institution would be one that greatly enhances its students.” However, the value added depends upon the adopted methodology and what is defined as ‘value’. Value measurements based on ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’ may offer a quantifiable measure of the ‘value added’, but, may not reflect the true nature of the qualitative transformation.

(iii) Empowering the participant

This approach professes giving power to the participants, i.e. empowering them, to influence their own transformation. In the context of higher education, empowering the participant involves them in the decision making process that concerns their transformation. The opportunity for self-empowerment is provided by the transformation process itself “with consequent impact upon decision-making processes that affect the participant. ... In this last sense of empowerment, quality is seen in terms of the extent to which the education system transforms the *conceptual* ability and *self-awareness* of the student.”(Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 26)

2.2.2 Human capital approach to quality

The emerging focus of higher education policies in recent times is on “student learning outcomes – the specific levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities that students achieve as a consequence of their engagement in a particular education program.” (Brennan & Shah, 2000, as cited in Dill, 2007, p. 1). Therefore, there is an increasing tendency to equate academic quality as equivalent to academic standards. Academic standards may be taken as “the level of knowledge and skill achieved by graduates as a result of their academic programme or degree.” (Eustace, 1991 as cited in Dill & Beerkens, 2010, p. 3). A student receiving higher education develops skills, knowledge and acquires abilities and, thus, contributes to the growth of human capital. The returns to society is not

only in economic terms but also in other non-monetary terms – improved parenting, healthier lifestyles, greater civic participation, and increased social cohesion” (Haveman et al., 2003 as cited in Dill & Beerkens, 2010, p. 3). “It is this conception of academic quality as academic standards that most often is articulated in current national policies on academic quality”(Brennan et al, 1997, as cited in Dill & Beerkens, 2010, p.3). These policies increasingly focus on improving academic outcomes and the educational ‘value-added’ contribution of an academic program or degree. In the light of contribution of higher education to the growth of human capital, it can be said that public interest is best served by an institutional framework of policies, rules and norms that maximizes the academic standards attained by graduates in as efficient and as equitable a manner as possible. The ‘human-capital approach’ to quality is consistent with the *‘talent development approach’* proposed by Astin (1990). The human capital argument, thus, applies across the entire spectrum of ability and achievement.

2.2.3 Standards approach to quality

As has been mentioned previously, quality in higher education is currently perceived as the maintenance of academic standards. The question that arises is as to what is ‘academic standards’. Astin (1990) gives two interpretations of “academic standards”. Firstly, it can be interpreted as referring to the performance-level the student must achieve in order to be awarded a degree. A second interpretation of “academic standards” expresses a concern for the talent development process itself. It is argued that an academic programme would become less demanding if a larger numbers of underprepared students are admitted to an institution. It would then lose some of its potency in developing student talent. However, such a situation is faced by all institutions. The quality of an institution can then be assessed on the basis of the diagnostic and remedial processes in place to deal with students with different academic preparations.

2.3 The meaning of quality assurance

‘The term quality assurance in higher education is increasingly used to denote the practices whereby academic standards, i.e., the level of academic achievement attained by higher education graduates, are maintained and improved’(Dill, 2007, p.1). Quality assurance can be broadly categorized into two: internal quality assurance and external quality assurance.

Internal quality assurance refers to those policies and practices where academic institutions regulate, monitor and improve the quality of their educational provisions by themselves. Some kind of this self-regulatory mechanism to assure academic quality has existed in the universities from earlier times. However, higher education institutions have always had to operate within a national policy framework drafted by the state to ensure appropriate academic standards.

Higher education witnessed profound changes in the last quarter of the twentieth century and this led to a growing state interest in quality, demands for accountability, and the establishment of national quality agencies. By the end of the 1990s, the concern for quality and standards was global. Internal quality assurance practices suffered from two major shortcomings. Firstly, there was the question of objectivity in such quality assurance practices. The second problem was about gauging the uniformity of quality standards between institutions. Gradually, there was a 'withdrawal of trust' insofar as the capability of institutions to judge their own academic quality was concerned. As a natural consequence of loss of trust, the demand for external quality assurance schemes emerged.

One of the most significant changes in national quality assurance frameworks at the end of the 20th century was the emergence of the evaluative state. National governments all over the world initiated and created new structures designed to assess quality in higher education programmes and institutions. External quality assurance refers to those supra-institutional policies and practices where the quality of higher educational institutions is monitored by external agencies.

2.4 Purposes of quality assurance systems

A second important dimension in quality assurance mechanisms concerns the purposes or functions of the quality assurance system. In general, four purposes have been identified for quality assurance systems: 'improvement of education', 'accountability', 'public information and market transparency' and 'steering of the higher education system in resources and planning'. "The focus of the first function is on the internal institutional level itself, whereas the second, the third and the fourth functions are centred on the external responsibilities of the institutions in relation to the government, stakeholders, the wider community and the public" (Damme, 2000, p. 13).

2.4.1 Improvement of education

In this function, the quality assurance system provides feedback to the academic staff on course curriculum, contents, infrastructure, etc. for improvement of the academic education. In many cases improvement also means renewal and innovation. This function is linked to the transformational approach to quality. In this approach, the quality assurance process leads to processes of institutional innovation.

2.4.2 Accountability

This function focuses on the more efficient and effective use of resources. As a consequence, a demand is put on some kind of accountability in respect of the returns on the investments made in higher education. The approach forces institutions to be more responsible and cost-efficient. It casts a public duty upon them to report publicly on the outcomes and their social benefits to higher education with the public resources invested in them. This approach acquired prominence in situations where relationships between the state and the institutions are based on concepts of self-regulation and institutional autonomy.

2.4.3 Public information and market transparency

This function recognizes the right of the stakeholders in higher education to have information regarding the standing and status of academic institutions. Viewed from this approach, quality assurance improves market transparency.

This function has been one of the most contentious ones. Vroeijenstijn (1995) places the entire discussion in a comprehensive perspective. The conflict between ‘improvement’ and ‘accountability’ arises at the time of writing of the report. From the ‘improvement’ perspective, confidentiality is favoured since making the report public invites an evasive behaviour from the faculties. They tend to avoid exposing their weaknesses, are less willing for an honest self-analysis or an open discussion with peers fearing retribution. The ‘accountability’ function, on the other hand, demands complete transparency and the publication of as much as possible of the data, findings and conclusions. Vroeijenstijn concludes that the advantages of a public report are greater. It would also be appreciated that transparency and publication of detailed results is actually inevitable given the increasing presence of the market in HE in the world today.

The market needs “perfect information by the producers and the consumers about price, quality and other relevant characteristics of the good or service being purchased in order to work efficiently... The information problem is very acute in the case of higher education ...” (Amaral, 2005, p. 8). Moreover, better information is also important for producer effectiveness: “Information on the quality of a product provides an incentive for producers to invest in quality improvements and thereby better compete in the market” (Dill & Soo, 2004, p. 61)

2.4.4 Steering of the higher education system in resources and planning

In this function, quality indicators are used to determine funding patterns and resource allocations between institutions or in decision-making processes concerning allocation of programmes. This purpose is present in accreditation procedures.

2.5 Quality assurance: A theoretical construct

“Quality may be perceived as a *policy* located within the broader domain of higher education” (Perellon, 2007, p. 156). A policy paradigm is dependent upon the ‘national context’ at any ‘point of time’ and, hence, is said to be time and space dependent. Premfors, in his discussion of policy analysis in higher education, outlines the existence of six fundamental choices or elements – size, structure, location, admission, governance and curricula – that must be addressed by all higher education policies. In addition there are five basic values – excellence, equality, autonomy, accountability and efficiency - that a higher education system must address. Policy formation takes place by the application of these five basic values to the six fundamental choices (Premfors, 1992: 1911 as cited in Perellon, 2007).

Modifying Premfors approach to policy analysis, Perellon (2007) outlines the existence of five fundamental choices for policy makers – ‘objectives’, ‘control’, ‘areas’, ‘procedures’ and ‘uses’ – that must be addressed by all higher education policies. ‘Objectives’ define the aims and objectives of the quality assurance policy. ‘Control’ refers to the body that should control the process of quality assurance. ‘Areas’ refer to the domains covered by the quality assurance procedures. ‘Procedures’ refer to how the quality assurance procedures are to be set up. ‘Uses’ refer to the use of the collected information.

The 'objectives' of quality assurance policy reflect the existing belief about the aims and objectives of the quality assurance policy. These true objectives, being a product of diverse socio-economic-political forces, may not readily be seen. Objectives can be of two different kinds: 'formative' or 'summative'. 'Formative' objectives pursue a real improvement of teaching and learning processes. It is concerned with the experience of learning. 'Summative' objectives link the results to some particular consequences and are regulatory in nature. In the context of higher education, this can be seen in the linking of funding decisions to quality performance.

The summative approach, when applied to higher education, has been criticised since it arguably ignores the learning dimension of education. Linkage of institutional funding with evaluation outcomes has been vigorously contested because of what is called the St. Matthew's effect (Neave, 1997): "To him who hath, it shall be given; to him who has not, it shall be taken away even that which he hath"(as cited in Amaral & Polidori, 1999, p. 22). The criticism notwithstanding, it would be seen that current global quality assurance trends strongly lean towards the regulatory, summative approach with its strong focus on accreditation.

Another approach to the 'objectives' aspect of quality assurance is to see whether it emphasizes 'accountability' or 'improvement'. It is argued that both these objectives require different mechanisms to achieve the desired outcomes. Accountability systems are unlikely to lead to a process of sustained quality improvement even though there may be lead to improvement in the short run. Accountability approaches tend to de-motivate staffs, who are already involved in innovation and quality initiatives. There is also "a feeling of being manipulated, of not being trusted or valued, by managers and outside agencies"(Harvey & Knight, 1996, p. 100 as cited in Newton, 2000, p. 5). Proponents of the improvement approach argue that improvement is accountability by itself. If an organization improves continuously, it can be said to be accountable.

The issue of 'control' of the quality assurance mechanism is an important consideration in the quality assurance process. Should the quality assurance policies be determined or controlled by the state or the universities? While a quality assurance policy without state support is not likely to succeed, equally true is the fact that a quality assurance policy without the involvement of the academic staff is as much doomed. Institutional autonomy is considered crucial for professional development. In addition, "the emergence of the market in higher education has gone hand-in-hand with increased institutional autonomy as the rules of the market demand that producers have

decision-making freedom to complete and adapt to the new environment” (Rosa & Amaral, 2007, p. 185). The optimum policy, then, should be an intermediate policy between the two extremes with a mixed political and institutional control over quality assurance procedures. In addition, the autonomy of those responsible for the quality assurance procedures should also be ensured.

The ‘area’ or the field of operation of quality assurance procedures is also crucial. The three areas that are addressed by HE quality assurance procedures are those of research, study programmes and institutional management.

The next fundamental choice relates to the adoption of appropriate ‘procedures’ for quality assurance. There are two approaches that are adopted to address this issue. The first refers to methodological issues while the second refers to the degree of involvement of the higher education institutions in the quality assurance process. “Methodological questions have to be addressed in three pairs of oppositions: outcome-oriented vs. process-oriented procedures; internal vs. external procedures and qualitative vs. quantitative methods” (Perellon, 2007, p. 164).

‘Outcome-oriented’ procedures focus on the quality of the product while ‘product-oriented’ procedures emphasize the general processes involved – teaching, learning, research – in higher education institutions.

‘Internal’ procedures are reflected in the self-assessment exercises done by the institutions as well as in any internal quality assurance mechanism that may be in place within the institution.

‘External’ procedures get expressed through peer reviews. Usually a quality assurance mechanism in higher education involves both internal as well as external procedures.

‘Quantitative’ methods involve the use of ‘performance indicators’, which provide clear, objective and measurable information that facilitate political decisions. ‘Qualitative’ methods are again illustrated by peer reviews. Both the quantitative and qualitative methods are complementary to each other.

Another procedural aspect related to the ‘procedure’ of quality assurance processes is whether it should be ‘compulsory’ or ‘voluntary’. In the early years of the quality assurance movement, taking part in the quality assurance procedures used to be voluntary. The entire approach was based on ‘mutual trust’ and a ‘will to improve’. However, higher education systems at present are strongly

influenced by market forces with the result that a voluntary approach has almost completely lost favour.

The fifth fundamental choice is regarding ‘how’ the information collected during a quality assurance exercise is used. The recent trend in quality assurance is to make the a detailed information available to all interest groups of higher education – students, parents, employers, state and the general public. Another trend has been to use the information to ‘rank’ institutions.

2.6 Forms of Regulation: A theoretical perspective

“The concept of regulation is most often associated with a binding set of governmental rules to be applied by a public agency over specific activities – the so-called command and control perspective”(Dill & Beerkens, 2010, p. 7). One of the well recognized approaches to coordinating or controlling behaviour in academic institutions has been advanced by Clark (1983) through his classic ‘triangle of coordination.’ (Please see Fig. 1)

Clark (1983) argues that “some coordination by academic oligarchy exists in all national systems of higher education”(p. 140). The extent of coordination may vary from system to system being most prominent in chair-based institutions. National systems not strictly controlled by the state depend heavily on the academic oligarchy to link persons, groups and institutions. In virtually every system, there exists a “buffer academic oligarchy” that coordinates relationships between the institutions and the state. The academic oligarchy having a significant presence, Clark has proposed a triangular model of state, market, and oligarchical forms of coordination. Each corner of the coordination triangle represents an extreme form of coordination while points inside the triangle represent different combinations of the three elements in different degrees.

From Clark’s perspective, the state has a number of policy alternatives available with it to command and control the various approaches for assuring academic standards in higher education institutions. Academic quality potentially could be assured by “professional self-regulation, which is ‘enforced’ by government structuring or oversight, or by competitive market, which is in turn steered by appropriate competition and disclosure laws designed to ensure that institutions of higher education provide adequate service to customers.”(Dill & Beerkens, 2010, p. 7).

Based on this broad concept of regulation, we can, as shown in Table 2, explain the general policy approaches (in bold) and new policy instruments for academic quality assurance (in italics).

2.7 The twin challenges of expansion and inclusive higher education

Altbach (2004) mentions that higher education in Asian countries was developed in a colonial environment, where higher education was generally neglected. In the post-colonial period, these countries, including India, are massive problems related to massification, equity, inclusiveness and equal opportunity in higher education. All these factors have the tendency to lower the quality of higher education since a great demand is put on funds. This is further compounded by the competing need for highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce to drive their emerging economies.

Under such a situation, Altbach suggests that massification of higher education requires a clear differentiation of goals and purposes between higher education institutions so that resources are efficiently managed and the different objectives of higher education are served. This requires ‘a coordinated system of higher education loosely managed by an authority that has both the power and responsibility for a system of higher education. Systems require clear definition of institutional goals and responsibilities, as well as appropriate funding.’ (Altbach, 2004, p. 28)

He mentions that ‘large academic systems require transparency in terms of quality academic programmes and institutions and assurance that minimum standards are met.’ (Altbach, 2004, p. 28). This is necessary to ensure that all stakeholders are appropriately, sufficiently and correctly informed of the quality that an institution or an academic programme offers. It is also necessary to ensure that public resources are effectively spent. Altbach is also of the opinion that markets may not be able to ensure the quality in higher education because the measurement of quality in higher education is complex and far from obvious to students or to employers. Altbach further says that the appropriate accreditation system suitably adapted to specific circumstances should be adopted by Asian countries to ensure that appropriate standards are met. He also says that not all universities need focus on research. However, every country needs some universities that engage in top-quality research in relevant fields or are at least capable of interpreting research done somewhere else.

2.8 Review of literature

Chapman and Austin (2002) have outlined six trends that have led to the renewed attention to higher education on the part of national governments and international assistance organizations. Firstly, the success attained by countries in raising participation in primary education has created an “enrollment bubble that is rapidly working its way up the system, resulting in extraordinary pressure for expanded access to higher education. Governments understand that failing to accommodate this new demand for access comes at considerable political risk.” (p. 6) Thus, governments cannot afford to be seen as limiting their access to better life opportunities and employment. Secondly, in some countries, an intense focus towards primary education has resulted in an imbalance in the skill levels of the available workforce. It is, therefore, necessary to produce sufficient manpower adequately trained in advanced technical and managerial capacity. Thirdly, economic globalization has put the focus back on higher education for a country to compete effectively in the modern global economy. Natural resources or the level of industrialization are no longer the sole measure of the wealth of nations. In the new age, knowledge is the new capital and information is the currency of exchange” (p.6). Fourthly, recent changes in national political systems with pronounced shifts towards democratic approaches have created opportunities as well as necessities for a new relationship between higher education institutions and the government. Fifthly, the higher education sector is facing increased competition with other equally important sectors for public funds. Sixthly, technological advances have opened up new avenues for delivery of educational services. “New approaches to the design and delivery of higher education itself are forcing a rethinking of how institutions are organized, how instructional quality is monitored, and the role of government in the oversight of higher education.” (p. 7).

