# ASSESSORS' HANDBOOK

National Assessment and Accreditation Council
Bangalore, India

Commonwealth of Learning
Vancouver, Canada

## Assessors' Handbook


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# FOREWORD

Global efforts to provide quality assurance in higher education has been vibrant. Quality *gurus* have exercised their minds to generate helpful ideas; academics have devised methods and models to monitor processes, and Quality Assurance Agencies have implemented these processes leading to quality assurance. However, in the external peer assessment of HEIs in particular, ideas and processes cannot ensure success without the human agents (ëAssessorsí), who with her or his skills of execution, can effectively translate the ideas and processes, to yield dependable results. The success or failure of an assessment exercise therefore largely depends on the performance or otherwise of the Assessors. Since most Quality Assurance Agencies world wide, depend on a wide spectrum of personnel drawn as Assessors (=Auditors) for the purposes of Quality assessment of educational institutions, there is a need for defining the roles, responsibilities and skills to be acquired by them, before undertaking the task of Quality Assessment.

This *Assessors' Handbook* documents the functional requirements of Assessors, before they undertake the task of quality assessment activities, and has two marked features:

(i) its universal outlook and application; and (ii) its NAAC-specific base of illustrations. The first of these underlies the attempt made here to arrive at what one may call ìAssessment Universalsî, i.e. the good practices commonly followed by most QAAs, to discern and shape the ideal role of the Assessor and to equip her or him with skills and qualities necessary to professionalize the task. The second feature provides the ground for authenticating shared experiences from the perspective of NAAC, which generalize the practices commonly adopted.

The module has four chapters. The first is an introduction that facilitates the reader to understand its objectives, scope and use. The second reviews the features and processes of institutional assessment and accreditation, and it provides a global overview of the assessment models and methods. The third deals with the criteria often adopted for empanelling assessors on a Peer Team; sets forth the principles of effective assessment; describes the skills indispensable to an assessor; and proposes a Code of Conduct to govern her or his performance with credibility. The highlight of the module is the attempt to fine-tune what are described as *Tangible Skills*, viz. skills necessary to note down contributive observations for producing the end-document, the Assessment Report (Peer Team Report); and *Intangible Skills*, those necessary to discern, observe and interact meaningfully and effectively through the conduct of the assessment visit. Team skills also form part of these. The last chapter discusses the structure and content of the Peer Team Report (PTR). The emphasis laid on rigorous content validation and the refinement of verbal skills necessary for writing a coherent and cohesive report to make it more authentic and acceptable to stakeholders is a unique contribution of the module.

The book has made good use of materials available in the academic world, and in business writing. Nuances of writing different kinds of reports as well as those of the management of teams with effective listening, and team maintenance found elsewhere are incorporated in the present text. Particular debt to insights gained into the art of verbal communication, in both speech and writing, found in modern concepts (Communicative Language, Discourse Grammar, etc.) is acknowledged.

I thank all those who have made this module possible: the COL for its motivation and support, and the authors Rev.Francis Soundararaj, Prof.Katre Shakuntala (Senior Academic Consultant, NAAC) and Dr.K.Rama (Deputy Advisor, NAAC) for their invaluable contribution in its preparation.

I believe that the initiative of NAAC in the publication of this module will be useful to all QAAs, to realise assessor-specific quality enhancement in their efforts for quality assurance of HEIs.

**Prof. V.S. Prasad**

Director, NAAC

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# 1. Introduction

Guided by the universal idea that ***"Quality is the essence and essential element of Higher Education"***, emphasis has been laid on it in the assessment of the Higher Education Institutions. They are assessed in order to recognize the quality of educational practices and their performance. While the outcomes of institutional assessment are many, ultimately all are expected to lead to a sustained effort, primarily to improve the quality of teaching - learning.

Assessment and evaluation of an institution is intended to be a means to document its educational quality and institutional effectiveness. Fostering institutional improvement and demonstrating its accountability are complementary processes that assure the quality of an institution. The validity of such an assurance depends on many dimensions of assessment. Without a clear sense of the purpose of assessment, knowledge of what is to be assessed, and an understanding of how the results of assessment would be used, assessment efforts may often become an end initself. If the results of an assessment are not useful thereafter for planning and arriving at reflective decisions, accredited colleges and universities would only be data-rich and response-poor institutions.

While a number of Quality Assurance Agencies (QAAs) have been addressing issues related to institutional assessment differently, the following general expectations of the process are implied in their efforts:

- Assessment and Accreditation processes should not be too ***"academic"***; they shall involve all stakeholders, in particular the students and employers. At the National level, they should also include universally relevant components, to ensure harmony of international practices and to achieve a reasonable degree of parity on an international scale.
- The Quality assurance and assessment methodology is expected to be ***"outcome oriented",*** with an emphasis on evaluation from the perspective of potential employers.
- The autonomy of Assessment and Accreditation (A&A) agencies is generally assumed.
- Assessment is expected to be holistic, inclusive of its social and psychological dimensions.

While many of the QAAs have considered these aspects while devising their A & A frameworks, some are still in the evolutionary stage. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has initiated the process and practice of A&A of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in India in the last decade. During this period, the instruments adopted for A&A by NAAC have also undergone and are undergoing, substantial, need-based and experience-led fine tuning, a process which most QAAs have found it necessary to adopt.

This Assessorsí handbook is essentially meant to be a generic module for the readership of individuals interested in quality assurance in higher education and Assessors involved in the Assessment and Accreditation of HEIs. Since NAAC is the apex QAA established by UGC to ensure quality of Higher Education in India, wherever necessary, specific examples from and references to the NAAC processes have been drawn.

