

INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE CELL (IQAC) IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE

Zahid Azeem*

Prof. Naheed Zahoor**

Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to conceptualize the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) and its need and significance for assessment of quality at higher education institutions. Quality in higher education is an essential issue for universities and colleges. Many institutions were formed in this direction and IQAC is one of these institutions. However, IQAC assesses the quality issues and resolves them internally, from inside the institution. IQAC could be differentiated from its previous institutions because of its wider role, the structure of the cell, a way of working and also by the involvement of stakeholders. It is considered that the formation of the IQAC has improved the quality of higher education. Scholarly community has various opinions regarding the need and significance of IQAC and problems it faces while working. This paper studies the structure and working of IQAC and examines the essentiality and acuteness of it; while also considering various hurdles and criticism it faces. This inquiry comes into the purview of quantitative study as it is primarily based on primary papers related to IQAC and various opinions of scholars regarding its requirement and importance. This brief nature of this inquest gives a simplified understanding of the IQAC cell's structure; working; its necessity and magnitude. This study could further assist in research in the area.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Assessment, Accreditation, Higher education, Need and Significance.

* **Research Scholar ,Department of T.T. & N.F.E. (IASE) ,Faculty of Education, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi**

** **Professor,Department of T.T. & N.F.E. (IASE) ,Faculty of Education, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi**

Introduction

Education is one of the foundations of society. Education contributes to the attitudes, skills and capabilities of the individual. Where education is necessary for society, higher education also plays a very significant role. Higher education is necessary as it, on first hand, furthers the existing knowledge; alongside, it induces critical thinking skills, provides practical benefits of the previous education, develops a personality, builds an information-based society and also provides for specialisation of discipline and pursuing a career in that. The essential purpose of higher education is to educate, encourage research, train and serve the society. As higher education is gaining prominence, quality in higher education is immensely vital.

The internal quality assurance emerged in the western world as a business methodology during the 1950s as quality is a vigorous element of any successful business. IQA (Internal Quality Assessment) is the process by which organisations or institutions examine their working internally, and the quality standards are maintained and enhanced. However, there is no universal definition of quality and its assessment as they are relative. Specialists of this area have defined the term quality in various ways, and they also vary in the use of methods for quality assessment and enhancement. It was introduced into the higher education in the western world (Preira, Lutz, & Heerens, 2001) initially, due to the increased quest of society, especially student community, for good quality higher education. It was later adopted by other nations gradually.

Setting up of Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) by National Action Plan of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is one step towards ensuring quality higher education (Hegde, 2007). Dr Prasad and Dr Stella Antony in their article “Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions: Indian experience” and Dr Raval in his article “Quality Sustenance and Enhancement in NAAC Accredited Institution” has stressed upon the importance of the quality higher education and also on the need to work extensively for its achievement.

The establishment of IQAC and continuous self-evaluation in intervals is mandatory in all the higher education institutions, which receive funding and planning to receive fund from NAAC, as a part of seven criteria put forth by NAAC to raise the capabilities and quality of higher education institutions from inside (Hegde, 2007). The self-assessment or internal quality checks are crucial to attaining response and any assistance from NAAC. To ensure the proper working

of the IQACs, NAAC has adopted a proficient and efficacious monitoring system (Mangnale & Potluri, 2011) which would monitor the working of IQAC thoroughly.

IQAC provides the institutions with an opportunity of self-assessment and helps to enhance their capabilities and reduce their flaws as institutions (Pawar & Solanke, 2015). It internally monitors over the educational institution providing higher education and upgrades the areas where changes are needed such as learning, research, evaluation process, curriculum, infrastructure, development and consultancy (Mangnale & Potluri, 2011). This study gains its importance from the previous debates vis a vis note worthy requisite of IQAC and the hurdles it comes across, autonomy being the prominent issue. This paper is descriptive in the sense that it attempts to explain the need and significance of the IQA cell, considering the primary data about the cell and various opinions offered regarding it.

Creation of IQAC and its Objectives:

Quality assurance was the outcome of the quest to improve the quality of education and to strategise checks and balances for the improvement of quality; this led to the emergence of IQAC, which was established by NAAC, an autonomous body of University Grants Commission (UGC-GUIDELINES). A series of events preceded the formation of IQAC; the process began when the central government and the human resource development ministry of India planned for the Higher Education reform Bill and successfully introduced it in 2010 as NCHER bill which aimed complete remodelling of higher education in India (Mangnale & Potluri, 2011). It was All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) which first initiated the accreditation cell by establishing the 'National Board of Accreditation.' The internal quality assessment and accreditation was first introduced in higher education in the 1990s (Nitonde, 2016). The task was assigned to NAAC to initiate the internal assessment and also it was assigned with the task of auditing (Nitonde, 2016) the educational institutions. Setting up of internal assessment cell was initially a voluntary act (Nitonde, 2016) of educational institutions but was made mandatory in 2015.