Brennan (1997) says that much of the controversy surrounding quality in higher education is centred around the language of quality. Conventionally, the language of quality has been used in the context of the manufacturing and service industry. Many academics see the quality initiatives as a threat to undermine the special characteristics and status enjoyed by higher education. He mentions that there has also been a lot of controversy about quality assessment in higher education over its ownership and also over the methods adopted for such quality assessment. He goes on to say that where the ownership of quality assessment maintains the existing balance of power (for example, in favour of the state, where the state has traditionally exercised control over the institutions) the controversy over ownership may be limited. However, when the ownership

involves a significant change in the balance of power, controversy is likely to be high. On the controversy regarding the methods to be adopted, he says that the institutions have a preference for self-evaluation whereas the government stresses upon the need for external assessment procedures. These preferences, in turn, may have less to do with proven efficacy of any particular assessment method and more with the exercise of power. Moreover, the controversy about power is not merely at the systemic level between the state and the institutions. "A different kind of controversy exists at the institutional level: the controversy of so-called managerialism. From the perspective of the individual staff member, local controls and constraints can appear to be far more powerful than anything that exists at the system level." (p.4). In view of this, Brennan argues that approaches to quality assessment which emphasise institution-level responsibility tend to be accompanied by the introduction of institution-wide procedures and policies which have the effect of shifting power away from the basic unit or department towards the institutional centre. Brennan further says that power at the institutional level also affects the attitudes to the assessment method. An assessment method focusing on the institution is likely to reinforce the power of institutional management while an assessment method that focuses on the subject level tends to enhance the power of the subject group and reinforces the importance of subject values and academic work.

El-Khawas (2002) has defined quality in terms of three characteristics: sufficient capacity, efficiency and effectiveness. This approach is shown in Table 3.

El-Khawas has stated that while the last of these characteristics is obvious, the other two characteristics are equally important for an institution to sustain quality over time and in changing conditions. The relationship between capacity, efficiency and effectiveness is not easily understood. Quality demands the existence and maintenance of infrastructure, both physical and human, adequate to the accomplishment of objectives. Issues of capacity were criticized as a potential focus for quality assurance policies and had been described as only showing "inputs" and being narrow in approach. However, the issue of capacity has found favour and has evolved as an important criterion to assess an institutions overall ability to offer academic programmes of good quality. The issue of effectiveness deals with whether the graduates have acquired knowledge or skills that is expected of them. The issue of relevance can also be considered. Efficiency characteristics look at the provision of effective education at low per unit cost. However, some difficulties may arise when the efficiency goals are over-stressed in higher education. For example, if institutions of higher education become elitist in nature, they may have a higher completion rate and may be considered as more efficient. However, this may not serve societal goals of massification of higher education.

Again, providing low wages to the teaching faculty may improve efficiency but at the cost of effectiveness.

Young (1979) mentions that accreditation focuses on the two concerns of “*educational quality*, defined and interpreted within the context of the institution or program’s statement of its own scope and purpose as compared with similar institutions and programs; and *institutional integrity*, viewed from the perspective that the institution or program is what it says it is and does what it says it does educationally, at any given point of time” (p. 134). Accreditation continues to evolve. It is intended to foster excellence in higher education through the development of criteria and guidelines for assessing educational effectiveness; encourage improvement through continuous self-study and planning; and assure the educational community, the general public, and other agencies or organisations that an institution or program has both clearly defined and appropriate objectives, maintains conditions under which their achievement can reasonably be expected, appears in fact to be accomplishing them substantially, and can be expected to continue to do so. Accreditation also provides counsel and assistance to established and developing institutions and programs; encourages the diversity of higher education, and allows institutions to achieve their particular objectives and goals; and endeavours to protect institutions against encroachments that might jeopardize their educational effectiveness or academic freedom. The criteria of the accrediting body are intended to establish a common frame of reference for the institutional self-study and the peer review, and not to impose rigid, external, quantitative requirements on the institution. He also goes on to assert that self-regulation is the most effective means of assuring proper behaviour because any system of external regulation can be effective only to the extent that it recognizes and builds upon a community’s willingness to engage in self-regulation.

Wergin (2005) holds that accreditation is the only buffer between institutional autonomy and government control, which is becoming increasingly assertive over the years in specifying what accreditation standards should be. The demand for transparency has mandated the making of the accreditation reports public. Increased public scrutiny of accreditation has only amplified tensions in the accreditation function. Accrediting bodies are faced with the problem of satisfying competing and even contradictory interests. On the one hand, they have to show that the tradition of peer review accurately and fairly assesses itself – something that is not easily bought by sceptics. On the other hand, accreditors must also maintain strong ties with the institutions. A system based on peer review requires that these institutions be willing to go along with needed changes, which in turn depends upon accreditors not acting as “fault finders”. Thus, accrediting bodies face the difficult

task of both assuring quality and improving quality. Too heavy a focus on the former leads to a compliance mentality, while too much emphasis on the latter leads to charges that the foxes are guarding the henhouse. A second tension in accreditation arises due to the almost universal increasing focus on student learning as the *sine qua non* of academic quality. Whereas quality was once defined in terms of ‘inputs’ and ‘resources’, it is now defined in terms of ‘processes’ and ‘outcomes’. Wergin goes on to say that the new standards constitute nothing less than a massive revolution in the way the quality of academic institutions and their programs should be judged and this process has not been easy. The principal obstacle to this change comes from the faculty, who not only treasure their professional autonomy but also hold a ‘transcendent’ view of academic quality, the notion that quality is what they say it is. They also believe that the recent emphasis on the methods to measure quality would also pass away like any other management fad and, therefore, tend to ignore administrative mandates.

Astin (1990) mentions that educational testing and assessment pose a serious obstacle to the educational progress of under-represented group, primarily because of the manner in which these tools are used. If assessment were to be used primarily as a form of feedback for enhancing the learning process rather than for screening and selecting, the cause of educational equity would be much better served. He adds that accomplishing such a change through the use of assessment will require a rethink on the traditional notions about educational ‘excellence’. Given that there may be social groups that are under-represented in higher education, current assessment procedures would raise serious equity issues in respect of these groups. “The use of grades and test scores for admission to higher education has serious equity implications beyond the competitive disadvantage that it creates for certain groups in the college admission process. It also has a profound effect on students’ decision making at pre-collegiate level. He further says that the principal driving force behind the use of grades and test scores in the admissions process is adherence to the resources and reputational views of excellence. Astin asserts that these traditional views of excellence should be replaced by a “talent development” conception, whereby an institution’s excellence is judged in terms of how effectively it is able to educate the students who enrol. Under a talent development view, an excellent institution is one that is able to develop its students’ talents to the fullest extent.

Astin goes on to define equity and says that while policymakers prefer to define educational equity in terms of the access concept (access to educational institutions), this would, in itself, not ensure equity unless the opportunities themselves are comparable. The issue of equity versus excellence is really a matter of how we define excellence. With the reputational or resource approach to

excellence, there is a conflict with the goal of equity. However, equity issues can be addressed by following the 'talent development' approach.

Vedder (1994) concludes that a global measurement of the quality of education is detrimental to the quality of education. This is particularly true for the developing countries. Such measures work with global indicators of the quality of education and tend to support development of standardized global curricula. And in doing this, the uniqueness of cultures get ignored. The resultant global curricula may hamper learning and may lead to isolation and feelings of inferiority instead of binding of cultures. While there is a general agreement on the importance of assessment of the quality of education across the world, there is a wide difference on what should be the contents of assessment and what are the best strategies to follow – whether the assessments should be local, national or international? “Education in Third-World countries occurs in situations of sometimes extreme scarcity.” (p. 4). This is reflected in the lack of proper educational infrastructure, low qualification of teachers and a pronounced mismatch between curricular aims and the requirements of the labour market. Vedder adds that quality assurance measures in education make little sense when it is “impossible to improve it or to avoid its deterioration.” (p.5). He points to the existing vested interests in education, which are often detrimental to any growth or improvement of the educational system, the lack of an infrastructure for the preparation and delivery of educational innovations and the absence of a clear picture of the state of educational systems in developing countries. Lack of funds limits their freedom of choice in changing the educational situation. In such a situation, the philosophy behind global quality assurance procedures does not reflect the perspectives of the poor countries. It also does not consider the “complex of ways to improve the quality of education in these countries.”

Damme (2000) mentions that the establishment of quality assurance policies and mechanisms in many countries has taken place in a political and governmental environment, which is experiencing a changing relationship between the state and the educational institutions. This changing relationship manifests itself in “deregulation, increasing institutional autonomy, devolution of authority, a shifting balance between state- and market-oriented elements in the steering of higher education systems, and a growing weight of output-related, performance based factors in steering and sometimes also financing ... In general, there was an exchange between deregulation and institutional autonomy on the one hand and quality assurance, accountability and output-control on the other hand.” (p. 11)

Damme goes on to say that accreditation was not primarily a quality assurance model, but a procedure for the recognition of programmes and institutions. He is also circumspect on the idea of having a global 'general model of higher education quality assessment'. His ideas are more in conformation with the ideas of Vedder mentioned above. He says that there are powerful historical and cultural differences between countries that explain and justify variations in quality assurance models. The model suitable for one country need not necessarily be optimally suited to the academic environment of another country. Damme cites Harman to say that "learning from the international experiences on quality assurance it is important to select elements which can be integrated into the national culture and characteristics of the national academic system. ... Importing models because of the perceived overall success of the higher education system of its country of origin may be a risky adventure and a potential source of cultural 'imperialism' or 'dependency.'" (p. 14). Damme, however, accepts that there are some common general characteristics of academic quality assurance valid in different systems across the world. Quality assurance has a strong element of self-determination and variety because of the almost universal emphasis on self-evaluation in quality assurance systems across the world. This gives the quality assurance model a strong potential for diversification.

Van Vught and Westerheijden (1994) have traced the history of quality assessment and have proposed a general model of quality assessment in higher education. They have traced the history of quality assessment to two extreme models, which they have referred to as the French model where the control is invested in an external authority and the English model, which is based on a self-governing community of fellows completely independent of external jurisdiction. The French model is considered to be the archetype of quality assessment in terms of accountability while the English model has been the harbinger of peer review. Both the models are crucial elements present in modern day quality management systems in higher education.

Van Vught and Westerheijden, after going through the experiences in quality assessment of the USA, Canada, the U.K., France and The Netherlands, propose a general model of higher education quality assessment. The common elements of this general model are an independent managing agent for quality assessment, self-assessment, peer review and one or more site visits by external experts, reporting of the results and, finally, a possible relationship between the outcomes of quality review system and funding decisions. The *managing agent* should be independent of government politics and policies and be responsible to manage the system at a *meta-level*. A *self-evaluative* approach is desirable since academics must trust and own the process to accept and implement

changes. Moreover, in a self-evaluation process consultation with outside actors is crucial. In the mechanism of *peer review*, it is important that the external experts be unbiased specialists in their fields. The external visitors should conduct a site visit when they can discuss the self-evaluation report and plans for future innovations. The *reporting* should refrain from judging or ranking the institutions or programmes and should endeavour for the improvement of academic quality. Institutions and units that have been visited should get an opportunity to comment on the draft version of the report and to advance counter-arguments, if necessary. The final draft report should reflect possible disagreements with the peer review team. Regarding the *relationship* between the outcomes of a quality review system and funding decisions, the authors argue that there should not be a direct, rigid relationship between quality review reports and funding decisions. This is because such relationships may lead to a “compliance culture, the only aim of which will be to appear to meet the criteria formulated, irrespective of whether those criteria are appropriate in the context of specific institutions or not.” (p. 368)

Newton (2000) conducted a single-site case study of a university sector college to study the academics’ perceptions of quality assurance and quality monitoring. The results of the study can be summarized as below:

- i) Quality monitoring was seen as more of “feeding the beast” than an actual exercise in quality enhancement. The study showed that the exigencies of accountability outweigh enhancement efforts.
- ii) External quality assessment served less of ‘quality purposes’ and had a greater element of ‘impression management’. Quality assurance systems were perceived as “important opportunities for manufacturing an improved identity.”(p. 5).
- iii) There was less of ‘ownership’ of the quality assurance processes and was more of a pragmatic acceptance of procedures. In addition, there was no real evidence of staff empowerment.
- iv) “There was little consistent evidence in staff responses supporting the view that the student learning experience *per se* has been enhanced.” (p. 7). Quality was perceived as more of ‘discipline and technology’ as compared to ‘improvement’.
- v) The staff experienced low morale and a degree of alienation, neglect and resignation. The management was seen to have broken the “psychological contract”.
- vi) Of the four broad categories of response to change advanced by Trowler – ‘sinking’, ‘swimming’, ‘coping’ and ‘reconstructing’ – most academics had developed coping

strategies. The staff was seen to have developed local practices to assert their autonomy by moving from the ‘passive’ to ‘active’ mode.

Harvey and Green (1993) state that the concept of quality is relative to the user of the term and the circumstances in which it is invoked – each stakeholder has a different perspective on quality. Used in another sense, there is the ‘benchmark’ relativism of quality where quality is seen in terms of absolutes. While in some conceptualisations, a product or process is said to be of quality if it exceeds a certain threshold, in others, quality is believed to have been achieved if the ‘processes’ result in desired outcomes. While acknowledging the difficulty in defining quality, the authors group the different conceptualisations of quality into five distinct but inter-related ways of thinking. According to them, quality can be viewed as *exceptional*, as *perfection (or consistency)*, as *fitness for purpose*, as *value for money* and as *transformative*. Each of these approaches to quality has further sub-categorisations, which have been discussed in detail by the authors. In the *exceptional* view, quality is seen as something special and exclusive. The *perfection* approach to quality focuses on processes and sets specifications that it aims to meet perfectly and consistently. Quality as *fitness for purpose* fixes the notion of quality to the extent to which a product or service fits its purpose. Quality as *value for money* reaches out to the “accountability” factor and focuses on the returns obtained on the investments made. Lastly, the *transformative* view of quality considers the “value added” to the participants. Harvey and Green argue that quality is a philosophical concept and the adoption of different approaches to it is only natural in a democratic society. Quality is stakeholder-relative and, therefore, to try to define quality is a waste of time. “If we want to find a core of criteria for assessing quality in higher education it is essential that we understand the different conceptions of quality that inform the preferences of different stakeholders.” (p. 29).

Dill and Beerkens (2010) assert that the traditional national frameworks for academic quality assurance in different countries had generally followed the three modal forms similar to those outlined by Clark (1983). These forms are (1) the European model of central control of quality assurance by state educational ministries, (2) the US model of decentralisation combining limited state control with market competition, and (3) the British model in which the state essentially ceded responsibility for quality assurance to self-accrediting universities. (Dill, 1992 as cited in Dill and Beerkens, 2010, p. 7). In accordance with this concept of regulation, Dill and Beerkens explain *generic policy approaches* (Professional/self regulation, Market regulation and State/Direct regulation) and *new policy instruments* for academic quality assurance. Professional or self-regulation assumes greater producer sovereignty with the academics themselves defining and

enforcing quality rules and norms. Market regulation stresses upon consumer sovereignty, provision of information to the consumer and rankings. In the state regulation of academic quality, the state takes upon itself the responsibility for defining and enforcing academic standards. In this approach, the most direct means of government monitoring of academic quality are assessment and accreditation of academic programmes.

Rosa & Amaral (2007) have analysed the limitations of the Total Quality Management (TQM) model to higher education. They cite Williams (1993) to say that continuous quality improvement, quality consistency, participation of academics, students, and non-academic staff, satisfaction of clients' need and the existence of management procedures that reinforce quality are a number of TQM principles that nobody would consider irrelevant within the higher education context. However, TQM principles are not easily accepted in higher education because the academic culture of these institutions is quite strong and resistant to TQM concepts, principles and practices. They list several other reasons for the limited applicability of TQM model to higher education including lack of clarity on the purposes, objectives and missions of higher education institutions, lack of clarity on the expectations of the consumer, the diverse nature of the actors in higher education – students, academic faculty and non-academic staff, the strong emphasis on individualism in higher education institutions with few incentives for teamwork, the difficulty in measuring outcomes, absence of effective communication channels, presence of a weak management information system, bureaucratic interference and the absence of true leadership in higher education institutions.