## 1.1. Objectives of the module

After reading this module and completing the reflective and application exercises suggested at the end of each chapter, the reader will be able to :

- Explain the importance of the process of Assessment and Accreditation
- Describe the variations in the approaches of different QAAs to the process of Assessment and Accreditation
- List the roles and responsibilities of an assessor/auditor
- Discuss role of the host institution and other stakeholders in the assessment exercise
- Explain the techniques for effective and objective assessment
- Describe the process of institutional assessment and accreditation
- Speak knowledgeably about the goals and objectives of the process of institutional assessment and accreditation
- Work in a team by understanding the group dynamics
- Play the role of an assessor effectively and complete the process of assessment, with least faulting
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of the institution, in order to prepare a checklist for verification
- Make an objective assessment of the institutional quality, arrive at an objective judgment and write a corroborating assessment report
- Participate in an effective assessment exercise of a QAA
- Communicate effectively by writing useful reports
- Demonstrate the competencies required for making a fair and unbiased judgment of the quality

## 1.2. Coverage of the module

This module addresses the following aspects:

- Principles to be adopted for External/Third-party assessment
- Structure and composition of a Peer Team
- Roles, responsibilities and professional ethics required of assessors/auditors
- Skills and competencies to be acquired by assessors/auditors

## 1.3. User Profiles

The user profiles are diverse and may include those providing Higher Education, funding agencies, stakeholders and others interested in knowing the processes adopted to assess quality in HEIs. It is likely that one of these is your own profile. This handbook will guide you to perform your tasks as an assessor , with ease and confidence. A few sample user profiles are detailed below:

1. Dr. Shaji, a Professor of Zoology, at a relatively new university located in a semi-urban area, is interested to be an assessor of HEIs. His exposure to the processes of assessment is limited to a one-day workshop organized for prospective assessors in the region. He wants to know more about all that is required of him to be a credible assessor.
2. Dr. Dixit, Director of Collegiate Education of a State wants to encourage the colleges under his jurisdiction to volunteer for NAAC assessment. He is planning to organize a two-day workshop on assessment in general, train the faculty in self-assessment and thereafter, prepare the Self Study Report (SSR) of the HEI.
3. Professor Swaminathan, Principal of a College, needs inputs for an in-depth orientation to the faculty of his college, on nuances of self-assessment, particularly related to the institutional grading and organization of team interactions, as the preparation of their SSR is underway and the document has to be submitted to the QAA shortly.
4. The staff at a QAA is deeply disturbed over the widespread dissatisfaction regarding the grading among four high-profile institutions. Before the institutions go on appeal, the Director of the QAA wants to review the process of assessment and the roles and responsibilities of the assessors. She/He was never on a Peer Team.

## 1.4. A note on the usage of the module

A linear reading is recommended. You may find the reflective and application exercises useful to:

- understand the nuances of external /third party quality audits
- relate experiences to those of your own institution i.e. internal/first/second party quality audit
- acquire knowledge and skills required of an assessor (internal /external to the institution).
- fine-tune your perception of quality from the perspective of a QAA

As the performance of assessors determines the course of development of HEIs towards excellence, a close reading of the handbook can help you to have a clear idea of the concepts and processes of institutional assessment and of the skills and competencies required of an assessor. You may use this module for self-learning or as a training material for orienting institutional staff members and managements. It is advocated that you also share this document with all those who are concerned with quality of higher education.

This document would be invaluable as a forerunner to the institutional assessment and accreditation process document of any QAA. In order to use this document effectively, readers are advised to also read the NAAC publication entitled ì Quality in Higher Education: An Introductionî.

*Note: Certain terminologies are interchangeably used in this document for example assessor/auditor, assessment/audit, self-study report/institutional information, Peer Team/visiting team/audit team and other similar terms like committees/teams.*

# 2. Quality Assurance, Assessment and Accreditation

Assessment and accreditation essentially aims at institutional capacity building for continuous quality improvement through self-analysis and self-monitoring of quality enhancement processes. The need for quality assurance arises from the following:

- Assessment and Accreditation provides an incentive for self- study and self-improvement.
- It reassures external stakeholders such as employers, professional bodies and the general public, about the legitimate quality of the assessed and accredited higher education institution, as well as the relative quality status of the institution as compared to other similar institutions.
- Third party assessment and accreditation and the resultant certification, vouch for the competence of the institution assessed, to provide education of a high standard.
- It enables course/credit transfers, among/within accredited institutions.
- Assessment and accreditation would enhance the responsiveness of communities of learners.
- Accreditation would ensure that institutions prepare the graduates for citizenship responsibilities, successful careers, acquisition of life skills and for life-long learning.
- On the whole, it would help institutions in capacity building.

## 2.1. Quality Assessment and Quality Assurance Agencies

Quality assurance is a conscious and planned approach to improvement, and quality assessment is a tool for quality facilitation. Overall quality assurance, whether internal or external, capitalizes on existing internal quality and adds value to the processes leading to its continuous improvement.

Accepting the above definition and purposes of quality assessment and quality assurance, we shall look at some quality assessment practices of the QAAs. The status and governance of the QAAs vary from country to country and therefore, there is a large variation

### Quality

- Is about creating a culture
- Is embedded in the mission and strategic focus areas of the institution
- Has strong support from institutional leadership and management
- Is located at and supported by learning laboratories
- Involves the institution as a whole
- Requires a focus on both quality enhancement and quality assurance
- Has an international orientation
- Is stakeholder related
- Uses external quality expertise

in the assessment and accreditation processes. In the US, for example, external quality assessment is achieved by regional, national and specialized accreditation agencies. While the six regional and the four national accreditation agencies undertake institutional accreditation, the sixty-odd specialised accreditation agencies undertake program accreditation.

The European QAAs initially started with subject accreditation and are now shifting towards institutional accreditation. The Australian model (AUQA) is somewhat like the ISO model as it reviews the delivery of quality services and the ability of the institution to sustain and enhance the same. In case of India, NAAC has adopted the institutional assessment model, in view of the similarity in the functional structures of majority of the HEIs. Further, it fits into the philosophy of NAAC that institution-level and programme-level assessments are mutually complementary to each other and not alternatives. Thus, quality assessment and accreditation can be either at the programme level or at the institution level depending on the context in which it is performed. Underlying the both is the concern for sustaining quality to satisfy stakeholders.