The main duty of the internal assessment cell is to improve and develop an institutional system, which would be consistent, dependable, cognizant and a kind of catalytic accreditation unit, for enhancing the administrative and academic progression of, especially of, institutions of higher

learning (Hegde, 2007). IQAC also aims at the institutionalization of quality enhancement process and also to internalise the quality assessment and enrichment.

Structure and Working of IQAC:

It is mandatory to setup IQAC in higher education institutions. Besides setting up an IQAC it is also mandatory for every institution, opting for 2nd and subsequent cycles of accreditation and assessment, to upload decisions and minute details of IQAC meeting to the institutional website(NAAC-Guidelines(Accredited-institutions), 2013). It is also compulsory to submit AQA reports in regular intervals; also upload it to the institutional websites so that it would be accessible to both learners and different stakeholders.

IQAC is formed under the chairpersonship of the head of the concerned institution. The heads of few important academic and administrative branches along with teachers and few other revered academicians or few local representatives became part it; the composition of IQAC may be listed as below:

- Chairperson (as head of the cell)
- Senior administrative officers
- 3 to 8 teachers
- 1 or 2 members from management
- 1 or 2 members from local committees.
- One of the distinguished teachers is selected as IQAC's coordinator.(NAAC-Guidelines(Accredited-institutions), 2013)

But the composition of the IQAC is not static; it depends upon the difficulty and size of the institution. Several precautions are taken before selecting the members to the cell; especially members with distinguished knowledge in various disciplines who have received eminence in their research and instruction are preferred; the members should be obliged to the enhancement of teaching and learning environment while being aware of institutional veracities(NAAC-Guidelines(Accredited-institutions), 2013).The appointment of the senior administrators and management representatives of the cell from among the experienced individuals having expertise in computer science, such members must be in service. Other members are drawn from

departments like a library, administrative department, planning and development and examination.

Along with this few members are selected having expertise in student welfare activities and in managing other developmental schemes. Such a broad-based selection would enhance the working of the assessment cell. The administrators and the representatives from the management should be committed to the augmentation of the quality of the institution. The high standing members who had made significant contributions to the society,(Mangnale & Potluri, 2011) especially to the education sector should be selected as representations to the cell from the local committee.

Besides these members, one among the senior and competent permanentfunctionary teachersis appointed as a coordinator. The position of a coordinator in IQAC is vital as this ensures the active working of all the members of the committee; while appointing the coordinator, it is necessary that the coordinator has the comprehensive acquaintance of data management, computers and other functions required for the post of coordinator such as effective communication. For the accurate working of the IQAC and all the cell members, the administration provides the secretarial support(NAAC-guidelines(Autonomous-institutions), 2018).

Working of IQAC

The guiding principles and parameters determined by NAAC define the working of IQAC and are also regulators of it. IQAC works for the application of parameters formed by the cell while also publishing the information regarding the parameters. To spread the information regarding quality enhancement in higher education, IQAC organises seminars and workshops regarding the importance of quality and quality circles. It also documents the programmes and activities designed for quality advancement. Other than documenting, IQAC works for the development of various programmes and activities of administration and academics that are dedicated to quality up-gradation. It acts as a nodal organisation among the institutions working for the quality improvement of higher education. IQAC creates awareness among the stakeholders regarding the policies that are being adopted or the strategies that are being followed to enhance the quality of

higher education. To accomplish this, the IQAC first will have to lay out the mechanisms and procedures for the collection of data and necessary information on several aspects of the institutional working(Mangnale & Potluri, 2011).It prepares strategies and formats to collect data and information required to assess the quality of higher education in an institution(Pawar & Solanke, 2015).

Another important task that IQAC is assigned of is to prepare a report “Annual Quality Assurance Report” (AQAR) and to submit it to NAAC; the report is a kind of self-evaluated progress report of the Cell’s working which is submitted annually(Mangnale & Potluri, 2011). The report consists of the results the cell has achieved so far, solved issues that were previously identified as obstacles in quality progress, contributions of the cell towards quality education, activities and plans of the cell that were used for quality development(Mangnale & Potluri, 2011).

The submission of the annual report to the NAAC is compulsory as without it the institution cannot apply for accreditation and assessment cycle. NAAC’s executive council has made it mandatory for the institutions to submit the AQAR report to seek the 2nd and subsequent A&A cycles from 16th September of 2016(NAAC-guidelines(Autonomous-institutions), 2018).It is also required for all the higher education institutions in India, seeking assistance from NAAC, to setup an internal assessment.

Besides the systematic working of the cell, few other factors contribute to the successful working of the cell such as- commitment to the improved quality education, rather than merely focusing on institutional issues; balancing between the health and growth of the institution;guaranteeing efficiency of high standards; ensuringdecentralisation of power and authority; and active involvement of every member of the cell and institution” (Pawar & Solanke, 2015).The success of IQAC is dependent on the active participation of members and their integrity with it. By becoming integral constituent, of the IQAC system, members can inculcate, from the system, necessary constituents and mechanism of the institution. IQAC besides assisting institutions to assess themselves; plan for the quality enhancement while monitoring over them also benefit the

patrons or stakeholders of IQAC with the “cross-sectional participation” in the quality assessment and enrichment of the institution(Mangnale & Potluri, 2011).