Harvey & Newton (2007) while dealing with the accountability versus improvement focus of quality assurance says that accountability has five main functions. Firstly, it ensures that the institution or programme is accountable for the money spent behind it. Secondly, it ensures that the core principles and practices of higher education are not ignored or eroded. Thirdly, it ensures that the programme is organised and run properly and that an appropriate educational experience is both promised and delivered. Fourthly, it generates public information that can be used to take funding decisions. Fifthly, it ensures compliance to a policy. They further asserts that accountability is intrinsically bound up with the fitness-for-purpose definition of quality. They also says that the so-called tension between accountability and improvement approaches to quality in higher education is illusory and the concept that quality assurance is torn between improvement and accountability is little meaning. Accountability is “about value for money and demonstrating fitness for purpose, while continuous improvement in teaching and learning is about improvement of the student experience, and empowering students as lifelong learners. Improvement is not something that is

regulated but something that occurs through critical engagement. Accountability and improvement are not two related dimensions of quality, rather they are distinct and there is no intrinsic tension between them.” (p. 232).

Perellon (2007) has approached quality as a policy located within the broader domain of higher education. He believes that ideas have a major role to play in policy formulation. For many, “ideas are simply ‘beliefs held by individuals’ that can be grouped into three main categories: world views, principled beliefs, and casual beliefs.” (p. 157). *World views* refer to a widely held perception as to how things should be. *Principled beliefs* help discriminate between what is morally ‘right’ and what is morally ‘wrong’ and often emerge from social behaviour. *Casual beliefs* “establish a cause-effect relationship between two, or more, dimensions of social life. This type of belief provides general guidelines about how a given objective can be reached.” (p. 158). There is a great deal of inter-dependence of the three categories of ideas and policy formulation may be conceived as combining the three types of beliefs within a single, general worldview. Policy analysis can be understood in terms of two different but complementary elements: the “ideational” and the “material”. The *ideational* dimension refers to the set of cognitive values and norms underpinning the production of new policies in a given domain. The *material* dimension refers to the implementation of the policy, the tools used to make it as efficient as possible and the procedures of evaluation of the policy.

Altbach (2004) says that the higher education system in Asia has emerged from a colonial framework and continues to retain the colonial model. The British did not take much interest in the spread of higher education in the colonies since they felt that doing this may invite subversive tendencies. They were not wrong in their perception because history is witness to the fact that freedom struggles, globally, have been led by people trained in the Western system of education. Universities themselves were live centres of intellectual discourse that led to the growth of nationalism and dissent. Because of this circumspection, the universities were severely restricted and governmental control on them was strict. Academic freedom was limited and severe restrictions were placed on the academic institutions. This culture was carried forward even after India became independent. Instead of developing a new indigenous academic model for themselves, they were attracted to the educational system of the USA and looked abroad for ways to expand and improve her universities.

Altbach further says that after independence, a lot of money was spent by the Indian government on education. But, most of this expenditure was on primary and secondary education with a view to meet the manpower requirements of the emerging industries. Higher education was not emphasized during the initial phases of industrialisation and only a small percentage of the population ventured into higher education. However, as the middle class developed and acquired some wealth and as literacy rates and secondary schooling became more widespread and as the number of people seeking upward mobility increased, the demand for higher education grew over time. The expansion of the higher education system was a natural consequence of an increasingly restive and articulate emerging middle class. In addition, the rapid economic growth brought in more sophisticated industries and a fast-growing service sector put an even greater demand for higher education to survive in a globally competitive environment. As a result, massification of higher education becomes a matter of compulsion and is inevitable. And, as theory suggests, the pressure for expansion is most significant in countries which have a smaller portion of the age cohort into higher education. He further adds that related to this phenomenon of massification of higher education, is the question of inclusiveness and access. Higher education opportunities must be provided for all sections of the population. Women, rural areas, the poor and some minorities lag behind in educational opportunities. Providing equal educational opportunities to such disadvantaged groups is a major challenge for the higher education system (p.28).

Wolff (2004) has defined documents as ‘standardized artifacts, in so far as they typically occur in particular formats: as notes, case reports, contracts, drafts, death certificates, remarks, diaries, statistics, annual reports, certificates, judgements, letters or expert opinions’ (p. 255). Wolff (2004) recommends that the researcher should not ‘start from a notion of factual reality in the documents compared to the subjective views in interviews, for example. Documents represent a specific version of realities constructed for specific purposes. It is difficult to use them for validating interview statements. They should be seen as a way of contextualizing information. Rather than using them as “information containers,” they should be seen and analyzed as *methodologically created communicative turns* in constructing versions of events.’ (p. 259).

Flick (2009), on research methodology, says that in qualitative research, documents and their analysis may be used as a complementary strategy to other methods like interviews or ethnography. However, he felt that the definition of a document as given by Prior was more dynamic and use-oriented: “If we are to get to grips with the nature of documents then we have to move away from a consideration of them as stable, static and pre-defined artifacts.” (p. 255). Flick further says that as

a stand-alone method, analyzing documents gives only a very specific and sometimes limited approach to experiences and processes. However, documents can be a very instructive addition to interviews or observations. 'The major problem in analyzing documents is how to conceptualize the relations between explicit content, implicit meaning, and the context of functions, and use of the documents and how to take these relations into account in the interpretation of documents.' (p. 261).

Bryman (2008) mentions that archive materials are one form of unobtrusive measure, which is considered an advantage as they are non-reactive. 'This means that, because they have not been created specifically for the purposes of social research, the possibility of a reactive effect can be largely discounted as a limitation on the validity of data' (p. 515). He also cites Scott (1990) to mention four crucial criteria for assessing the quality of documents: authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning. Bryman, citing Strauss and Corbin (1998) has also explained the grounded theory as a theory 'derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another' (p. 12). He also points out to the limitations of the grounded theory in that there are practical difficulties in carrying out 'a genuine grounded theory analysis with its constant interplay of data collection and conceptualization' (p. 549). Moreover, it is also doubtful whether grounded theory actually leads to a theory.

2.9 Global practices in quality assurance: A brief overview

As the concern for quality occupies the central agenda of higher education globally, different quality assurance practices have evolved in different countries. At this stage, it would be relevant to have an overview of the quality assurance mechanisms prevalent in some countries across the world.

2.9.1 Quality assurance practices in the USA

In the USA, accreditation is done by non-governmental, private, non-profit organisations. The accreditation structure is decentralised, dispersed and complex. Accreditation in the USA is voluntary. However, both the federal and the state governments rely upon accreditation for taking funding decisions.

Accreditation of institutions and programmes takes place in a cycle that may range from every few years to as many as ten years. It is an ongoing process and involves periodic reviews. The steps involved in the accreditation process are 'self-review' by the concerned institution or programme, 'peer review' by faculty and administrative peers in the profession, 'site visit' by a team consisting of peers and may also include public members. This is followed by judgments by accrediting organisations. Institutions and programmes continue to be reviewed over time. They normally prepare a self-study and undergo a site visit each time.

Accreditors are themselves accountable to the institutions and programmes they accredit and to the public and the government. They are themselves subjected to a periodic external review known as 'recognition'. Recognition is carried out either by another private organisation, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or the US Department of Education (USDE). Although accreditation is strictly a non-governmental activity, recognition is not. CHEA accreditors are normally reviewed on a 10-year cycle with two interim reports. USDE recognition review normally takes place every five years.

As would be seen, the state keeps away from the direct responsibility of quality assurance in higher education institutions. However, it maintains an indirect control by using accreditation for taking financial decisions. It directly participates in the 'recognition' of the accrediting agencies.

2.9.2 Quality assurance practices in England

The HEIs in the UK are publicly funded and receive Government funding through the higher education funding councils, which also serve as a buffer between the Government and the higher education institutions. All HEIs receiving public funds, are subject to the Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (QAA). The QAA is owned by the organisations that represent the heads of the UK universities and colleges. Though the QAA claims as being independent of the government, this may not entirely be true. The QAA enters into contracts with the funding councils to carry out external quality assurance work on their behalf. It is through the mechanism of these contracts that the government can influence the QAA policy and even formulate their policy. (Lewis, 2010, p. 22).

The quality assurance mechanism in England consists of six-yearly ‘institutional audits’, which examine the internal quality assurance systems at the institutional level. The institutional audit is based on the QAA’s ‘Code of Practice’. “Institutions are not expected to comply with the ‘Code of Practice’ on a precept to precept basis but are expected to explain, in their self-evaluation documents, how they have addressed the intentions behind the precepts including any resulting changes to their practices.” (Lewis, 2010, p. 23).

Beginning from September, 2011, QAA will launch a new process of ‘institutional review’ to ensure academic quality standards in HEIs in England and Northern Ireland. The new process will be a peer-review process with a pronounced reliance on student feedback. Every peer team would include a student reviewer. The institutional review would be a six-yearly exercise and would include publication of reports on the QAA website.

As can be seen again, the state is not seen as directly participating in the quality assurance process, which is left to an ‘independent’ agency. However, it does maintain a discreet, indirect control.

2.9.3 Quality assurance practices in Germany

The German Accreditation System is decentralised: the accreditation of study programmes is carried out by non-profit, Accreditation Agencies, which in turn, have to be compulsorily accredited by the German Accreditation Council (GAC) of the *Stiftung zur Akkreditierung von Studiengängen in Deutschland* (Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany). The GAC ensures that accreditation is carried out by the agencies with the highest degree of quality, comparability and transparency. Institutions can, however, opt for an additional accreditation from an international accreditation agency.

The accreditation process in Germany is conducted in several stages and is based on the peer-review principle. The accrediting agency forms a peer group usually consisting of representatives of the institute, “representatives from the respective professional field or of employers of graduates in that subject and a representative from the ministry.” (Kehm, 2010, p. 231). The peer group conducts an on-site visit and prepares a draft report and also a recommendation for the institution. The institution receives a copy of this draft report and is free to give its comments on the draft report. At the next stage, the report and the recommendations are finalised and submitted to the responsible accreditation commission of the agency, which takes the final decision.

The German system of quality assurance is similar to that in the USA in that the state has removed itself from the direct quality assurance responsibilities and only controls the quality process indirectly by accrediting the accreditation agencies.

2.9.4 Quality assurance practices in Denmark

Accreditation was introduced into the Danish higher education system through a new act – The Accreditation Act, 2007. It provides for the setting up of the Accreditation Agency for Higher Education consisting of the Accreditation Council and two secretariats. The Accreditation Council lays down the general framework of the Council's activities and makes accreditation decisions.

Accreditation is done on the basis of centrally laid down criteria (Table 8) regarding the quality of existing and new study programmes. A new agency – ACE Denmark – was established for accreditation of study programmes in the university sector. In this new system, the Evaluation in Higher Education (EVA) is responsible for accreditation of programmes in the college sector. The Accreditation Council takes accreditation decisions based on the evidence provided by EVA and ACE Denmark.

On the basis of the criteria, ACE has prepared a guide for both existing and new study programmes. ACE Denmark sets up an accreditation panel to conduct an academic assessment of a study programme. The panel consists of one or more relevant independent experts, an employer and a student. The panel prepares an accreditation report based on a documentation report prepared by the university staff involved in the study programme and an in-depth meeting between accreditation panel and the staff, management and students of the study programme. ACE Denmark acts as the Chairman during the in-depth meeting at the university. Based on the accreditation report, ACE Denmark frames concluding recommendations for the programme. Both the accreditation report and the recommendations are then placed before the Accreditation Council. The final accreditation report is prepared in consultation with the university and the response is included in the final accreditation report.

2.9.5 Quality assurance practices in Australia

The Australian higher education system consists of autonomous universities established under the State, Territory, or Commonwealth government legislation. The universities have the power to

accredit their own courses. State/Territory governments retain the power to accredit individual higher education courses developed and delivered by other providers. Accreditation arrangements and approaches, however, vary among the States/Territories.

The quality assurance framework of Australia, introduced in 2000, consists of five key elements (Figure 2). Under the framework, the *State and Territory* is made responsible for the registration, re-registration and accreditation of higher education providers other than universities. The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) is prescribed to undertake cyclical audits every five years. University performance is monitored by the *Commonwealth* on the basis of Institutional Assessment Framework (IAF) and other data submissions. The *onus* for the development and enhancement of quality and standards lies with the universities themselves.

In Australia, quality audits in higher education are conducted by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA). AUQA evaluates an institution's quality assurance arrangement in respect of 'Objectives', 'Approach', 'Deployment', 'Results' and 'Improvement'. AUQA does not impose an externally prescribed set of standards upon the institutions that are to be audited, but uses each institution's own objectives as its primary starting point for audit.

AUQA bases its audit on a critical self-review (or self-audit or self-evaluation or self-study) by the institution or agency subject to the audit. Effective quality assurance in higher education requires the use of external academic and professional points of reference. To achieve this, a number of guidelines, codes of practice or codes of conduct have been promulgated by national or sectoral bodies. "AUQA enquires of an institution whether such guidelines have been adopted or adapted and investigate the extent to which the institution's objectives in this regard are being met. AUQA looks for evidence that institutions have considered the purpose and intentions of the relevant external reference points and taken appropriate and effective action."(AUQA, 2011).

2.9.6 National Assessment Examination of Brazil

The Brazilian higher education system is extremely heterogeneous as regards the distribution of universities, nature of administration and the quality of education. After a rather tumultuous history in ensuring quality in HE, Brazil, in June, 1995, by means of a Provisional Decree, established the 'National Examination of Study Diplomas', which made it mandatory for any Brazilian student to

sit at a national examination before being awarded a university degree. The national examination, held on the same day, was to be the same throughout the country for each discipline with a minimum study content defined for each discipline. The objective of the examination was not to evaluate students but to assess the quality of the higher education institutions. Each course programme received a grade from 'A' to 'E'.

The announcement of the national examinations met with opposition from students, rectors and professors. The first examination was held in November, 1996. The Student's National Union (UNE) organised a boycott of the examination, which however, received little support. Public opinion and professional associations, in general, supported the system.

The cost of the examination worked out to US \$ 33 per student without taking into consideration the internal costs. As such, the costs are quite reasonable for the size of operations. The national examination led to changes in the HEIs. The "most frequent innovation was to prepare the students to take the exam, followed by changes in pedagogical and teaching practices." (Schwartzman, 2010, p. 302) In addition, several institutions looked to improve their courses while some closed down due to lack of demand.

With the change of government in 2003, a new system of assessment of higher education came into being. The national examinations, though retained, were considerably diluted and rechristened as the National Exam of Student Achievement (ENADE²). Instead of regular yearly assessments of all graduating students, the assessment was now to be done every 3 years through sampling procedures. Moreover, instead of just one assessment, two assessments were mandated – one at the beginning and the other at the end of the course programme. The Brazilian national assessment examinations raised the interest in higher education assessment circles across the world. However, despite receiving strong public support, its future is uncertain as it finds itself warped in the maze of politics.

2.9.7 Summary of global quality assurance practices

Drawing from the experiences in quality assurance processes of different countries, it can be seen that the general approach towards quality assurance has been to leave the responsibility of ensuring

² Exame Nacional de Desempenho de Estudantes

quality on the higher education institutions themselves. The state has carefully withdrawn itself from a direct control over the quality assurance process while at the same time it does exercise “*steering from a distance*” by linking funding arrangements with quality. It can also be asserted that no quality assurance mechanism is likely to succeed unless it is supported by the state. It is also seen that several countries have adopted multifarious and dispersed quality assurance bodies. Each of these bodies has a different approach to quality, which is most suited to the local, national or international context. And lastly, the accreditation process is either directly or by implication made compulsory for all institutions to ensure quality.

3. Quality assurance in higher education in India

After having discussed the existing theory and current global practices relating to QA in higher education, the existing quality A&A mechanism in higher education in India needs to be discussed. It would then be possible to analyse the mechanism in the backdrop of existing theory and common global practices.

3.1 National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)

Assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions in India is carried on by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). The NAAC is an autonomous institution of the University Grants Commission (UGC) created in 1994. The unit of assessment is the institution – colleges, universities and departments.

3.2 Vision and mission

The vision of NAAC, as mentioned on its website is “to make quality the defining element of higher education in India through a combination of self and external quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance initiatives.” (NAAC, 2012b, para 1)

The mission of NAAC, as mentioned on its website broadly specifies the objectives of its quality assurance process. The objectives mentioned are:

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

Guided by its vision and striving to achieve its mission, the NAAC primarily assesses the quality of institutions of higher education that volunteer for the process, through an internationally accepted methodology.” (NAAC, 2012b, para 2).

3.3 New methodology for assessment and accreditation

After consultation with educational experts and feedbacks from various stakeholders, the NAAC has drawn out a new methodology for the assessment and accreditation of HEIs. This new methodology has come into effect from 1st April, 2007. The broad framework for assessment and accreditation, however, remains the same and consists of a three-stage process of self-study, peer review and a final decision.