Depending on the sectors they are serving, the quality assessment practices of the QAAs across the globe have subtle variations. While the institutional model is more appreciable to the Indian context, programme accreditation is more acceptable to the European context where funding / allocation of resources is based on assessment outcomes. However, there is one notable similarity in the processes adopted by the QAAs across sectors as well as nations i.e. assessment by a team of external peers. The roles and responsibilities of the members of Peer Teams and the QAA staff and their involvement in the assessment and subsequent accreditation decisions however vary from QAA to QAA. Similarly, there is also a variation in procedures of disclosure of the assessment outcome.

## 2.2. Quality Assurance ñ Methods and Models

Before moving further, we shall look at the quality assurance processes and procedures adopted by some of the early initiators of the assessment system for a better understanding of the processes of assessment and accreditation and of the roles and responsibilities of assessors / Peer Teams. While the processes of A&A adopted by some of the established and recognized QAAs are described in brief in the table below, the NAAC model, as practiced in India, has been used as an example for detailing the processes and for the reflective/practice exercises in the sections that follow.

**Table: 1**

**A Global Overview of Assessment Models and Methods**

| Country & Quality Assurance Agency | Criteria of Assessment | Methodology | Outcome | Validity period and follow up actions |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| USA<br>CHEA, which accredits the accreditation agencies, and the accreditation agencies which assess and accredit the HEIs | Based on the standards/ criteria set by the accreditation agency, the Institution prepares a performance summary. | A group of external Experts/Peers appointed by the accreditation agency reviews the report submitted by the institution and requests for further information wherever necessary.<br>The Peer Team undertakes an 'Onsite' visit to the Institution for validating the claims made by the institution. | Based on the report of the Peer Team, the accreditation agency either confers or denies accreditation to the Institution. | There is an external review which takes place every few years to once in 10 years |
| UK<br>QAAHE | The QAAHE has set out guidelines on good practices and the principles that the institutions should satisfy. Based on these codes of practices the Institution prepares and submits the self-evaluation documents. | A group of Peers appointed by the accreditation agency reviews the self-evaluation documents prepared by the institution and requests for further information wherever necessary.<br>Institutional audit consists of a comprehensive scrutiny of the internal quality assurance mechanisms and validation of the claims made by the institution. The assessment process also involves interactions and involvement of all stakeholders. | The audit team gives its judgment either as "broad confidence", or "limited confidence" or "no confidence" | Institutional review takes place in a six-year cycle. Based on the judgment, however there may be reviews at shorter intervals as well. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Australia<br><br>AUQA | AUQA does not provide any specific criteria and as such every institution offering itself for accreditation has to evolve its own quality systems relevant to its specified objectives. The institution submits a portfolio, which is nothing but a documented self-review. | AUQA appoints a Peer Team which reviews the portfolio submitted by the institution.Peer Team undertakes a site visit and performs the external review. During this visit, the Team is also expected to consider how the institution meets the National Protocols of Higher Education Approval Processes. | The team reports on "Commendable practices" and "areas for improvement" | Based on the recommendations the institutions submit a progress report between 18-24 months of publication of the audit report. AUQA monitors and provides help as and when required. The subsequent audit may be anytime within a five-year period from the initial audit. |
| India<br><br>NAAC | Based on the seven criteria framework of NAAC, the institutions submit their self analysis in the format/ manual given by NAAC, termed as the Self-study Report (SSR). | A group of external Experts/Peers appointed by the NAAC reviews the report submitted by the institution and requests for further information wherever necessary.The Peer Team undertakes the 'Onsite' visit to the Institution for validating the claims made by the institution. | Based on the qualitative report of the Peer Team and the scores assigned to the individual criteria and the overall institutional score NAAC assigns a grade. | Institutional review takes place in a five-year cycle. The institutions are expected to submit annually a quality assurance report, through which NAAC monitors their performance. |

## 2.3. Features of Institutional Assessment and Accreditation

### 2.3.1. The Process

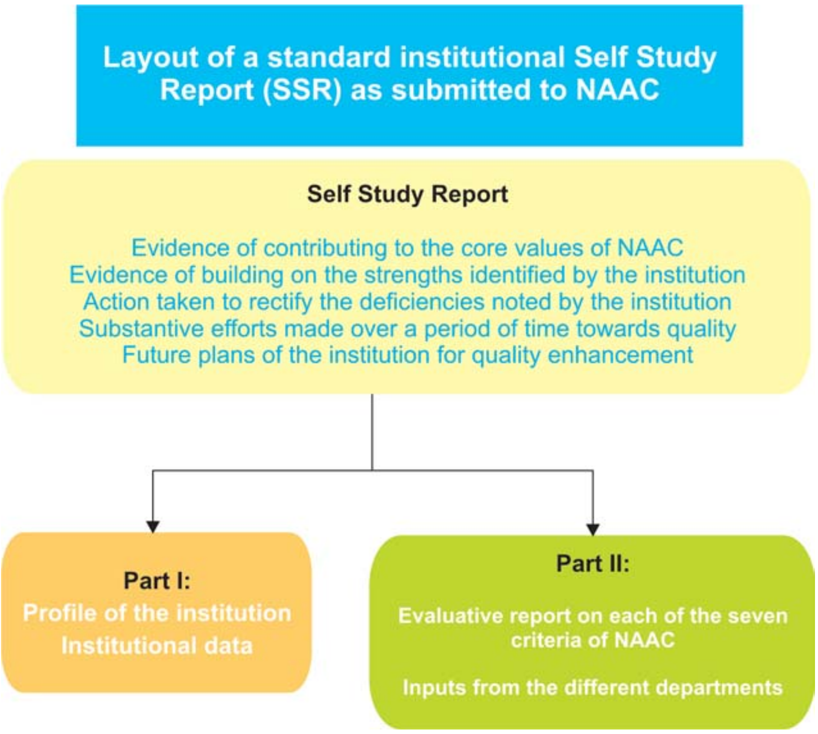
The scheme of assessment and accreditation as adopted by a QAA, is expected to help institutions to carry out their SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis which will enable them discern how to make their programmes more useful to both the students and their potential employers. On the whole, assessment and accreditation by QAAs is expected to act as an instrument to raise the quality of the educational provisions of the HEIs and to help them use their physical and instructional infrastructure optimally and professionally. As the whole process of assessment and accreditation revolves round the institutional processes, the primary role in the assessment and accreditation process lies with the individual institution itself.