Need and Significance

IQAC was immensely requisite for the improvement of the quality of higher education through internal assessment, which is the main purpose of its formation. The significance and need of quality enhancement were rightly put by Mangnale and Potluru as “Quality does not apply only to the product or service itself; it also applies to the people, processes and the organizational environment associated with it”(Mangnale & Potluri, 2011). Along with quality improvement, IQA cell focuses on achieving clarity regarding the functions of the institutions and its activities to enhance educational quality; while working on the functional activities, it also works on internalization,i.e.sink in the quality culture into the institution. There were many hierarchical structures established in the higher education institutions to keep note of the activities of institution in the promotion of higher education but these couldn't help the purpose, which led to the need of an institution which would monitor the educational institute's activities, keep record of its activities, develop the institute's capacity to improve the quality of higher education and various other activities required for the development of quality higher education. Keeping in view all the requirements for quality higher education, the establishment of IQAC as a potential vehicle was indispensable.

Besides the primary devotions, IQAC was required for many other causes.

Before discussing the various other needs and significances of IQAC, it can be broadly put that it is required and is significant at 3 levels; institutional and administrative level, teaching-learning level and the societal level. IQAC pinpoints inadequacies in the institution's functioning, its policy procedures, services and activities devoted to the advancement of education while also introducing newer strategies and approaches to fixing the discrepancies,i.e.(Mangnale & Potluri, 2011)IQAC facilitates for the initiation, planning and supervision in the broader terms. Assurance of timely, effectual and advanced management of academic activities, administrative tasks and finances can be reached by IQAC. It can also pursue wider roles like checking the relevance of research and academic initiatives, also the integrity of examination and evaluation process; ensuring that the various academic programmes are equally are in reach and

affordability of the all the sections of the population;(Nitonde, 2016) assimilation and development of various contemporary techniques and approaches to learning and teaching(D.G.Sawant, 2016); maintain standards of teaching evaluation and learning(D.G.Sawant, 2016); guaranteeing sufficiency of services and arrangements for support while also securing their functioning and maintenance; and also stimulating the co-curricular and extra-curricular events in the institution(Mangnale & Potluri, 2011). One of the main mechanisms of IQAC which makes it distinct requirement than the others is its feedback mechanism, regarding its working; it welcomes the feedback (IIEP, 2016) in the form of grievances and suggestions.

Collaboration with the other higher education institutions is promoted by IQAC via promotion of the inter-institutional co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. IQAC signifies its establishment by incorporating various new roles other than its former hierarchical structures. It can be considered an institution that has the potential to pursue larger and wider roles that enhances its significance and necessity for society at large (IIEP, 2016). Institutionalizing the various practices that bore good results and integrating the different academic activities of the institution mostly depends on the IQA cell of the institution (Pawar & Solanke, 2015). One of the important aspects of any institute's function is the decision making, and IQAC provides a base for this process, and its role in the decision-making process ensures requisite outcomes and progresses institutional working(Mangnale & Potluri, 2011); correspondingly acts as a channel for superior in-house communication. The promising nature of the IQAC encourages it to act as a proxy for change in the educational institute by uninterruptedly administering academic and administrative activities. The pupil of the academic institution which consists of IQAC, are prepared according to the labour market needs (IIEP, 2016). Employment opportunities are considered as a goal while assessing the quality of education; planning and promoting the structures and curriculum; organizing academic programmes and activities; also while adopting modern techniques and methods. In short, it improves the relevance of education in society. It also promotes the global competency, fosters value system and also inculcates zeal to learn and excel among the students of the institution; while also promoting the zeal to teach among the teachers.

Conclusion

The prominence of IQAC is determined by its stakeholders; administrative staff, teachers and students. Other than these, there are other factors that influence its working; the degree of autonomy, corruption and favouritism and hierarchical issues. After the rigorous examination of the structure and working of IQAC and also considering various views on IQAC, it could be considered that the critical requirement and prominence of the IQAC sustain its role in the process of quality assessment and accreditation. It also is a potential institution whose roles and the working area can be widened. IQAC could contribute to the sharing and networking of research with the education institutions other than India considering its functional range and ability (Mangnale & Potluri, 2011). While inquiring it was found that the IQAC not being autonomous is a difficulty in its working especially when it comes to the speedy working and the use of resources. However it is a matter of research that “is autonomy the actual and only difficulty or is there any other working hurdle that needs to be addressed for efficient working of the cell” and the other problem which could be raised is that “would granting autonomy solve all the working issues and make the cell effective”. To conclude, for now, IQAC, even after encountering difficulties, is a significant unit in the process of internal assessment and accreditation.

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