The new methodology has been adopted in view of wide variations in the quality standards of affiliated or constituent colleges and their large numbers in the country. The assessment instrument for these affiliated and constituent colleges has been redesigned to provide for a two-step approach. The first step, called the Institutional Eligibility for Quality Assessment (IEQA), is only to ascertain whether the institution is eligible for the more comprehensive second step ‘Comprehensive Assessment and Accreditation’ by NAAC. At the first step, the institution should be able to demonstrate that it has adequate human, financial and physical resources in place and that it has the potential to attain its goals.

However, in the case of universities, autonomous colleges and colleges with potential for excellence, the previously adopted single-step approach continues to be in vogue. The (second step) assessment and accreditation process for universities, autonomous colleges, colleges with potential for excellence and those institutions that have cleared the first step is the same. Since the focus of the study in the present thesis is the assessment of universities, only the assessment and accreditation process applicable to universities will be considered.

Under the new methodology, NAAC has identified seven broad criteria for the purpose of assessment. Each of these seven criteria have been assigned weights. (Please see Table 4). For each of these criteria, Key Aspects have been identified. In addition, for each of these Key Aspects, appropriate Assessment Indicators have also been identified. The Assessment Indicators may be used as guideline/probes by the Peer Teams during their visit to the institution. Each of the Key

Aspects under each criterion has been assigned a different weight. (Please see Table 5). The Grading Pattern has also been changed from the previous nine-point scale to a new three-grade scale – “A”, “B” and “C” for accredited institutions and “D” for those that are not accredited. While in the old system, institutions were assigned overall score in percentages, in the new system, the overall scoring pattern for institutions has shifted to a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) System on a four-point scale.

Moreover, in the new methodology, institutions are graded for each Key Aspect under the four categories, viz, A, B, C, D, denoting ‘Very Good’, ‘Good’, ‘Satisfactory’ and ‘Unsatisfactory’ levels, respectively. The overall grade against each criterion is arrived at by calculating the weighted average of these grades and the overall grade, in turn, is arrived at by calculating the weighted average of the grades of each criterion. Details of the grading system are shown in Table 6.

3.4 The process of institutional assessment and accreditation

Broadly speaking the A&A process of NAAC involves the following stages:

- (i) **Letter of intent:** The process of institutional assessment and accreditation begins with the intending university submitting a letter of intent.
- (ii) **The First-Step: IEQA:** In the first step of Assessment and Accreditation, IEQA is required to be obtained by the institution desiring to undergo the A&A process while it is still in the planning stage for assessment. On obtaining the IEQA, the institution gets recognized as eligible to apply for the second step comprehensive Assessment and Accreditation process. If it does not qualify for it gets feedback about specific improvements to be made for achieving the required quality level. In addition, the institution also gets assistance and suitable mentoring to enable it to achieve the prescribed standards.
- (iii) **Self-study report:** The university intending to undergo the assessment and accreditation process is required to prepare and submit to the NAAC an institutional self-study report by following the appropriate NAAC Manuals. The first part of the self-study report deals with institutional statistics. The second part deals with the evaluative report with reference to the probes, under each criterion-wise key aspect. Based on the

completeness of the self-study report, NAAC prepares the Peer Team Document and constitutes a peer team for a planned visit to the concerned institution.

- (iv) **Peer team visit:** The peer team constituted by the NAAC visits the institution ‘on-site’ for validating the claims made by the institution in its self-study report. In doing this, it adopts various strategies and collects relevant documentary evidences.
- (v) **Peer team report:** On completion of the on-site visit, the peer team prepares an objective report termed as the Peer Team Report (PTR), highlighting its evaluative judgments, mostly using keywords.
- (vi) **Institutional grading:** The final CGPA for the quality level of the institution, along with letter grades and corresponding performance descriptors, constitute the certificate on the institutional accreditation by NAAC. Each cycle of accreditation is valid for a period of 5 years.
- (vii) **Appeals:** A provision for appeal has been provided in case institutions have grievances with the assessment and accreditation process and its results. A committee has been established at NAAC for this purpose.
- (viii) **Re-assessment:** An accredited institution may seek a re-assessment for accreditation after one year of its five year accreditation period. In such a case, the method outlined in the new methodology would be adopted.
- (ix) **Re-accreditation:** After five years, an institution may seek re-accreditation by NAAC. “The framework for re-accreditation essentially involves processes, which take into account the impact of first assessment.” (NAAC, 2007, p. 15).

It may be mentioned here that the 11th Plan (2007 – 12) has recommended the policy of compulsory assessment and accreditation. In view of this, the UGC is developing a procedure to introduce mandatory assessment and accreditation for universities and colleges. Towards that end the UGC has also approved a scheme for the establishment of Quality Assessment Cell in universities and colleges for regular internal self assessment and self monitoring of quality and excellence.

3.5 Fees

With effect from 1st July, 2010, the assessment and accreditation fees for universities is INR³ 100,000.00 for universities having up to four departments. For universities having more than four

³ Indian Rupees

and up to ten departments, the fee is INR 100,000.00 plus INR 15,000.00 for each additional department. For universities having more than ten departments the fee is INR 190,000 plus INR 10,000.00 per additional department. The detailed fee structure for assessment and accreditation for HEIs is shown at Table 7.

4. Institutional perspectives on quality assurance in higher education in India

It was the intent of the research to seek the interviewees from different areas to ascertain if there was any difference in their perspectives in the A&A process. Towards this, the colleges from whom interviewees were selected were spread over three different universities and covered large urban centres, smaller towns and rural areas. All these colleges were running under-graduate and post-graduate courses. (A Masters Degree programme is referred to as a post-graduate course in India.) The different colleges/institutions were spread over four universities of Gujarat State in India. The profile of the institutions from which the interviewees were selected is outlined below.

4.1 General information and professional profile of interviewees

Before a formal introduction of the respondent interviewees is undertaken, it may be mentioned that the division between administrators and academics is not strict in India. In almost all cases, it is the academic faculty who is usually assigned administrative jobs in the institution. Thus, the principal of a college would also be engaging classes in addition to administrative responsibilities. To that extent, a clear cut distinction of views between academic and administrators may not be noticed since they basically come from the same background.

‘A1’, a male, was nominated by the Vice Chancellor of the concerned university and is looking after the internal quality assurance cell in the university. This state-run university is located in a medium-sized city and its numerous affiliated colleges are spread far and wide over a very large area of Gujarat. The colleges affiliated to this university lie in urban, semi-urban and rural areas and also touch tribal pockets of the state. The university conducts courses in humanities, science and commerce and also run several technical courses. It runs under-graduate, post-graduate as well as doctoral/post-doctoral courses. It is also a fairly old university.

‘A2’, a female, is the principal of a state-run government college located in a small town of Gujarat. The college is technically labelled as lying in ‘rural’ area by the Government of Gujarat. It is affiliated to the Gujarat University, Ahmedabad. The college runs both under-graduate as well as post-graduate courses in humanities and commerce. Science is not taught in this college. This college has a vast majority of male students and a significantly lesser number of female students.

The college has a vast majority of first-generation learners in higher education. The college caters to a vast section of the socio-economic weaker sections.

‘A3’, a male, is the principal of a government-aided private college located in northern Gujarat. It lies in a rural area and is affiliated to the Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University, Patan. The college runs under-graduate courses in humanities and commerce. This college also has a vast majority of first-generation learners. The college caters to a vast section of the socio-economic weaker sections.

‘A4’, a male, is the principal of a government-aided private college located in Central Gujarat. It lies in a rural area and is affiliated to the Gujarat University, Ahmedabad. The college runs under-graduate as well as post-graduate courses in humanities, commerce and science. It has a greater proportion of male students.

‘C1’, a female, teaches in a state-run government college located in a rural area of Gujarat. It is affiliated to the Gujarat University, Ahmedabad. The college runs both under-graduate as well as post-graduate courses in humanities and commerce. C1 was the nodal officer for the A&A process conducted by NAAC very recently.

‘C2’, a female, teaches in a state-run government college located in south Gujarat. It lies in a rural centre. It is affiliated to the Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat. The college runs both under-graduate as well as post-graduate courses in humanities and commerce. C2 was closely associated with the A&A process conducted by NAAC in her college.

‘C3’, a female, teaches in a government-aided private college located in an urban centre. The college is affiliated to the Gujarat University, Ahmedabad, and was graded “A” by NAAC. C3 is in-charge of the Internal Quality Assurance Cell of the college for the past several years. The college runs both under-graduate as well as post-graduate courses in humanities, science and commerce. It has a fair proportion of female students. C3 also engages in consultancy work for NAAC A&A process and has advised several colleges spread all over the state on the various formalities and procedures of NAAC.

‘C4’, a male, teaches in a premier state-run government college located in an urban centre. The college is affiliated to the Gujarat University, Ahmedabad. C4 is the in-charge of the Internal Quality Assurance Cell of the college and is familiar with the procedures and processes of NAAC.

‘G1’, a male, teaches in a state-run government college located in an urban centre. The college is affiliated to the Gujarat University, Ahmedabad. G1 was, for long, attached to the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education in Gujarat and is, therefore, well versed with government policies and priorities. He was found suitable to shed light on the NAAC A&A process from the viewpoint of the government.

4.2 The objectives and purpose of NAAC’s A&A

The **first question** was presented to the respondent interviewees to ascertain their views on the objectives and purpose of the A&A process adopted by NAAC. This was felt important to ascertain whether the objectives and the purpose of the A&A process of NAAC was understood by the HEIs without any ambiguity.

A1 mentioned that A&A was a tool to facilitate quality enhancement. A1 felt that what was being practiced in India was not assessment but actually a validation process since whatever an institution claims in its SSR is validated by the peer team. Grades were given accordingly. Regarding the objectives, A1 felt that the objective of the NAAC procedure was that of accountability to quality since it verified as to what extent the institution was delivering what it was promising.

A2 also agreed with A1 in that the A&A process was a tool to assure quality. It was also an opportunity to know one’s strength and weaknesses that led to improvement and benchmarking of the best practices in the institutions. On the objectives of the NAAC A&A process A2 mentioned that the objective of the NAAC procedure was accountability. A2 also mentioned that once an institution is held accountable, its performance would improve.

A3 mentioned that the A&A process of NAAC was a major initiative to ensure quality in HE and it was in its infancy. On the objectives of the NAAC A&A process, A3 mentioned that the objective of the NAAC’s A&A process was to insure consistent quality standards. Also, the process should

incorporate modifications in the process in keeping with the times and the needs of the society and the employer. The objective of the process was consistent quality improvement.

A4 mentioned that A&A was the actual process of external evaluation of quality in higher education institutions and programmes and can take different forms. On the objectives of the NAAC A&A process, A4 mentioned that the A&A process has two competing objectives – improvement and accountability. In the Indian context since A&A was not mandatory, the accountability concept did not hold true. Therefore, it was the improvement objective that was stressed upon by NAAC.

C1 mentioned that NAAC is a body constituted by the UGC for A&A. C1 explained the NAAC procedure for A&A. On the objectives of the NAAC A&A process, C1 mentioned that the A&A process is not designed for accountability. NAAC's A&A process enabled an institution to discover its strengths and weaknesses. It allowed them to enforce our strengths and improve upon the areas where they were lacking.

C2 mentioned that A&A was a quality assurance process where educational institutions or programmes were evaluated by an external body to determine if applicable standards were met. On the objectives of the NAAC A&A process, C2 stated that the objective of the A&A process in India was improvement. The process was not compulsory and there was no linkage between funding and NAAC's A&A. C2 also felt that it would be difficult to implement in rural, backward, remote and tribal areas.

C3 was of the opinion that the NAAC A&A procedure should aim at improvement and should introduce a kind of global competitiveness. On the objectives of the NAAC A&A process, C3 was of the opinion that the objective of NAAC's A&A was accountability – in financial transactions, teaching methodologies, value impartation, etc. Moreover, the standards of assessment of institutions in urban areas should not be applied to institutions located in rural areas.

C4 was of the opinion that the objectives of NAAC was as per the mandates of NAAC. C4 believed that the NAAC's A&A procedure was needed because otherwise the quality would not be raised to the extent desired. On the objectives of the NAAC A&A process, C4 felt that the objective of NAAC is inclined more towards improvement though accountability also matters.

G1 mentions that the NAAC process involved both assessment and accreditation, where the NAAC certifies the quality of a certain academic programme or institution. On the objectives of the NAAC A&A process, G1 is of the opinion that the NAAC website mentioned both improvement and accountability as its objectives. However, in practice, it leaned more towards improvement.

It was, thus, noticed that there was a convergence of opinion on the role played by NAAC in the A&A of institutions. There was also a general uniformity of opinion in the purpose of the A&A process of NAAC, i.e. enhancement of academic quality. All the respondents agreed that the aim of the NAAC A&A process was to improve the quality of higher education institutions. However, differences in opinion emerged once they were asked to elaborate on the approach that NAAC had adopted for quality assurance in higher education – whether the approach was for improvement or for accountability.

Administrators A1 and A2 were of the opinion that the approach to quality assurance in India was one of accountability. On the other hand, administrators A3 and A4 had a different opinion. They maintained that the objective of the A&A process of NAAC was quality improvement. Their argument was that since the A&A process was not mandatory for HEIs in India, the concept of accountability does not hold true.

The variations in the responses on the approach to quality assurance in HE was also visible amongst the academics. Academics C1 and C2 were of the opinion that NAAC's approach to A&A was one of quality improvement. C3, however, was of the opinion that the approach of NAAC was one of accountability. C4 maintained that though the approach of NAAC was primarily of improvement, accountability was also taken into consideration.

G1 felt that in practice, the leaning of NAAC was more towards the improvement approach than the accountability approach. In this respect, G1's views were somewhat similar to the views of C4. The similarity in the responses of the informants is perhaps because of the location of their institutions in urban areas. It is also noticed that C3, an academic from a college lying in an urban area, also felt that the focus of NAAC's A&A was accountability.

Here, a broad distinction can be seen between the views of the administrators on the one hand and the academics on the other. C3's view may have been influenced by the opinions of administrators since she has been taking up consultancy work for the NAAC A&A process. Thus, A1, A2 and C3

holding that the “accountability” view prevails in the NAAC quality assurance process. On the other hand, the academics, with the exception of C3, felt that quality improvement was at focus during the NAAC’s A&A process. This distinction in views may have arisen due to the aspects dealt with by them. In the “accountability” viewpoint, the money spent is to be accounted for, which is the premise of administrators. In the “improvement” viewpoint, it is the academic’s field that gets more focus and hence their view. However, it is admitted that the data may not be sufficient to formally draw a final conclusion. This may be a subject of further study.

From the responses of the interviewees, it can be said that while improvement dominates NAAC’s approach to quality assurance in HE, the accountability approach is not totally ignored. It can also be said that the academics thought that quality improvement was more of a focus for NAAC as compared to the administrators, where the opinion was equally divided.

4.3 The effect of NAAC’s A&A process on the decisions of stakeholders

The **second question** was presented to the respondent interviewees to ascertain how the NAAC score was being used by the stakeholders – students, parents and employers. The idea was that if the stakeholders were using the NAAC score for decision-making in their respective contexts, then that could be an incentive for HEIs to go in for the A&A process.

A1 felt that nowadays parents are very much aware about the institutions and check on the various facilities available with an institution. Before they made a choice, they do inquire as to whether the institution was accredited or not. A1 agreed that the detailed NAAC report was not a public document and that only grades were published over the internet. A1 also admitted that the criterion on the basis of which grades are awarded would not be understood by the parents. However, grades did provide an overall picture of the institution.

A2 felt that the awareness level regarding the A&A process in the country was very low. Parents were still not aware of the entire process. In matters of employment, the reputation and nature of the institution from where the degree had been obtained, matters. A2 said that the NAAC report was not a public document and said that employers seldom rely upon the NAAC report. A2 also said that where the recruitment was conducted through a competitive examination, it did not matter where the degree was taken from.

A3 was a bit unsure and mentions that parents may be referring to the NAAC grades before admitting the students. However, the employers don't rely much on the NAAC report. A3 mentioned that the NAAC report was a public document after the institution was graded. However, A3 also mentioned that there was no provision to give the NAAC report to the public. However, if anybody asked for the report, institutions are bound to give it.

A4 felt that the A&A process in India was not very developed. A4 also did not want to guess as to how far the parents, the students and the employers depend on NAAC grades for making decisions. The NAAC grades only gave a broad idea about the quality of an institution. Since the detailed NAAC report was not made public, it would be difficult for any stakeholder to make a decision based on NAAC assessment.

C1 mentioned that once an institution had been awarded a grade, parents and students can definitely use that as a basis for selecting an institution. Nowadays, most parents were aware of NAAC grades and what they implied. Moreover, once an institution started preparing for the A&A process of NAAC, it got in touch with the parents and ascertains their views on the institution. Regarding employers, C1 mentioned that they were not relying upon the NAAC grades when it came to government institutions. C1 agreed that the NAAC report was not a public document.