Though there are various stages in the process of institutional assessment and accreditation, the process of **(a) self-assessment** and **(b) validation by external Peer Teams** are the two important common elements of the procedures adopted by the QAAs across the world.

***a) Self-assessment:*** The self-assessment process, which is the first step in assessment and accreditation, emphasizes on *'building for the future'* through a review of the institutional performance, based on an understanding of its existing strengths and weaknesses. While preparing for self-assessment, the institution needs to fulfill the following three essential requirements:

- ✓ The self-assessment process needs to be collaborative and participative. In this process the institution involves all its employees (academic and administrative), as well as students, parents, community representatives and other stakeholders.
- ✓ The process should be authentic in analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the institution. It is not an exercise, however efficient, in creating a document just to satisfy the visiting Peer Team.
- ✓ The process should be able to rejuvenate the institution and inculcate a passion amongst all concerned, for an effective understanding of its identity with reference to its claims for quality work and institutional excellence.

Based on the QAAs assessment framework, institutions desiring accreditation are required to fulfill certain threshold-level requirements and submit self-assessment report/institutional information prepared along the guidelines of the QAA. The institutional efforts to prepare its self-assessment report will be an intensive but self-rewarding exercise. Specific manuals/formats prescribed by the QAAs for the maintenance of uniformity in institutionsí self-assessment reports lay clear emphasis on a set framework, by reference to which the current level of quality of a HEI is expected to be appraised. The form of presentation and the data provided in these reports are crucial both to the institution and the QAA. Every QAA requires the institution to submit such institutional self-assessment information prior to the assessment processes. However the terms used for such documents vary. Incase of NAAC, it is termed as the Self-study Report. Thus, the term Self-study Report (SSR) used in this document is the product of the self-analysis processes the institution has gone through and it is the basic document for the assessment of the institution by the external Peer Team to be constituted by the QAA. The standard layout of an institutional SSR with reference to NAAC is illustrated in the figure given below:




b) **Validation by External Peers and Final Outcome:** On receipt of the SSR/institutional information, the QAA undertakes an ëin-houseí analysis of the report for its completeness and institutional eligibility. For the eligible institutions, Peer Team visits are organized. Depending on the size of the institution and the policy of the QAA, the institutional ëonsite visití varies from three to five days. The onsite visit will normally result in a detailed team report, highlighting the strengths and areas of concern of the institution. The draft report of the team will be shared with the institution to ensure accuracy of institutional data/information, either by the end of the onsite visit or a few days later depending on the policy of the QAA executing the exercise. On receipt of the consent of the institution it is processed by the QAA for institutional grading/rating and for the consequent disclosure of the report and the outcome to the public. Most QAAs upload these reports on their websites. The validity period of the assessment outcome varies from QAA to QAA. Incase of NAAC it is valid for a period of five years. Institutions that complete the valid accredited period may seek second cycle of accreditation or re-accreditation thereafter.

The five major phases and the steps involved in institutional assessment and accreditation by NAAC, are illustrated in the following figure:

**Five phases of Institutional Assessment and Accreditation by NAAC**

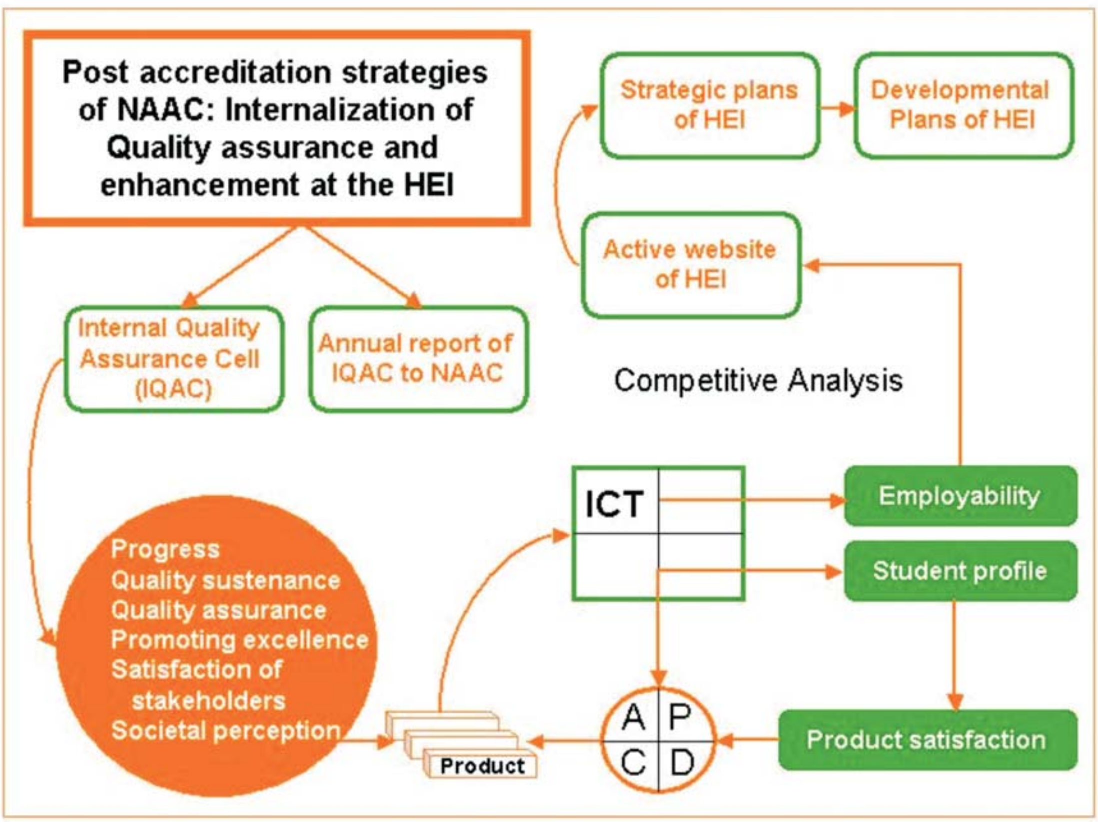
| Phase I: Institutional Intention | Phase 2: SSR of HEI | Phase 3: In house' analysis & processing by NAAC | Phase 4: Peer team visit and results of assessment | Phase 5: Accreditation Outcome |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Letter of intent (LOI) from the HEI to NAAC<br><br>Process the LOI for eligibility<br><br>Reply by NAAC to eligible institutions, with necessary manuals and documents, for facilitating preparation of Self-Study Report (SSR) by the HEI<br><br>Incubation time at the HEI: Preparation of SSR | Self-assessment by the institution and inclusion of the information/ data in the manuals provided by NAAC<br><br>Voluntary submission of SSR by HEI along with other required documents and processing fee<br><br>Acknowledgement by NAAC<br><br>Intimation to NAAC on the suitable time for visiting the institution | Process the SSR and other information submitted by the institution for completeness<br><br>Preparation of peer team document/ guidance document for the use of peers<br><br>Fixation of tentative visit schedule and intimation to HEI<br><br>Intimation to the HEI, of the financial implication of the visit for concurrence<br><br>Random selection of Peer Team Members through computerized database at NAAC<br><br>Intimation of the details to the HEI / Peer Team Members seeking 'no conflict of interest' from HEI and Peer Team Members<br><br>Networking by NAAC and mailing the materials to HEI and Peer Team Members<br><br>Finalization of dates of visits and related logistics | On site Peer Team visit to the HEI<br><br>Pre visit meeting of the Peer Team<br><br>Adherence to the visit schedule<br><br>Visit to all the sections of the HEI<br><br>Interactions with all the HEI stakeholders<br><br>Daily post-visit peer team discussion meetings<br><br>Gradual development and completion of the Peer Team Report<br><br>Addressing outstanding issues (if any) and sharing the report with the Institutional Head<br><br>Finalization of the Peer Team Report and confidential score sheet<br><br>Exit meeting handing over a copy the report to the HEI<br><br>Score sheet & report submitted to NAAC | Peer Team Report and Score sheet approved by NAAC<br><br>The validity period of the accreditation is 5 years<br><br>Accreditation outcome and institutional grade communicated to HEI<br><br>Accreditation outcome and institutional grade uploaded on NAAC website |

### 2.3.2. Provision for addressing Institutional Appeals

It is necessary for every QAA to address institutional grievances regarding the accreditation outcome communicated to them. The procedure for redressal and disposal of such appeals vary from QAA to QAA. For example NAAC has made a provision for an aggrieved institution to go on ëAppealí. For this purpose, the institution can make a written representation to the NAAC, within one month from the date of notification of the accreditation status by NAAC. A five-member external committee constituted for the purpose will consider the appeal .

### 2.3.3. Post-accreditation strategies

The procedures for Post-accreditation follow-up, monitoring and /or support, facilitating the institutional improvements vary from QAA to QAA. Most QAAs only provide suggestions and leave it to the institutions to adopt suitable action plans, which will result in quality sustenance and quality enhancement. The strategies adopted by NAAC, to motivate accredited institutions to enhance their quality are depicted in the following figure:



## 2.4. Summary

In this chapter the following important features of the processes of assessment have been discussed:

- It is a joint activity of the higher education institutions and the QAA.
- Assessment is based on an analytical framework for self-improvement.
- The Self-study Report or any other document of the institution would be a significant data source for an effective SWOT analysis.
- Assessment Report and Grading would reflect the level of performance of the HEI.
- Dissemination of Best Practices of the accredited HEI to other institutions would motivate not only emulations but also innovations.

## 2.5. Reflective Exercises

1. Reflect on whether or not the assessment and accreditation procedures, as made within the framework of a certain QAA, shows greater depth and sharper focus in sustaining and enhancing institutional quality. Write out your comments.
2. Differentiate between internal quality assurance and external quality assurance. How does each of them compliment the other in quality sustenance and quality enhancement initiatives?
3. Identify the stakeholders and say how they can contribute to the institutional development.
4. Study the quality continuum ensured by the process of assessment.

# 3. Executing the Assessment Effectively – The Role of an Assessor

The framework of every QAA envisages assessment of the institutional functioning with reference to its contribution to the identified/defined core values. In general, the higher education institute is expected to demonstrate how it has achieved these objectives through the data/information collected during the preparation of its SSR and other documents to be submitted to QAA for validation by external peers. The assessment by the QAA will normally take a holistic view of all the inputs, processes and outputs of an institution towards the realization of the core values and assess how the higher education institute has performed and progressed over a period of time and its potential for growth. In particular, the assessment would focus on the developments with reference to three aspects of quality - initiatives, enhancement and sustenance. These are mutually exclusive; developments in one area may influence the developments in the other two areas. Taking cognizance of the changes in the system, the QAAs often evolve their core values, which form the basis of the assessment of institutional functioning. For example NAAC has formulated five core values (Table 2), which form the value framework for assessment of higher education institutions in India. It is imperative that assessors understand the value framework of the QAA, to be able to execute the assessment effectively.

**Table 2**

**Value Framework for Assessment of Higher Education Institutions***

| | Core values | Suggested Parameters / Activities |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Contribution to National Development | ⇨ More access with equity<br>⇨ Developmental thrust in identification of research areas and academic programmes<br>⇨ Community engagement |
| 2. | Fostering Global Competencies among Students | ⇨ Development of generic skills<br>⇨ Development of application skills<br>⇨ Development of life skills |
| 3. | Inculcating Value System in Students | ⇨ Value integration in academic programmes<br>⇨ Value integration in management practices<br>⇨ Value inculcation through co-curricular and extra-curricular activities |
| 4. | Promoting the Use of Technology | ⇨ For enrichment of learning<br>⇨ For increasing the access-online programmes<br>⇨ For system management |
| 5. | Quest for Excellence | ⇨ Development of benchmarks of excellence<br>⇨ Application of Best Practices<br>⇨ Institutionalization of continuous improvement systems |

** The list is only illustrative. Institutions may identify many other parameters / activities depending on their context.*

## 3.1. The Peer Team Approach

Most QAAs have an internal assessment by the institution followed by an external assessment by the QAA. While the institutional members undertake the internal assessment, members external to the institution execute external assessment. Almost all QAAs have trained experts designated as assessors/ auditors/peers who are appointed by the QAAs for conducting external assessment on their behalf. The profiles of the experts vary from QAA to QAA. Some utilise the services of a mix of stakeholders, administrators and academicians, while others utilise purely subject specialists. In case of NAAC, it is the academicians/experts from the higher education system, who do the assessment. These experts called as assessors are either specifically trained for the purpose or are expected to have gained adequate experience while undergoing the process of assessment and accreditation of their own institution. As the assessors are essentially from educational institutions engaged in teaching-learning and/or educational administration, they are referred to as Peers and the team appointed for the purpose as Peer Team (PT).

Most of the European and a few Asia-Pacific Quality Assurance Agencies also use the peers for assessment of educational institutions. However they prefer the terms audit (Assessment), auditor (Expert) and auditee (HEI undergoing the process), or assessment (Audit), assessor (Expert) and assessee (HEI undergoing the process). These terms may be interchangeably used and NAAC has adopted the latter terminology for its assessment exercise.

### Assessors

External or Third party assessment and accreditation of an educational institution is accomplished by a QAA, through the nomination of ASSESSORS.

ASSESSORS may be

(1) Professionals specially trained for the purpose of undertaking the assignment as an exclusive vocation, on behalf of the QAA or

(2) Academicians (= Peers), selected, trained and deployed to undertake the assignment on behalf of the QAA.

All ASSESSORS essentially need to develop (a) Team Skills (b) Communication skills and (c) judgement skills (including report writing reflective of the judgement)

In this section, apart from the details of executing the assessment, we shall discuss the three significant attributes of a dependable assessor or Peer Team member viz. (1) The skills and competencies for achieving the objectives of the exercise and maintaining a balance. (2) Ability for making objective judgment and (3) Ability to write a good report, reflecting the assessment outcome / judgment. We would also discuss in detail the roles and responsibilities of the members towards the assessee institution as well as the QAA which they represent.

## 3.2. Criteria for Empanelling Assessors

QAAs across the globe with a few exceptions follow the practice of assessing institutions with the help of a team comprising of external peers. The team is normally constituted in consultation with the institution concerned soon after its SSR or institutional information is received by the QAA. Incase of NAAC the composition and the size of the team depends on the nature of the institution, the number of faculties and departments it has, and its geographic location. Each team has a membership that is national. Generally, the team is chosen from states other than that to which the institution belongs. They are experts and professionals chosen from the university systems and heads of accredited institutions. The Chairpersons are normally present or former Vice-chancellors.

Whether a two member or a larger team carries out the assessment, a Chairperson will be placed in overall charge of the Peer Team. When the NAAC is auditing a large institution or a University, the Chairperson of the team may assign specific departments/constituents of the institution to be assessed by specified members of the Peer Team. In case of small institutions or subject-specific units(Teacher education colleges) that are undergoing assessment and accreditation, no specific division of functions among the team members is required. In either situation, the whole group works as a team and is responsible for visiting all the functional units of the institution. Wherever necessary, the Chairperson or the NAAC staff, in consultation with the assessors and the concerned assessee institution, may make necessary change in assignments or schedule of visit.

Depending upon the circumstances, the team may include experts with specialized backgrounds, observers from industry and/or other employment sectors. Some of the QAAs for example AUQA, have an international expert on the team as observer. In some there is a member from the industry or other stakeholders as an observer on the team. NAAC for example has an observer from the industry or other user agencies, on its re-accreditation/ second cycle visits. Generally the observer is included on the team to cater to specific requirements.

## 3.3. Attributes of an Assessor

Quality assessment is a verification tool that enables the assessor to identify the strengths and weaknesses (existing and potential) and avenues for improvement in the institution under assessment. For an effective assessment the Assessors need to

- Commit full time and attention to the assessment process
- Provide expertise as and when required facilitating the smooth execution of the process
- Obtain and evaluate the objective evidence fairly and frankly

- Constantly and consistently evaluate the observations and interactions made by self and/or the team during the exercise
- Arrive at generally acceptable conclusions based on the observations and findings during the visit
- Remain true to the conclusions jointly arrived at and reach a consensus despite pressure to change or for fear or favour

In addition, the assessors have to work independently with little or no direction, communicate with people, probably whom they are meeting for the first time, and work in unfamiliar environment. All this may need to put in long and stressful working hours and thus may be physically and mentally tiring. To be successful in such diverse work environments, the following attributes are desirable of an assessor:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Diplomatic | Patience | Facile communication |
| Good Judgment | Self discipline | Freedom from bias |
| Industrious | Open mind | Honesty |
| Analytical Thinking | Inquiring attitude | Interest |
| Resilience | Professionalism | Training |
| Good listening | Articulation | Indifference to popularity or unpopularity |

The undesirable attributes of an Assessor includes the following:

| | |
|---|---|
| Argumentativeness | Illogicality and Rigidity |
| Gullibility | Anxiety to Please |
| Cynicism | Self-opinion |
| Indiscipline | Giving up |
| Disregard of Facts | Nit picking |
| Impatience | Irritableness |
| Dishonesty | Prone to Influence |

## 3.4. Principles for Effective Assessment

The following principles can help assessors to make assessment an effective process, enable the institutions to repose confidence in the assessors and to ensure/win unreserved acceptance of the outcome of assessment by the external peers.