C2 felt that the different stakeholders – parents, students and employers – were relying on the NAAC grades only to a limited extent since the detailed report was not available. Employers were generally using separate tools for recruitments. Also, it created a credibility crisis in the entire assessment process. It was difficult to rely upon a letter as a grade.

C3 was of the opinion that parents and students are largely unaware of the existence of NAAC. C3 was of the opinion that employers were relying heavily on NAAC gradations. They think that there was a better relationship between NAAC gradations and discipline, exposure for the students and faculty, better infrastructure, better faculty and all this would give to the industry a better work culture. C3 said that the NAAC report was not a public document.

C4 mentioned that the parents are exposed to the procedures of NAAC only to a limited extent. Generally speaking, they were also indifferent to it and don't have a clear vision of NAAC. Students, to some extent, realised the importance of NAAC and the A&A process. Employers were

also indifferent to the NAAC grades. C4 also agreed that the NAAC report was not a public document.

G1 added to the list of stakeholders by including the government as an important stakeholder. G1 believed that the lack of transparency in the A&A process eroded the credibility of the entire process. As a result, there was no reason why a stakeholder, whether it be a student, or a parent or an employer, should trust the system. G1 mentioned that the NAAC report was not a public document.

Here again divergence in views of the respondents were seen even within functional groups (administrators, academics) and also between the functional groups in respect of whether the NAAC grades were being used by parents and students. This may have arisen because of different locations of the institutions. However, there was uniformity in opinion as regards the use of the NAAC grades by the employers and this cut across all functional groups. The similarity in the responses of the informants can perhaps be attributed to the likelihood that the employers themselves would, in all probability, be coming from the urban centres and may not be relying upon the NAAC grades.

A1, an administrator associated with the office of the Vice Chancellor, felt that parents are now quite aware about the institutions and do inquire about the accreditation of an institution. Contrary to A1, A2 felt that parents had a low level of awareness regarding the A&A process. Even the employers were not relying on the NAAC report for employments. A3 and A4 are not very sure of whether the parents use the NAAC grades before admitting the students. However, A3 is confident that employers are not using the grades for recruitment purposes. The difference in views of A1 on the one hand and A2, A3 and A4 could be due to differences in the location of their institutions. A1 comes from a city, where the people may be expected to be more aware than those from the rural areas. A2, A3 and A4 belong to the rural areas. However, all the four are in agreement that the grades are not used by employers for providing employment to the students.

On the academic side, C1 was of the opinion that parents were aware of the grades awarded by NAAC and what they implied. However, the employers were not using those grades. C2 and C4 felt that the different stakeholders were using the grades but only to a limited extent since the detailed report was not available. C3 was of the opinion that students and parents were largely unaware of the existence of the NAAC A&A. However, the employers were relying upon the grades since it

promised them more disciplined employees and a better work culture. Thus, in the case of the academics too, a majority of them felt that the NAAC grades were relevant only to a limited extent and were not used by the employers for recruiting. C3, an academic engaged in consultancy work related to NAAC quality assurance process, appears to be an exception in believing that employers were relying upon NAAC grades for employment. It is possible that her opinion may have been biased. This is further confirmed when while highlighting the gains for her institution, C3, whose institution was graded “A” by NAAC does not mention that students of her institution were directly recruited by the employers.

G1, the government representative, felt that different stakeholders – students, parents and employers – were using the grades but only to a limited extent since the detailed report was not available. In this way, his view was similar to the academics. A1, C2 and G1 also felt that the non-availability of this report created a credibility crisis in respect of the assessment process. It was difficult to rely upon a letter as a grade.

On the basis of the responses, it appears that parents and students were either not relying on the NAAC grades or were relying upon them only to a limited extent. This may be more marked in the rural areas, where apart from the reliability factor the absence of alternative institutions may also be making the NAAC grades less useful. Moreover, it appears almost certain that employers were not using the grades for recruitment purposes.

4.4 Incentives of accreditation to institutions

The **third question** was asked to know what incentives were there for an institution if they underwent the A&A process. This was asked to know if there were any gains for an institution undergoing the A&A process.

A1 maintained that once certain facilities have been mentioned to exist in the SSR, those facilities have to be maintained by the institutions. A1 also mentioned that accredited institutions get additional benefits, including monetary benefits, from government agencies. For example, it could apply for recognition as a College with Potential for Excellence (CPE).

A2 felt that the biggest gain of the A&A process was that one came to know about ones strengths and weaknesses. A2, like A1, also cited that there were grants made available for developing an institution as a CPE. A2 also felt that if private bodies could be convinced that the institution was doing good work, some funds could be obtained from them also. A2 also felt that a better grade enhanced the reputation of the university.

A3 felt that the institution, as a whole, geared up to face the NAAC's A&A process. A good NAAC grading enhanced the reputation of the institution in academic circles. A3 felt that public funding to the institution was not guided by the NAAC grades as of now and was dependant more on the student strength and rural-urban divide. However, private funding was dependent on the NAAC grading system.

A4 felt that there was an incentive for the institutions to qualify for selection as a CPE and such other schemes of the UGC, which would provide them with more funds. However public funding was not linked to the NAAC grades.

C1 felt that a good NAAC grade enhanced the reputation of the institution. C1 felt than public funding of government colleges were unaffected by NAAC grades. She, however, was not clear on the position of the private and the grant-in-aid colleges.

C2 mentioned that by going through the NAAC process, one became aware of the standards expected of an institution and then people tend to work towards accreditation. Curricular aspects were looked into and their relevance to contemporary times was established. Dynamism was given importance. The teaching-learning-evaluation process developed. Research, consultation work improves. Innovative practices come up. Students get trained for governance. Leadership skills are also inculcated. Reputation was a question of tradition. C2 mentioned that the A&A process did not help acquire public funding and the two were not linked.

C3 mentioned that the reputation of the institution was greatly enhanced if it received good grades. This, in turn, encouraged the faculty to take up further research, training, etc. C3 mentioned that the biggest incentive for accreditation was getting funds, which could come from multiple agencies like the State Governments, UGC, Ministry of Human Resources and Development (MHRD). Colleges, faculties and students could apply to the MHRD directly for funding of projects, which could take them abroad and facilitate them in some research project within the campus. Private funding was

also on the rise. HEIs with better grades might receive funding for activities like student exchange programmes.

C4 said that the A&A process brought in awareness for quality. C4 also said that good grades at NAAC enhanced the reputation of institutions. C4 was of the opinion that NAAC grades do not have much relevance either for private or for public fundings of institutions. Though, in the odd case, the UGC may increase funding.

G1 mentioned that G1's institution underwent the NAAC A&A procedure merely like a ritual that needed to be performed. It gave them an opportunity to test the waters. It also sensitized them to the expectations of quality that stakeholders have from HEIs. But there was little incentive insofar as material benefits are concerned. There was no change in the funding of institutions based on NAAC grades. The same applied to funding from private parties in respect of his college since there has not been the kind of improvement in research and other academic-related aspects due to the NAAC A&A process.

Since question three and four pertain, broadly, to the same issue, their analysis would be taken up after laying out the data of question four as well. This would provide an overall perception of the issue.

4.5 Improvements to an institution as an outcome of the NAAC A&A process

The **fourth question** was asked to know what improvements had been experienced by the institution of the interviewee after having undergone NAAC's A&A process. This was again designed to know if there were actual gains for an institution undergoing the A&A process.

A1 mentioned that to survive in the competitive world, institutions were bound to maintain quality. A1 mentioned that because of the A&A process, the institution was attracting better brains, which would produce results in the future. A1 believed that Vice Chancellors viewed the A&A process in a positive manner and desired that their institutions acquire an iconic stature and tried to implement new reforms in education.

A2 felt that the A&A process had helped improve the documentation in the institution. The institution was working in coordination with the Government of Gujarat and had signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) with other departments. A2 believed that the grading achieved by an institution was very important for the Vice Chancellors because it gave a new reputation to the institution in the society and also a lot of financial assistance from the UGC.

A3 felt that the A&A process in India had improved the quality consciousness in institutions amongst the stakeholders. Teachers had become more conscious of their research work and about their presentations. Student-participation in institutional activities also increased. The administration had become more student-friendly. A3 mentioned that the Vice Chancellors felt that the NAAC is constantly interfering with their work and they may not be acknowledging NAAC's contribution to the quality enhancement process.

A4 felt that the first gain was that the institution became of the various aspects of quality and of the expectations that NAAC and the government had from their institution. The institution also consulted a number of manuals of best practices from the internet. That had improved the library with an independent room dedicated to it. Journals and books were being purchased regularly for the library. A4 mentioned that the Vice Chancellors approached the A&A process with a very positive view. However, there were so many strings attached to the development and decision-making process. The universities were not autonomous. However, with all the restrictions, the Vice Chancellors did make efforts to conform to the prescribed standards of the NAAC.

C1 mentioned that the gain for the institution was that they became aware of their weaknesses. The NAAC procedure also brought the entire staff closer and work in unity. Team effort was brought to the fore. The institution had also adopted some of the best practices. Morning assemblies had improved student-faculty interaction and that has led to significant improvement in the student. The A&A process also led to better maintenance of institutional records. C1 mentioned that NAAC A&A process had a positive effect on Vice Chancellors and they appreciated institutions that secured a good grade.

C2 mentioned that awareness created by the NAAC accreditation process was a benefit to institutions. Students get involved with different activities. Research and development was made possible because of better infrastructure. Any lacuna or shortcoming was easily and quickly addressed. C2 mentioned that Vice Chancellors were very positive towards the A&A process.

However, since the selection of the Vice Chancellors was not on the basis of academic proficiency alone, they were amenable to political groups and on occasions, quality was compromised.

C3 mentioned that once an institution was accredited, it got established on the national network. Secondly, it encouraged and induced a healthy competition. Thirdly, because of NAAC gradations, there was an optimal use of all resources, which till a decade back was lying unused as waste. C3 felt that the Vice Chancellors perceived the A&A process as a necessary evil. However, they also realised that it is a matter of reputation. Therefore, they looked at the A&A process in a positive manner.

C4 mentioned of the improvements to his college largely on a theoretical plane. C4 mentioned that when the institution went through the accreditation process, it had less than 50 computers. And now it had 100-200 computers. C4 was of the opinion that Vice Chancellors had a positive approach towards the A&A process and supported all efforts that institutions may take for securing better grades.

G1 mentioned that his institution had seen only a limited improvement for reasons that arise out of NAAC A&A process. There had been some benefits: formal space for library, increase in student activities and participation, increase in quality consciousness and better maintenance of available infrastructure. However, the core interest of academics in terms of research, course curriculum and admission procedures had not improved. G1 mentioned that Vice Chancellor approached the process of A&A in an open manner and encourage the colleges to go in for the A&A process. However, they do not force the institutions to compulsorily go in for the A&A process since they know that it does not make any difference. The political will to acquire quality in higher education was missing. And since all Vice Chancellors are political appointees, they knew when they should not cross the political boundary.

The **third question** was asked to know what incentives were there for an institution if they underwent the A&A process. The **fourth question** was similar to the third question, though it was more specific. It asked about the gains that had accrued to the institution of the interviewee. Both these questions are being analysed together.

A1 mentioned that accredited institutions got additional benefits, including monetary benefits, from government agencies and they could apply for recognition as a CPE. That additional monetary

benefit accrues if the college qualified as a CPE was also supported by A2, who felt that if the college got good grades, it could also expect private funds. A2 also said that her college had signed MOUs with other departments. However, her college was about to undergo the A&A process at the time her interview was recorded. Therefore, it would be difficult to link the MOUs to the A&A process. A3 also felt that public funding was unaffected though private funding may increase if the college got good grades. A4 also felt that an institution getting a good grade may apply and be recognized as a CPE that would entitle it to more finances.

Amongst the academics, C1, C2 and C4 felt that public funds were unaffected by NAAC's A&A process. As opposed to this, C3 felt that good grades also facilitated getting funds, even from government agencies. Though C3 mentioned that private funding may also increase, her college, which was graded "A", has not seen any increase in external private funding. G1 was of the opinion that NAAC grades did not affect the funding pattern significantly either from public or private sources and that it did not translate into material benefits.

Here again, a divergence of views between the administrators on the one hand and the academics on the other can be seen. Administrators felt that if the quality of teaching-learning was good, it could attract private funding. The academics were silent on this. It is possible that the general conception in the minds of administrators and academics is that ensuring quality in the teaching-learning process is primarily the responsibility of the academics with the administrators playing only a supporting role. That may explain the views of the administrators, who did not feel responsible to get additional funds and sought to project that if additional funds were not coming, it was due to unsatisfactory work done by the academics.

It was also observed that none of the persons interviewed reported that they had got additional monetary benefits due to the NAAC A&A process even though their colleges had undergone the A&A process. A minimum of 'B' grade is required to qualify for declaration of a college as a CPE. Out of the institutions from where the interviewees came, one was an "A" grade college while the others had received "B" grades. However, none of them had been declared as a CPE.

Explanation for this can be found from G1's interpretation of the issues involved. G1 clarified that a minimum of 'B' grade at NAAC A&A was only a necessary but not a sufficient criterion for qualification of a college as a CPE. The qualifying standard set by the UGC for CPE is too lenient to serve as an incentive. Moreover, while selecting a CPE, other criteria are also considered. Many

of these criteria, though assessed by NAAC in its A&A procedure, is re-assessed by the UGC independently. So, even the UGC is not relying on the A&A carried out by NAAC. Regarding funds received by students for research G1 was doubtful whether the funds, if sanctioned, arose out of the NAAC A&A procedures or whether they arose as a result of the nature of the project.

On the major gains of the NAAC's quality assurance process, there was a unanimity between the respondents that one of the major gains of the A&A process was that it created awareness amongst the entire staff. One came to know about ones strengths and weaknesses. Better grades also enhanced the reputation of the institutions.

Some gains were also pointed out by different interviewees. A3 mentioned that student participation in institutional activities increased and the administration also became more student-friendly. A4 pointed out the gains from the NAAC process – a dedicated library, regular purchase of books and journals, etc. C1 mentioned that better student-faculty interaction had helped produce more confident students. C4 mentioned that when his college gained in respect of computerization following the NAAC process. However, he did not explain how computerization was linked to A&A process of NAAC. The third and the fourth questions may be basically an outcome of the manner in which the Indian A&A system is implemented.

4.6 Improvements suggested by interviewees to the NAAC process

In the **fifth question**, interviewees were asked to respond on what they thought were needed to be introduced into the A&A system followed by NAAC. The question was framed, especially, to ascertain the views of the interviewees on the issue of making the A&A process mandatory, on the issue of transparency and on the issue of including students as members of the NAAC peer team.

Regarding reforms that may be introduced into the A&A process, A1 felt that it should be made mandatory. A1 was of the opinion that not all dimensions of the report should be made public. However, some important points touching the students as well as parents may be disclosed. Confidential information should not be disclosed. A1 felt that students should not be included in the peer team of the NAAC since it may create a biased environment. This was because they are in a learning stage and are inexperienced.

A2 also felt that the A&A process should be made mandatory. However, it should not lead to an unhealthy competition amongst institutions. A2 believed that the entire process should be transparent and everything should be made public. A2 felt that students should be made part of the peer team.

A3 felt that the process should not be made mandatory and that a way should be found out by which institutions volunteered to undergo the process. A3 believed that the report should be made public. A3 felt that student participation in the A&A process should be encouraged.

A4 felt that ideally the A&A process should be made mandatory. However, practically, it was not possible in India. A4 suggested that it should be made mandatory for institutions located in urban areas while it should not be so for institutions located in far flung, remote, tribal and backward areas. There was a need to balance the whole approach. A4 felt that the report should be made public once an institution goes through the A&A process. A4 felt that though the concept has come up in the Western countries to include students as part of the A&A process, in India, considering their understanding, level of education and literacy, it will only complicate things and may also bring in a lot of politics and vicarious interests. A4 was not in favour of including students in the A&A process.

C1 felt that the A&A process should be made mandatory. C1 also felt that the entire NAAC report should be made public. Only then would the institutions strive for getting a good grade. Regarding the inclusion of students in the NAAC process, C1 mentioned that they were already included in the A&A process. There was an interaction of the peer team with the students during their visit to the institution. However, C1 was of the opinion that if students may be immature to judge an institution and this may complicate the process if they are made a part of the peer team.

C2 felt that it was desirable that the A&A process was made mandatory. However, C2 was not sure if it can be achieved. It would be difficult to implement in rural, backward, remote and tribal areas. C2 felt that the NAAC procedure should be made more transparent since quality in education was an important public concern. C2 was circumspect about the inclusion of students in the peer team that visited the institutions fearing that they may not be mature enough.