**The Ten Essential Principles for Effective Assessment**


**a) Objectivity**

Objectivity is crucial for assessment. Where assessors have varied backgrounds and interests, prejudices are likely to come in the way of fair judgment. When that happens, assessment can seldom be objective and assesseeñcentred. Assessment is expected to be totally fact-oriented. Logical reasoning, fairness, genuineness and an in-depth understanding of the assessee institution characterize objective assessment.

**b) Transparency**

Any assessment is likely to be unhelpful and is bound to be wrongly interpreted if it is not transparent and obvious. Transparency is the outcome of honest and forthright probing, resulting in a clear statement of the judgment. For example an overwhelming praise of performance or an outright and hasty condemnation of the practices of the assessee-institution, without acceptable justification indicates lack of transparency.

**c) Reliability**

Reliability is paramount in the context of third party assessment. This underlies almost every aspect of assessment in relation to both, the processes and the personnel. Any QAA expects that its assessors should realize the importance of basing their interpretations, procedures and judgment with reliability, so as to reflect true validation of the information submitted by the institution and gathered during the visit and interactions with various stakeholders. It helps them to repose confidence in the assessee, win co-operation and ensure acceptance of the outcome of the assessment.

**d) Credibility**

Credibility is the most important principle of quality assessment. Both, self-study and peer-assessment demand internal and external credibility. Trust strengthens the process of assessment through involved and sincere interaction, empathetic listening, confidence building activities and honest and unbiased assessment. This is essential for the successful interactions during the onsite visit and adds value to the observations recorded. Where credibility crumbles owing to human failure or professional indiscretion, the assessment process would be rendered abortive and institutional gains of self-assessment will be undermined.

**e) Rigour**

Carefulness, uncompromising fairness and attention to details, constitute this vital principle. Procedural rigour enables better time management and team interactions. Rigour of application of tested principles with integrity renders the assessment exercise successful, to achieve its ultimate purpose. Lackadaisical assessment hardly wins the confidence and trust of the stakeholders, much less does it ensure institutional development and progress.

**f) Support**

A positive assessment approach encourages, enables and facilitates institutional development. Such a process follows a complementary institutional process and therefore remains non-intrusive. However, this does not mean that a supportive assessor shall accept mediocrity or non-performance of the assessee institution. On the other hand, she/he identifies mediocrity (if any), in order to facilitate the institution to remove it. Supportive assessment can trigger progressive improvement of institutional quality.

**g) Adaptability**

While good assessment is rigorous, it is not expected to be too rigid. Perception of diverse needs arising from specific contexts demands creative adaptation of the processes of assessment. Especially in the context of assessment of institutions in the Indian subcontinent with its existing diversity, it requires a great deal of adaptability on the part of the assessors, to complete the assessment procedures and institutional visit in a befitting manner.

**h) Change**

Sound assessment motivates change by enabling institutions to shed practices, which are stagnant and often regressive. The rapidly changing global education scenario and the core thrusts of the system demand a radical change from sterile systems and practices which might have remained with institutions far too long to be serviceable. A good assessment often facilitates identifying areas, which need change and offers suggestions and recommendations to realize it. Recommendations of the visiting team, made from fresh perspectives, to motivate the assessee institution to adopt innovative good practices in place of unproductive traditional practices hitherto practiced by it would be invaluable for quality enhancement.

**i) Communication**

Both the process and the outcome of assessment heavily rely on sound communication. Interactions between the assessor and the various constituents of the institution largely depend on effective verbal communication. Sharing of the outcome of assessment with different individuals and bodies also demands effective written communication. The underlying principles of such communication are: precision, clarity, assesseeñorientation and effectiveness.

**j) Teamwork**

Teamwork is a modern management concept. Without belittling the central control and co-ordination by a leader, it enhances the importance of every member of the team. It helps execution of tasks assigned with the enrichment and creativity of collective thinking and acting. The principle of top-down direction is replaced by the circular strategy of mutual autonomy and co-operation. One does not sit above, but sits beside. Nevertheless the output of teamwork rests upon right leadership, which is functional, not a status symbol. The visiting Peer Teams work on such a team philosophy.

### 3.4.1. Principles for Effective Assessment: Practice

The principles for effective assessment as stated above are to be practiced by the assessor through the assessment process. He or she may do it through approach behaviour, inter-personal rapport and professionalism in performance. Some of the attributes, which may help an assessor to be successful, are detailed below:

**Acceptability**

Acceptability is public approval of a person. A person may be acceptable for several reasons such as reputation, acheivement, geniality or charisma, the quality which easily attracts many. The acceptability of an assessor does not depend so much on these as on the confidence he or she generates in the minds of the people of the assessee institution. While soundness of scholarship and maturity of observation win the admiration of many, confidence building depends largely on behavioural impact. Those which contribute to confidence building are:

- the impression that the assessor is fair-minded and sympathetic while making a decision or pronouncing judgement;
- patient listening and thoughtful speaking;
- genuine concern for developing the institution with helpful suggestions;
- positive and optimistic outlook that subdues possible fears and suspicions: and
- absence of any adverse communication or behaviour which easily alienates the audience.