C3 felt that the A&A process should be made mandatory for all institutions. C3 felt that the NAAC procedure should be made more transparent. C3 felt that the reports should be made public and that

the reasons behind the award of a particular grade should also be declared. C3 felt that students should be allowed to participate in the A&A process since the entire exercise was to facilitate students.

C4 felt that it was not necessary for NAAC A&A to be made mandatory for all. C4 was of the opinion that the NAAC report should be made public so that it was available to all. C4 preferred that student be involved in the A&A process since the entire procedure is student-centric. However, C4 was not of the view to accept students as part of the NAAC peer team because they may not be mature enough.

G1 felt that the A&A process should be made mandatory for all HEIs. However, he admitted that such a goal may be difficult to achieve. G1 was of the opinion that all NAAC documents related to the A&A should be made available to the public over the internet. Transparency of procedures was necessary. G1 felt that since A&A procedures in India were a relatively new phenomenon, students should not form part of the peer team at present. However, as the system matures, we could experiment including a student member in the peer team.

Except for A3 and C4, there was a near unanimity on the issue of whether the A&A process should be made mandatory. A3 felt that the process should not be made mandatory and that a way out should be found out by which institutions volunteer to undergo the process. However, it was apprehended by A4 that it may not be practically possible to make the process of compulsory. It was also felt by C2 that the A&A process as it stands today would be difficult to implement in rural, backward, remote and tribal areas. C4 feels that the A&A process should not be a prerogative of the NAAC alone. Other bodies should also be allowed to operate.

It can again be seen from the data collected in respect of the previous question that though the Vice Chancellors are generally positive in their approach towards quality assurance, they lack the will to impose it upon institutions. This can be seen from the responses of the interviewees to the motivation that they got from the Vice Chancellors of universities as mentioned below.

A1 said that Vice Chancellors were positive towards the A&A process. A2 also felt that Vice Chancellors considered the A&A process very important since it added to the reputation of the institution. A3 felt that Vice Chancellors felt that the NAAC was constantly interfering with their work though they acknowledge its contribution to the quality enhancement process. C1, C2 and C4

felt that the Vice Chancellors were positive about the A&A process. C2, however, mentions that they may come under political influence and quality may get compromised. C3 felt that Vice Chancellors perceived the A&A process as a necessary evil though they admit that it can have a bearing on the reputation of an institution. G1 opined that Vice Chancellors approached the A&A process with an open mind and encouraged the colleges for it. He also mentioned that Vice Chancellors could come under political influence.

5. Discussion, conclusion and recommendations

Research was conducted to ascertain the objectives and purpose of the A&A process adopted by NAAC. More specifically, research focussed on whether the focus of the NAAC's quality assurance process focused on "improvement" or "accountability".

The "improvement vs. accountability" debate is quite common for HE systems all over the world. According to (Damme, 2000) in the "improvement" approach, the quality assurance system provides feedback to the academic staff on course curriculum, contents, infrastructure, etc. for improvement of the academic education. In this approach, the quality assurance process leads to processes of institutional innovation. On the other hand the "accountability" approach focuses on the more efficient and effective use of resources. It casts a public duty upon them to report publicly on the outcomes and their social benefits to higher education with the public resources invested in them. However, central to this approach is the existence of the relationship between the state and the institutions based on concepts of self-regulation and institutional autonomy.

Indian HEIs are mostly state controlled. Since the grant-in-aid private colleges are also heavily dependent on the state for funds, they are also controlled to a large extent by state administered policies. The level of control is very stringent leaving virtually no room for autonomy of these higher education institutions. As mentioned by Damme, the "accountability" function entails the existence of self-regulation and institutional autonomy as well as transparency of outcomes. When there is no discretion given to the HEIs, the question of accountability is only minimal and if it exists, it exists only to the extent of compliance of government directives. Under these circumstances, "accountability" does not appear to be focus of NAAC's quality assurance process.

Moreover, Vroeijerstijn (1995) mentions that the conflict between 'improvement' and 'accountability' arises at the time of writing of the report after the visit of the peer team. From the 'improvement' perspective, confidentiality is favoured since making the report public, invites an evasive behaviour from the faculties. They tend to avoid exposing their weaknesses, are less willing for an honest self-analysis or an open discussion with peers fearing retribution. The 'accountability' function, on the other hand, demands complete transparency and the publication of as much as possible of the data, findings and conclusions.

The NAAC quality assurance process is not really transparent, as had been seen from the data collected during research. The entire report is not made public. All that is made public is the grade received by an institution. In Vroeijenstijn's perspective, this is indicative of "improvement" perspective as has been borne out in this research. A majority of the respondents also support that the approach of NAAC puts greater focus on the "improvement" function. Thus, in this regard also, the observations are consistent with the pronounced theory.

Research was also conducted to ascertain how the NAAC score was being used by the stakeholders – students, parents and employers. In addition, data was also collected to see how institutions gained from the NAAC's quality assurance process. Research showed that neither the stakeholders nor the institutions gained significantly from the NAAC's quality assurance process. This lack of gain may be linked to the issue of transparency of the entire process.

Altbach (2004) mentions that large academic systems require transparency to assure the stakeholders that minimum quality standards are met. A transparent system ensures that all stakeholders are appropriately, sufficiently and correctly informed of the quality that an institution or an academic programme offers. It is also necessary to ensure that public resources are effectively spent. He then advocates an appropriate accreditation system suitably adapted to specific circumstances to be adopted by the countries. This requirement for transparency acquires all the more significance for countries experiencing a surge of massification accompanied with demands for inclusiveness and equity.

Wergin (2005) asserts that the demand for transparency has mandated the making of the accreditation reports public. Increased public scrutiny of accreditation has only amplified tensions in the accreditation function. Accrediting bodies are faced with the problem of satisfying competing and even contradictory interests. Moreover, better information is also important for producer effectiveness: "Information on the quality of a product provides an incentive for producers to invest in quality improvements and thereby better compete in the market" (Dill & Soo, 2004, p. 61).

The Indian A&A system appears to be lacking in this aspect as is clearly borne out by the responses of the interviewees, where none of the stakeholders – the student, the parent, the employers and not even the UGC (government) are putting reliance on it. Even an "A" grade institution does not invite extra funds either from private or from public sources. A non-increase in public funding may be explained given the competing interests from other sectors that the government has to face.

However, lack of transparency and, maybe, consistency does not convince the private players to invest in an institution. The funding patterns experienced in Indian higher education is, therefore, consistent with the existing theory explained by Dill & Soo and cited by Wergin.

This research also went into the perception of whether the NAAC quality assurance process should be made mandatory for all higher education institutions. As has been mentioned previously, the quality assurance process in India continues to be a voluntary affair. Moreover, the entire exercise for all HEIs (with few exceptions) is conducted by the NAAC. There is a need, therefore, to consider the 'control', 'areas' and 'procedures' amongst other aspects of higher education policy as spelt out by Perellon (2007).

Perellon (2007), in his discussion of policy analysis in higher education, outlines the existence of five fundamental choices for policy makers – 'objectives', 'control', 'areas', 'procedures' and 'uses' – that must be addressed by all higher education policies. 'Objectives' define the aims and objectives of the quality assurance policy. 'Control' refers to the body that should control the process of quality assurance. 'Areas' refer to the domains covered by the quality assurance procedures. 'Procedures' refer to how the quality assurance procedures are to be set up. 'Uses' refer to the use of the collected information. One aspect related to the fundamental choice of 'procedure' of quality assurance processes is whether it should be 'compulsory' or 'voluntary'. In the early years of the quality assurance movement, taking part in the quality assurance procedures used to be voluntary. The entire approach was based on 'mutual trust' and a 'will to improve'. However, higher education systems at present are strongly influenced by market forces with the result that a voluntary approach has almost completely lost favour.

The Indian HE quality assurance process, for reasons embedded in its socio-economic construct and its political backdrop is still voluntary in nature. The significance of market forces and the needs of the 'users' cannot be ignored by HEIs and policy makers. Also, the body responsible for quality assurance is highly centralised and the process itself is somewhat inflexible. With a large HEI system the need for structural changes in the 'control' apparatus needs to be considered if quality assurance is to become a meaningful exercise. Moreover, the management paradigm of 'Different strokes for different folks' does not hold true in Indian quality assurance. In the Indian context of vast diversity and grave challenges of inclusiveness and equity in higher education, such inflexibility may not produce the desired results. The domains covered by the

quality assurance process may need to be revisited after considering local circumstances of an institution.

Conclusion

In view of the research carried out, it would be appropriate to draw out conclusions that beset quality assurance in the Indian higher education set up. These conclusions are drawn on the basis of the documents collected and the interviews recorded of different persons related to higher education.

What quality?

The first question that needs to be addressed is as to what is that “quality” that the NAAC seeks to address through its A&A process. Theory offers several perspectives on quality and before any quality assurance process is put into practice, it is important to understand the meaning of quality that had been adopted in the context of a particular country. For this purpose, one has to dissect the seven “criterion” and the associated “key aspects” to deduce the concept of “quality” as understood by NAAC. A closer analysis of Table 4 and Table 5 shows that virtually no attention has been paid to the “customers” of the product (students) of higher education. NAAC’s approach avoids the issue of determining the customers and puts the emphasis for quality on the institutions. In that sense, the concept of quality that is guiding the NAAC may be said to be “Fitness for purpose 2 – Mission” in the context of the theory advanced by Harvey and Green.

However, at the same time, it is seen that the same parameter is used for all institutions irrespective of their profile. Location and demographic considerations in respect of the institutions are not taken into account at all. It is also seen, from Table 4 and Table 5, there is a certain weight attached to research work to all institutions. The concept of differentiation, as outlined by Altbach (2004) – of roles of institutions being differentiated depending upon circumstances – is not factored into the NAAC’s QA process. All institutions, whether they are located in urban, rural or remote areas or whether they are addressing primarily a women or tribal population, are evaluated on the same scale and using the same parameters. Concerns about inclusiveness and equity in higher education, which are important social realities, are not a factor in determining the accreditation and assessment standards of institutions.

At the same time, significant emphasis is placed on research, consultancy, extension services and collaboration – 25% for universities and 15% for colleges (Table 4). As Altbach (2004) has mentioned, not all HEIs need to attend to research. All that is required from most of them is that they be teaching institutions equipped with faculty, who can understand research done elsewhere. Emphasis on research, consultancy, collaboration and extension services indicates that NAAC has some fixed concept of quality and wants the HEIs to achieve the same. From this, it appears that NAAC's quality assurance process may have a slight leaning towards the "Checking Standards" variant of "Quality as Exceptional" approach to quality.

Whither implementation?

Cloete and Maassen (2006, p. 27) in their work have observed: "India – Niagara Falls of policy reports and a Sahara of action." They go on to explain the colonial background of India and give reasons for the current state of affairs where high sounding policies are put in place only to see a failure in their implementation. The Indian quality assurance system is one such illustration of the situation so correctly put forth by Cloete and Maassen. To analyse this situation in the light of this research, one may go back to the research questions presented for this research.

1. What are the motivations for HEIs to get accredited?
2. How does the assessment and accreditation process enhance institutional improvement?

As has been revealed during the research, the motivations for HEIs to get accredited are very peripheral. Most of the persons interviewed mentioned that the major gain for them was the awareness that the A&A process created in their institution amongst both the academic and the administrative staff. In terms of substantive gains, however, the gain was only minimal, if at all. Some of the respondents mentioned that they did experience gain in physical assets in their institutions. But, one really has to go in deep and find out if the gain was triggered by the NAAC's A&A process or whether it was part of the normal growth prescription of the institution administered by the state. In a situation where the interviewees have denied the existence of any policy linking finances with the NAAC's A&A process, it is difficult to conceive how such increase in infrastructural facilities was an outcome of the A&A process.

Research also showed that the stakeholders of higher education – students, parents, employers – were not relying on the grades awarded by NAAC. Even government agencies such as the UGC, which created the NAAC, do not rely on the A&A process of NAAC.

The fault may not lie with the NAAC or with the institutions that are assessed. The fault, most probably, lies more with the implementation of the quality assurance process. Part of the blame lies with the refusal of policy makers to come out of the colonial legacy inherited by the country, where higher education was introduced to produce subservient civil servants and government functionaries.

What purpose? The “improvement” vs. “accountability” debate

As can be seen from the vision and mission statement on its website, NAAC professes both “improvement” as well as “accountability” as the purpose of its quality assurance exercise. However, as borne out from the responses of the interviewees, there is a strong leaning towards the “improvement” aspect of quality assurance. But, if one goes by the experience of the institutions, even the “improvement” aspect may not be getting projected as a result of NAAC’s quality assurance process. Gains, if any, have only been marginal and in areas that are not really central to the criteria and the related key aspects set by the NAAC for its quality assurance process. Moreover, as has been mentioned before, it remains doubtful whether even these marginal gains have been a direct outcome of the NAAC’s quality assurance process or whether they are a product of general government policy.

With the current state of quality assurance in mind, there may be a case to consider putting the focus on the “accountability” aspect of quality assurance. This aspect casts a public duty upon the HEIs to report publicly on the outcomes and their social benefits to higher education with the public resources invested in them. The concept of “social benefits” is in-built in this approach, which allows for quality assurance systems that can differentiate between institutions depending upon their purpose. Thus, in this approach, the accountability functions may be differentially fixed for each institution depending upon its entire academic environment and goal. However, for this approach to be successful, it is necessary for the institutions to be given autonomy and the power to self-regulate their functions.

Autonomy of higher education institutions

Indian universities and other institutions of higher education are deeply embedded in the colonial culture and have little autonomy to decide on their own policies and priorities. State control on the universities is almost complete and institutions have very little autonomy on deciding on the academic issues like admissions, course curriculum, academic flexibility, teaching, learning and evaluation, etc. The assessment process of NAAC needs to be analysed in this backdrop to see if institutions are being truly assessed or whether the institutions are being presented with a *fait accompli* because they have little power to act in their own discretion.

Table 4 lays out the key aspects in respect of each of the seven criteria, it is seen that in respect of most of the key aspects, the policy is specified and directed by the state rather than by the institution. The NAAC assessment process lays significant emphasis on these key aspects over which the institution has little say of its own. The institutions are merely made answerable to what is, in reality, a state policy. Under such circumstances, if two institutions are differently graded by NAAC, the difference may arise not because of the effort made by institutions for quality but also because of the facilities and other conditions inherited by the institution by virtue of its location, age and tradition amongst other things.

The mirage of compulsory assessment and accreditation

There is a strong case for making the A&A exercise mandatory for all HEIs, as has been recommended by all the respondent interviewees. However, some of the interviewees have mentioned that this may be difficult to achieve in view of the socio-economic political conditions in the country. While there can be no doubt that the A&A exercise must be made mandatory, there are obvious difficulties with the implementation of the A&A process that is being operated at present. While it is true that there are several socio-political vested interests that have crept into higher education, the enormous economic implication of the entire exercise cannot also be overlooked. Given that the number of HEIs stood in excess of 26,000 in 2009, the manpower and the cost involved in carrying out compulsory quality assurance processes for all institutions is quite prohibitive. This would be so even if an institution has to undergo the A&A process once in five years, which means that 5,200 HEIs would have to undergo the A&A process every year. Besides the issues of manpower and expenses that such an exercise would involve, there would also be a great concern about consistency, objectivity and impartiality of the entire exercise since numerous

peer teams would have to be involved in such a herculean task. The enormity of the task itself will put the entire exercise on the brink of impossibility.

While making the A&A process mandatory is desirable, it may not be achieved with the present NAAC framework. To achieve this purpose, it is necessary to decentralize NAAC. This is in addition to the process itself that would need to be revisited and reinvented.

NAAC compared with other A&A systems of the world

Dill and Beerkens postulated three basic modal forms of quality assurance mechanisms in higher education, which were similar in their approach to Clark's 'Triangle of Coordination'. These forms are (1) the European model of central control of quality assurance by state educational ministries, (2) the US model of decentralisation combining limited state control with market competition, and (3) the British model in which the state essentially ceded responsibility for quality assurance to self-accrediting universities. (Dill, 1992 as cited in Dill and Beerkens, 2010, p. 7). In this respect, the Indian quality assurance system is based on the European model of central control of quality assurance by state educational ministries. In the state regulation of academic quality, the state takes upon itself the responsibility for defining and enforcing academic standards. Out of the six quality assurance systems of different countries that have been discussed in this thesis, the Indian system would come closest to the system followed in Denmark insofar as the quality assessment framework is concerned. In Denmark, accreditation is done on the basis of centrally laid down criteria. Accreditation is done by ACE Denmark (for universities) and by EVA (for colleges). Accreditation decisions are taken by the Accreditation Council on the basis of the evidence provided by the EVA and ACE Denmark. However, there are differences between the Indian and the Danish systems as well. For example, there is a student representative and also an employer in the peer team in Denmark, which is not there in India. Also, the decision making body is different from the body that reports on the quality of institutions making the process that much more objective. The entire academic settings in the two countries would also be different.

Recommendations

It would be interesting to analyse the recommendations that emerge out of the data collected during the research. The recommendations, based on grounded theory, may be summarised as follows:

The **first** recommendation coming from the interviewees, which has not really been uniform, is to make the entire A&A process completely transparent. This would mean putting all A&A records including the SSR, Peer Team Report and the grades awarded in the public domain over the internet. Such a procedure would only ensure the objectivity of the A&A process and greatly enhance its credibility. It is only when the quality assurance system becomes transparent that different stakeholders would rely upon it.

The **second** recommendation that has emerged out of the data is the decentralisation of the assessment body, i.e. NAAC itself. This recommendation becomes a necessity if one considers the enormity of the task at hand, especially if the entire A&A process has to be made mandatory.

The **third** recommendation that may be suggested for adoption is to shift the focus of quality assurance from “improvement” to “accountability”. This may require a deeper research or “field trials” to understand their effectiveness in ensuring quality in higher education.

The **final** recommendation is in respect of this research itself. This research, because of time and resource constraints has limited itself only to certain aspects of NAAC’s quality assurance process. While doing this research, no similar research, involving field work, to gauge the effectiveness of the NAAC’s A&A procedure could be found. This means that there is no “feedback” on the effectiveness of the NAAC’s quality assurance procedures. Given that NAAC has been in existence since 1994, a deeper research is required covering all the facets of NAAC’s quality assurance procedure to arrive at a final conclusion on NAAC’s overall strengths and weaknesses.

To conclude, the crossroads at which the Indian higher education system finds itself stranded is easy to understand. Problems of funds, expansion, quality, inclusiveness, autonomy, etc. present formidable challenges to an emerging economy like India. However, a series of measured steps with a long-term view may just be the right recipe that India is waiting for its higher education system to take wings.

References

- ACE, Denmark (2009). *Accreditation in Denmark*. Retrieved 07.06.2011 from http://acedenmark.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/dokumenter/Engelske_tekster/Accreditation_in_Denmark_2009.pdf
- ACE Denmark: *The accreditation process*. Retrieved 07.06.2011 from <http://acedenmark.dk/this-page-in-english/accreditation-the-process.html>
- Adelman, C. (2009). *The Bologna process for U.S. eyes: Re-learning higher education in the age of convergence*. Retrieved 08.06.2011 from <http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/EYESFINAL.pdf>
- Altbach, P.G. (2004). The past and future of Asian universities: Twenty-first century challenges. In P.G. Altbach & T. Umakoshi (Eds.) *Asian Universities - Historical perspectives and contemporary challenges* (p. 1 – 32). Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press
- Amaral, A. & Polidori, M. (1999). Quality evaluation in Brazil: a competency based approach? *Higher Education Policy*, 12, 177 – 199.
- Amaral, A. & Rosa, M.J. (2007). A self-assessment of higher education institutions from the perspective of the EFQM excellence model. In D.F. Westerheijden, B. Stensaker & M.J. Rosa (Eds.) *Quality assurance in higher education: Trends in regulation, translation and transformation*, (p. 155 – 178). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer
- Amaral, A. (1998). The US accreditation system and the CRE's quality audits: A comparative study. *Quality in Higher Education*, 6(4), p. 184 – 196.
- Amaral, A. (2005). *Higher education and quality assessment. The many rationales for quality*. Plenary Conference at the IAUP Biannual Conference, July 5, Bangkok.
- Astin, A.W. (1990). Educational assessment and educational equity. *American Journal of Education*, Vol. 98, No. 1, 458 – 478.
- Australian Qualifications Framework (2007). *Implementation handbook*. Carlton, South Victoria: AQF Advisory Board
- Australian Universities Quality Agency (2011). *Australian Universities Quality Agency - Audit manual Version 8*. Retrieved 05.06.2011 from http://www.auqa.edu.au/files/auditmanuals/audit_manual_version_8.pdf
- Babbie, E. (2006). *The practice of social research*. Chennai: Thomson-Wadsworth
- Billing, D. (2004). International comparisons and trends in external quality assurance of higher education - commonality or diversity. *Higher Education*, 113 – 137.
- Bogue, E. G. (1998). Quality Assurance in Higher Education: The Evolution of Systems and Design Ideals. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 1998(99), 7-18.

- Bogue, E.G. & Hall, K.B. (2003). *Quality and accountability in higher education: Improving policy, enhancing performance*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Brennan, J. (2007). The multiple functions of evaluation and quality assessment. *The Authors Volume Compilation, 2007*, p. 1 – 25.
- Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chapman, D.W. & Austin, A.E. (2002). The changing context of higher education in the developing world. In D.W. Chapman & A.E. Austin (Eds.) *Higher education in the developing world: Changing contexts and institutional responses* (p. 3 – 22). Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Clark, B. (1983). *The higher education system: Academic organisation in cross-national perspective*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cloete, N., Maassen, P. (2006). Global reform trends in higher education. In N. Cloete, P. Maassen, R. Fehnel, T. Moja, T. Gibbon and H. Perold (Eds.), *Transformation in higher education- Global pressures and local realities* (pp. 13 – 57). Dordrecht: Springer
- Cozby, P.C. (2009). *Methods in behavioral research (10th ed.)*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Department of Commerce (n.d.). *Higher education in India and GATS – An opportunity*. Retrieved 01.10.2009 from http://commerce.nic.in/trade/Consultation_paper_on_Education_GATS.pdf
- Department of Secondary and Higher Education (n.d.). *Higher Education in India*. Retrieved 30.06.2011 from <http://www.education.nic.in/higedu.htm>
- Dill D. D. (2007). *Quality assurance in higher education - Practices and issues*. Retrieved 30.04.2011 from http://www.unc.edu/ppaq/docs/Encyclopedia_Final.pdf
- Dill, D. and Soo, M. (2004) “Transparency and Quality in Higher Education Markets”. In Teixeira, P., Jongbloed, B., Dill, D. and Amaral, A. (eds). *Markets in Higher Education: Rhetoric or Reality?* Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, p. 61-85.
- Dill, D.D. & Beerkens, M. (2010). Introduction. In David D. Dill & Maarja Beerkens (Eds.), *Public policy for academic quality (p. 1 – 20)*. London: Springer.
- Eaton, J.S. (2009). *An overview of US accreditation*. Retrieved 08.06.2011 from http://www.chea.org/pdf/2009.06_Overview_of_US_Accreditation.pdf
- El-Khawas, E. (2002). Developing a strategy for quality assurance. In Chapman, D.W. & Austin, A.E. (Eds.) *Higher Education in the Developing World: Changing Contexts and Institutional Responses*, p. 197 - 215. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press
- Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research, 4th Edition*. New Delhi: SAGE Publishers.

- Fornari, R. (n.d.). *The indicators and mission of higher education: What is the gap?* Retrieved 16.07.2011 from <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/ati/education/ioe/ioe5/Fornari%20paper.pdf>
- Green, D. (1994). 'What is Quality in Higher Education? Concepts, Policy and Practice.' In D. Green (Ed.), *What is Quality in Higher Education?* Great Britain, Open University Press, p. 3 – 20.
- Green, D.M. (1994). *What is quality in higher education?* Taylor & Francis: London.
- Gornitzka Å, Maassen P. (2000). Hybrid steering approaches with respect to European higher education. *Higher Education Policy*, 13, 267 – 285.
- Harvey, L. & Green, D. (1993). Defining quality. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*. April 93, Vol. 18, Issue 1, p. 9 - 26.
- Harvey, L. & Green, D. (1993). Defining quality. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 18:1, p. 9 – 34.
- Harvey, L. & Knight, P.T. (1996). *Transforming higher education*. Buckingham: Open University Press
- Harvey, L. & Newton, J. (2007). Transforming quality evaluation: Moving on. In D.F. Westerheijden, B. Stensaker & M.J. Rosa (Eds.) *Quality assurance in higher education: Trends in regulation, translation and transformation*, (p. 155 – 178). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer
- Higher Education Quality Committee (2002). *Programme accreditation framework*. Retrieved on 10.12.2011 from <http://www.che.ac.za/documents/d000010/AccreditationFramework.pdf>
- Houser, R. (1998). *Counseling and educational research: Evaluation and application*. California: Sage Publications
- International Institute for Education and Planning (UNESCO) (2007). *Conducting the process of external quality assurance*. Retrieved 29 April, 2011 from http://www.unesco.org/iiep/PDF/TR_Mods/HE_Mod2.pdf
- Kehm, B.M. (2010). The German system of accreditation. In David D. Dill & Maarja Beerkens (Eds.), *Public policy for academic quality* (p. 141 – 154). London: Springer.
- Lewis, R. (2010). External examiner system in the UK: Fresh challenges to an old system. In David D. Dill & Maarja Beerkens (Eds.), *Public policy for academic quality* (p. 21 – 36) London: Springer.
- McInnis, C. (2010). The Australian qualifications framework. In David D. Dill & Maarja Beerkens (Eds.), *Public policy for academic quality* (p. 141 – 154). London: Springer.
- Ministry of Human Resources and Development (2009) *Yash Pal Committee: Interim Report*. Retrieved 30.06.2011 from http://www.jnu.ac.in/Yash_Pal_Committee.pdf

- Ministry of Human Resources and Development (n.d.) *Yash Pal Committee Report*. Retrieved 05.05.2011 from <http://www.hindu.com/nic/yashpalcommitteereport.pdf>
- Ministry of Law (n.d.). *Constitution of India*. Retrieved 30.06.2011 from <http://lawmin.nic.in/coi/coiason29july08.pdf>
- NAAC (2007). *New methodology of assessment and accreditation (effective from 1st April, 2007)*. Bangalore: Director, NAAC. Retrieved from <http://www.cscsarchive.org/dataarchive/textfiles/textfile.2008-05-06.3040051475/file>
- NAAC (2010). *Assessment and accreditation fees*. Retrieved 30.06.2011 from [http://www.naac.gov.in/\(IEQA\)%20Fees.pdf](http://www.naac.gov.in/(IEQA)%20Fees.pdf)
- NAAC (2012a). *NAAC 16th annual report, 2009-10*. Retrieved on 23.09.2012 from <http://www.naac.gov.in/sites/naac.gov.in/files/Naac%20Annual%20Report.pdf>
- NAAC (2012b). *Vision and mission*. Retrieved 11.11.2012 from http://www.naac.gov.in/vision_mission
- NAAC (2012c). *Weightages*. Retrieved 11.11.2012 from <http://www.naac.gov.in/Weightages>
- NAAC (2012d). *Key aspects and weightages*. Retrieved 11.11.2012 from <http://www.naac.gov.in/sites/naac.gov.in/files/WEIGHTAGES.pdf>
- Newton, J. (2000) 'Feeding the Beast or Improving Quality?: Academics' perceptions of quality assurance and quality monitoring', *Quality in Higher Education*, 6: 2, 153 – 163.
- Newton, J. (2006). *What is quality?* Retrieved 16.05.2011 from <http://www.eua.be/eual/jsp/en/upload/PS%202%20-%20Jethro%20Newton.1166003065141.pdf>
- Newton, J. (2007). What is quality? In *Embedding quality culture in higher education*, p. 14 – 20. Belgium: EUA.
- Perellon, J.F. (2007). Analysing quality assurance in higher education: Proposals for a conceptual framework and methodological implications. In D.F. Westerheijden, B. Stensaker & M.J. Rosa (Eds.) *Quality assurance in higher education: Trends in regulation, translation and transformation*, (p. 155 – 178). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer
- Prasad, V.S. & Stella, A. (2004). *Accreditation of higher education institutions: Indian experience*. Retrieved on 23.09.2012 from http://www.che.ac.za/documents/d000091/seminar_9-3-05-Int-trends-qa_prof_prasad.pdf
- QAA (2011a) *Institutional review: England and Northern Ireland, 2011*. Retrieved 07.06.2011 from <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalreview/>

- QAA (2011b). *Quality assurance in UK higher education: A guide for international readers*. Retrieved 07.06.2011 from http://www.qaa.ac.uk/international/studentGuide/English_readers.asp#item3
- Reddy, Y.V. (2007). *Some perspectives on the Indian economy*. Retrieved 05.07.2011 from <http://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/Bulletin/PDFs/81163.pdf>
- Schwartzman, S. (2010). The national assessment of courses in Brazil. In David D. Dill & Maarja Beerkens (Eds.), *Public policy for academic quality* (p. 293 – 312). London: Springer.
- Scott, J. (1990). A matter of record. (Cambridge: Polity). In Bryman, A. *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shah, M., Nair, S. & Wilson, M. (2011). Quality assurance in Australian higher education: historical and future development. *Asia Pacific Education Review*. Springer
- Silverman, D. & Marvasti, A. (2008). *Doing qualitative research – A comprehensive guide*. New Delhi: Sage Publishers
- Stensaker, B. (2010). Subject assessments for academic quality in Denmark. In David D. Dill & Maarja Beerkens (Eds.), *Public policy for academic quality* (p. 183 – 202). London: Springer.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J.M. (1998). Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory. In Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Trade Policy Division, Department of Commerce, Government of India (n.d.) *A consultation paper on higher education in India and GATS - An opportunity*. Retrieved 25.06.2011 from http://commerce.nic.in/trade/Consultation_paper_on_Education_GATS.pdf
- UGC (2011). *Higher education in India – Strategies and schemes during eleventh plan period (2007-2012) for universities and colleges*. New Delhi: UGC
- UGC (n.d.). *Guidelines for colleges with potential for excellence*. Retrieved on 07.07.2012 from <http://www.ugc.ac.in/oldpdf/xiplanpdf/cpe.pdf>
- UGC (n.d.). *Mandate*. Retrieved 30.06.2011 from <http://www.ugc.ac.in/about/mandate.html>
- UNESCO (n.d.). *Highlights: Learning - The treasure within*. Retrieved 16.05.2011 from http://www.unesco.org/delors/delors_e.pdf
- UNESCO (n.d.). *Making basic choices for external quality assurance systems*. Retrieved 29.04.2011 from http://www.unesco.org/iiep/PDF/TR_Mods/HE_Mod1.pdf
- UNESCO (2011). *Setting up and developing the quality assurance agency*. Retrieved 29.04.2011 from

http://www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Cap_Dev_Training/Training_Materials/HigherEd/EQA_HE_3.pdf

UNESCO (n.d.) *Understanding and assessing quality*. Retrieved 29 April, 2011 from http://www.unesco.org/iiep/PDF/TR_Mods/HE_Mod4.pdf

University Grants Commission (2008). *Higher education in India - Issues related to expansion, inclusiveness, quality and finance*. Retrieved 25.06.2011 from <http://www.ugc.ac.in/pub/report/12.pdf>

Van Damme, D. (2000), *Accreditation in global higher education: the need for international information and co-operation*. Memo for the Commission on Global Accreditation of the IAUP.

Van Vught, F.A. & Westerheijden, D.F. (1994). Towards a general model of quality assessment in higher education. *Higher Education, Vol. 28, p. 355 – 371*.

Vedder, P. (1994). Global measurement of the quality of education: A help to developing countries? *International Review of Education, Vol. 40, Issue 1, p. 5 – 17*.

Vroeijenstijn, A.I. (1995), *Improvement and accountability: navigating between Scylla and Charybdis. Higher Education Policy Series 30*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Wergin, J.F. (2005). Higher education – Waking up to the importance of accreditation. *Change, Vol. 37, No. 3, 35 – 41*.

Westerheijden, D.F. (2007). The changing concepts of quality in the assessment of study programmes, teaching and learning. *Authors Volume Compilation, 2007, 1 – 16*

Wolff, S. (2004). Analysis of documents and records. In Flick, U. *An introduction to qualitative research, 4th Edition*. New Delhi: SAGE Publishers.

World Bank (n.d.). *Quality assurance in higher education - A comparison of eight systems*. Retrieved 29 April, 2011 from http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTECALEA/Resources/ECA_KB35_Quality_Assurance_in_Higher_Education.pdf

Young, K.E. (1979). New pressures on accreditation. *The Journal of Higher Education, Vol. 50, No. 2, 132 – 144*

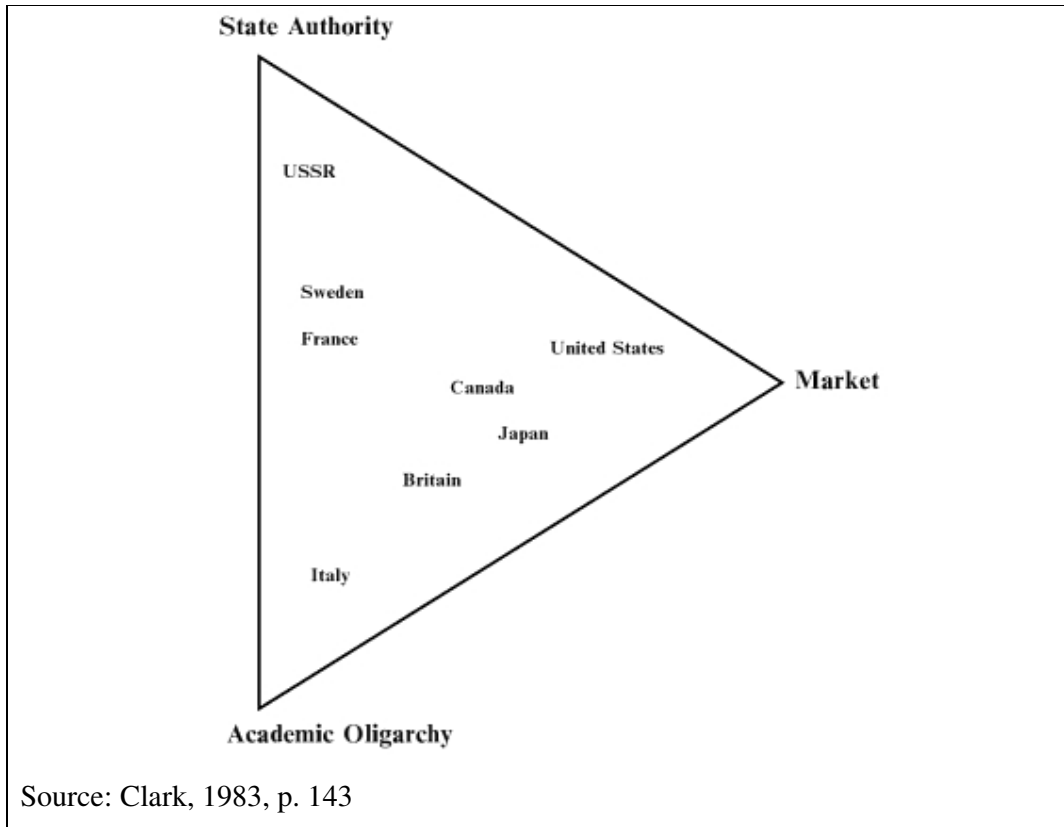
Figure 1: Clark's triangle of coordination

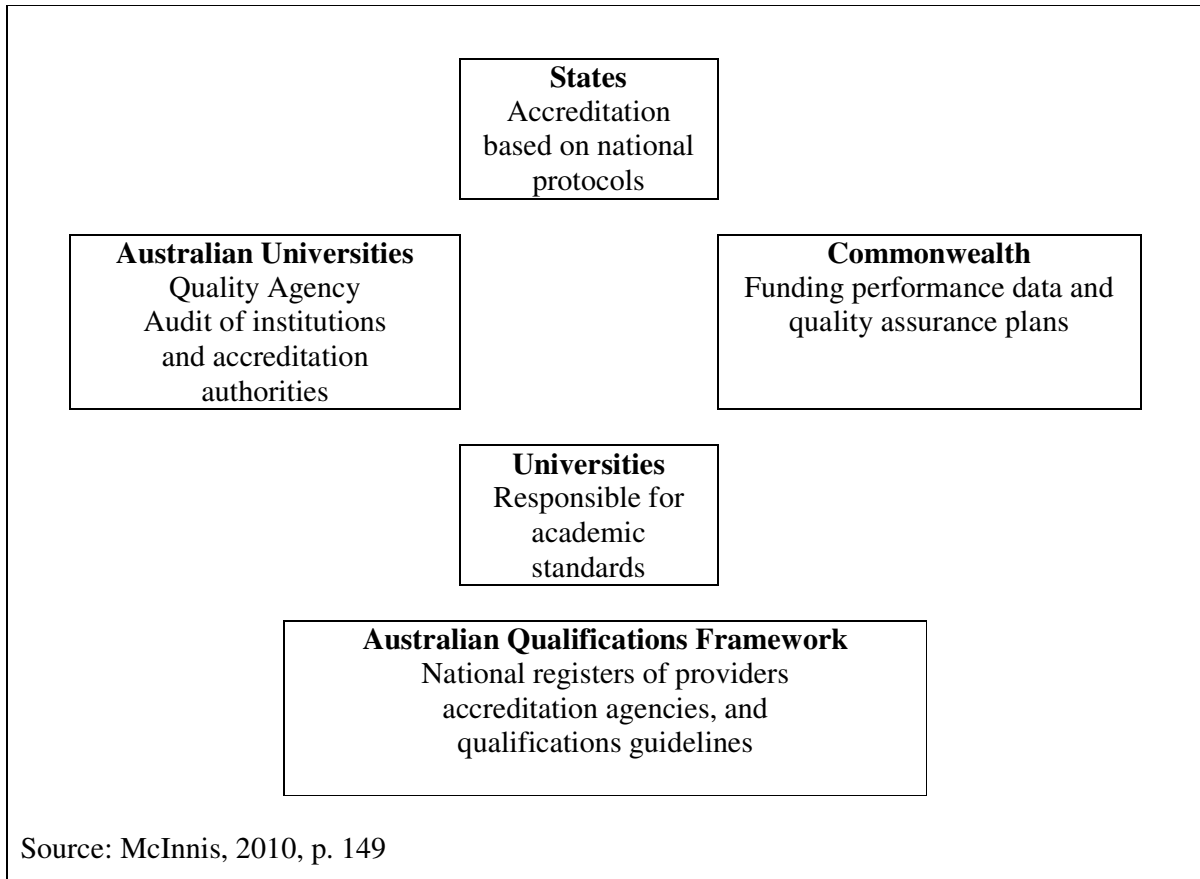
Fig. 2: Australian higher education quality assurance framework

Table 1: Approaches to quality

1.	<p>Quality as Exceptional</p> <p>Traditional notion of quality: something special, exclusive</p> <p>Excellence 1: exceeding high standards</p> <p>Checking standards: Passing a set of required (minimum) standards</p>
2.	<p>Quality as perfection or consistency</p> <p>Excellence 2: Zero defects</p> <p>Quality culture: Getting things right first time</p>
3.	<p>Quality as fitness for purpose</p> <p>Fitness for purpose 1 (FFP1) – customer specifications</p> <p>Meeting requirements</p> <p>Fitness for purpose 2 (FFP2) – mission</p> <p>Quality assurance</p> <p>Customer satisfaction</p>
4.	<p>Quality as value for money</p> <p>Performance indicators</p> <p>Customer charters</p>
5.	<p>Quality as transformation</p> <p>Enhancing the participant</p> <p>Value added</p> <p>Empowering the participant</p>

Source: Harvey & Knight, 1996, p. 8 and suitably modified

Table 2: New public policy instruments for the assurance of academic quality

Professional (Self) regulation	Market regulation	State (direct) regulation
<p>External examining <i>External examining (U.K.)</i></p> <p>Professional accreditation and licensure <i>Teacher Accreditation (USA)</i></p>	<p>Information provision – university rankings <i>CHE-Ranking (Germany)</i> <i>National Survey of Student Engagement (USA)</i> <i>Course Experience Questionnaire and Graduate Survey (Australia)</i></p> <p>Information provision – system rankings <i>State Report Card (USA)</i></p>	<p>Specification of standards <i>National Qualifications Framework (Australia)</i> <i>Subject Benchmarking (UK)</i></p> <p>Program assessment and accreditation <i>Subject Assessments (Denmark)</i> <i>Subject Accreditation (Germany)</i> <i>Medical Accreditation (U.K.)</i></p> <p>Institutional accountability <i>Academic Audit (Hong Kong)</i> <i>Performance-based contracting (Catalonia, Spain)</i></p> <p>Information provision <i>Course Experience Questionnaires and Graduate Surveys (Australia)</i> <i>National Assessment of Courses (Brazil)</i></p>

Source: Dill & Beerkens, 2010, p. 8

Table 3: Operating definitions of quality

- Sufficient capacity (resources; effective planning and administrative procedures)
- Effectiveness (high achievement levels for graduates; achievements are relevant to society and to the economy)
- Efficiency (low unit costs; high completion rates; timely completion)

Table 4: NAAC: Criteria and their weights

	Criteria	University	Autonomous College	Affiliated/ Constituent College
I	Curricular Aspects	150 (15%)	150 (15%)	100 (10%)
II	Teaching-Learning and Evaluation	200 (20%)	300 (30%)	350 (35%)
III	Research, Consultancy and Extension	250 (25%)	150 (15%)	150 (15%)
IV	Infrastructure and Learning Resources	100 (10%)	100 (10%)	100 (10%)
V	Student Support and Progression	100 (10%)	100 (10%)	100 (10%)
VI	Governance and Leadership	100 (10%)	100 (10%)	100 (10%)
VII	Innovative Practices	100 (10%)	100 (10%)	100 (10%)
	Total Score	1000	1000	1000

Source: NAAC (2012c). *Weightages*

Table 5: Criteria & Key Aspects: Weights

	Key Aspects	University	Autonomous College	Affiliated/ Constituent College
		Weight		
1. Curricular Aspects	1.1 Curricular design and development	50	50	20
	1.2 Academic flexibility	50	50	30
	1.3 Curriculum enrichment	30	30	30
	1.4 Feedback system	20	20	20
	Total	150	150	100
2. Teaching-learning and Evaluation	2.1 Student Enrolment and Profile	10	30	30
	2.2 Catering to Diverse Needs of Students	20	40	50
	2.3 Teaching-Learning Process	50	100	100
	2.4 Teacher Quality	50	60	80
	2.5 Evaluation Process and Reforms	40	30	50
	2.6 Student Performance and Learning Outcomes	30	40	40
	Total	200	300	350
3. Research, Consultancy and Extension	3.1 Promotion of research	20	20	20
	3.2 Resource Mobilization for Research	20	20	10
	3.3 Research Facilities	30	20	10
	3.4 Research Publications and Awards,	100	20	20
	3.5 Consultancy	20	10	10
	3.6 Extension Activities and Institutional Social Responsibility	40	50	60
	3.7 Collaboration	20	10	20
	Total	250	150	150

	Key Aspects	University	Autonomous College	Affiliated/ Constituent College
		Weight		
4. Infrastructure and Learning Resources	4.1 Physical facilities	30	30	30
	4.2 Library as a learning resource	20	20	20
	4.3 Infrastructure	30	30	30
	4.4 Maintenance of Campus Facilities	20	20	20
	Total	100	100	100
5. Student support and progression	5.1 Student Mentoring and Support	40	40	50
	5.2 Student Progression	40	40	30
	5.3 Student Participation and Activities	20	20	20
	Total	100	100	100
6. Governance and Leadership	6.1 Institutional vision and leadership	10	10	10
	6.2 Strategy Development and Deployment	10	10	10
	6.3 Faculty Empowerment Strategies	30	30	30
	6.4 Financial Management and Resource Mobilization	20	20	20
	6.5 Internal Quality Assurance System	30	30	30
	Total	100	100	100

	Key Aspects	University	Autonomous College	Affiliated/ Constituent College
		Weight		
7. Innovations and Best	7.1 Environment Consciousness	30	30	30
	7.2 Innovations	30	30	30
	7.3 Best Practices	40	40	40
	Total	100	100	100
	TOTAL SCORE	1000	1000	1000

Source: NAAC (2012d). *Key aspects and weightages*

Table 6: NAAC: Grading system

Cumulative Grade Point Average (Range)	Letter Grade	Performance Descriptor	Interpretation of the Descriptor
3.01 – 4.00	A	Very Good (Accredited)	High level of academic accomplishment as expected of an institution.
2.01 – 3.00	B	Good (Accredited)	Level of academic accomplishment above the minimum level expected of an institution.
1.51 – 2.00	C	Satisfactory (Accredited)	Minimum level of academic accomplishment expected of an institution.
≤ 1.50	D	Unsatisfactory (Not Accredited)	Level of academic accomplishment below the minimum level of expected of an institution.

Source: NAAC (2007). *New Methodology of Assessment & Accreditation* p. 11

Table 7: NAAC: Assessment & Accreditation Fee

Institutional Eligibility for Quality Assessment (IEQA) Fees	
INR 2,000.00 (Indian Rupees two thousand only)	
1. For universities:	
Up to four departments	INR 100,000.00
More than four but up to ten departments	INR 100,000.00 + INR 15,000.00 for each additional department
More than ten departments	INR 190,000.00 + INR 10,000.00 for each additional department
	The accreditation fee will be limited to a maximum amount of Rs. 500,000.00 per institution
2. For general colleges	
a. College with multi faculties, i.e. Arts and Science (Commerce will be treated as a part of the Arts)	INR 75,000.00
b. College with mono faculty viz. Arts/ Commerce/ Science/ Law or any other	INR 50,000.00
3. Teacher Education/ Physical Education Institutions and Departments	
a. Teacher Education Institutions/ Physical Education Institutions	INR 50,000.00
b. Teacher Education Department of General Colleges conducting Teacher Education/ Physical Education Programme(s)	INR 25,000.00
c. University teaching departments of Teacher Education/ Physical Education Departments	INR 25,000.00

4. Professional institutions
Fee structure for professional institutions will be determined by NAAC from time to time. At present, Engineering and Technology, Management, Pharmacy, Medical and Allied Institutions (Allopathy, Homeopathy, Ayurveda, Dental, Nursing, etc.,) are charged fees as per fee structure applicable to universities as given in Sl. No. 1 above.
Fees for other specialized institutions will be determined by NAAC from time to time.

Note:

The institutions which are recognized under 2(f) and 12(B) of the UGC Act, 1956, need not pay the assessment and accreditation fees. The expenses on TA/DA of peer team would be reimbursed. For more details refer “Revised UGC guidelines for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions.”

For institutions applying for re-assessment:

In case of the institutions applying for re-assessment irrespective of their 2f and 12B status, the institutions have to bear the Accreditation fee, TA/DA and also the local hospitality expenses. NAAC will reimburse the honorarium paid to the peer team members as per NAAC guidelines.

Source: NAAC, 2010. *Revised A&A fee structure for institutions*. Retrieved 30.06.2011 from [http://www.naac.gov.in/\(IEQA\)%20Fees.pdf](http://www.naac.gov.in/(IEQA)%20Fees.pdf)

Table 8: Danish QA system: Criteria

Criteria Column I: The labour market's demand for the study programme

- Criterion 1: Demand for the study programme

Criteria Column II: Research-based study programme

- Criterion 2: The study programme is research-based and is associated with an active, high-quality research environment

Criteria Column III: Academic profile and level of the study programme as well as internal quality assurance

- Criterion 3: Academic profile of the study programme and learning outcome targets
- Criterion 4: Structure and organisation of the study programme
- Criterion 5: Continuous internal quality assurance of the study programme

Annexure III

Interview Guide

- 1) In your opinion, what constitutes (a) assessment, (b) accreditation for Indian higher education institutions

Supplementary questions:

- a. What should be the objective of A&A?
 - b. Why should we have A&A?
- 2) Generally speaking, how does the role and activities of NAAC affect decisions of stakeholder, namely, (a) parents, (b) students and (c) employers?

Supplementary questions:

- a. Is the NAAC report a public document?
 - b. Do parents have access to the NAAC report?
 - c. Do parents/students rely upon the NAAC report while seeking admission to the institution?
 - d. Do employers rely upon the NAAC report when they seek to recruit?
- 3) In your opinion, what are the incentives of accreditation to your institution?

Supplementary questions:

- a. Does it assist in accessing and acquiring financial resources - either through public or private funding?
 - b. Private funding would imply funding from industries, etc. for research or expert opinion.
 - c. Does it enhance the reputation of the institution?
- 4) From the perspective of your (a) position and (b) institution, how has the current assessment & accreditation system used in India improve your institution?

Supplementary questions:

- a. What steps have been taken to meet the requirements of NAAC in terms of best practices?
 - b. How has it helped the institution – directly/indirectly?
 - c. How do vice chancellors of different HEIs look at the process of accreditation?
- 5) What improvements can be incorporated in the A&A process followed by NAAC?

Supplementary questions:

- a. Should it be made mandatory?

- b. Should the report be made public and easily available over the internet?
 - c. Should student participation in the A&A be encouraged, i.e. should they be made part of the Peer Team?
- 6) What linkages can be established between A&A grades and HEIs? (Optional: Not included as a key question but rather a follow-up question during the interview)