**Transparency**

The functioning of an assessor would be acceptable when he/she is

- free and frank in judgement, but not blunt or prejudiced; both inhibit transparency;
- an effective communicator who can dispel fear, remove uncertainties, clarify issues and convince by direct plain speaking, and
- an objective thinker who goes by authentic facts and not by impressions.

**Empathy**

One who practises empathy makes otherís cause oneís own. An assessor who is empathetic desires the institution he or she assesses to be as good as oneís own, if not better. Such an identification avoids:

- a magisterial fault-finding inclination; in which case there can be no empathy because the two are on unequal planes;
- condescension, which precludes sharing as peers (one is looked upon as having all and the other having nothing); and
- judgment by external standards which threatens rather than encourages; and it inhibits rather than promotes initiative.

Empathy, however, is not emotional involvement. Sympathy and pity may be personal and emotional but empathy is not. It does not

- allow judgement to be partial, favourable or condemnatory; and it does not
- let one forget that one is a peer, in whatever capacity one may operate.

**Objectivity**

One who is objective is ìnot influenced by personal feelings or opinions, considering only factsî (OALD).This is an element of transparency. Often assessors find it difficult to be objective and justifiably so, because of the complexity of the educational scenario. They are expected, to deal with different types of institutions, different emphases of goals, and diverse objectives. They themselves have diverse backgrounds. It is easy for them to be influenced by reports, impressions and pronouncements made by others. It is this that often leads to

- inconsistency in assessment by the same assessor in different institutions;
- inter-team variance;
- intra-team variance;
- false or inadequate validation of claims made in an SSR;
- undermining the trust and confidence of an institution in a given team; and to
- loss of credibility.

Objectivity largely depends on:

- reliance on facts , figures and calculations before a decision is taken;
- transparency ;
- study of optimal data and making a critical analysis;
- authentic evidence to justify validation and overall assessment; and
- rigour of application of mind.

**Credibility**

Credibility is nothing but trust or faith. It is an intangible quality but it relies on tangible evidence in order to exist. Credibility operates on different levels. There is credibility of the person (reliability of character); of work (genuineness as distinct from shoddiness); and method. Credibility:

- makes assessment easy;
- makes it acceptable to others without reluctance;
- triggers positive action for the benefit of the assessee; and
- helps sustain quality of performance.

Credibility can be promoted by

- not only being fair in assessment but by also being seen to be fair in processes which lead to it; and by
- all other behavioural and performative aspects.

## 3.5 Roles and Responsibilities of the Assessors and the Assessment Teams

Assessment and accreditation is a team exercise and many individuals contribute to its success. Roles and responsibilities of members of the assessment team, therefore, determine how befittingly the *"fitness for purpose"* has been achieved through the process of assessment.

### 3.5.1. Roles and Responsibilities of the Chairperson

As the Chairperson is vested with the authority to monitor the team, his or her role becomes most important. Unless and until, however, one succeeds in getting the full co-operation of all the members with persuasion and goodwill, the task cannot be accomplished. An effective Chairperson is an admirable blend of firmness and sympathy, cohesion and reserve, a task master and vicarious servant. He or she effectively manages the human resource entrusted to his or her care to make assessment reliable and objective. Often an effective Chairperson is found to have:

- a profile that evokes attention and commands respect - an asset to the authority of leadership;
- just and impartial judgement;
- a blend of empathy and dignity;
- winsome communication which is clear and purpose oriented; and
- an inclusive attitude which manifests, among other things, sympathy for weaknesses and failures .

The Chairperson is ultimately responsible for all phases of the institutional assessment and onsite visit. She/he should have management capabilities and experience and enjoys authority to make final decisions regarding the conduct of the other members of the Peer Team, the visit and assessment outcomes as also any observations regarding the same. Therefore the Chairpersonís responsibilities also cover:

- finalization of the schedule of visit in consultation with the QAA /Institution and the team members;
- planning and organization of the process of assessment during the visit to the institution;
- representing the Peer Team / Assessment team with the institutionís management and other stakeholders, during the visit and scheduled interactions and while sharing the report with the institution.
- assigning responsibilities to, and accomplishing discharge of them from, all the members of the team;
- task maintenance by guiding members to acquire every piece of information relevant to assessment, collating information from different quarters, clarifying doubts in procedures and performance, and by setting procedures to enable the team to move beyond impasse, if any;
- team maintenance with encouragement of hard work, praise for efficiency, genial handling of sensitive inter-personal issues and championing consensus with discretion in order to arrive at unanimity of decisions;

- monitoring group dynamics in order to facilitate free interaction, transparent discussion, time-management and adherence to procedures of interaction according to a pre-set agenda followed by faithful recording of outcomes;
- monitoring the involvement of all members in the writing of the report;
- conscious and consistent effort to minimize or eliminate inter-team variance;
- arriving at a consensus in recording the judgment of the assessment outcome
- maintaining check lists at every stage to ensure control of quality in making the assessment exercise effective;
- restraining socializing except, perhaps, for a quick feedback from stakeholders on their potential and creativity for raising the cultural quality of the institution, subject to availability of time; and resisting distractions of any kind that may jeopardize work;
- maintaining discretion in public behaviour;and in the disclosure of the results of the asessment at the institution in the interest of ensuring the teamís credibility and decorum;
- desisting from any activity that may cast a slur on the person or on the QAA for whom he or she holds the assignment.

### 3.5.2. Roles and Responsibilities of Members

Members of the assessment team, being academicians and educational administrators with considerable experience have the potential necessary to perform the team task . As the exercise needs to be performed with utmost care and effectiveness, much care is bestowed on their selection by the QAAs. Members will generally have:

- readiness to acknowledge and accept constituted authority;
- cohesive attitudes to enhance team performance;
- willingness to work hard;
- integrity and transparency;
- willingness to accept suggestions and judgment which he or she perceives to be better than his or her own, in the interest of promoting collective effort;
- readiness to contribute to team consultations or interactions;
- restraint, if it can promote harmony, team image and credibility.

Members are responsible for:

- complying with applicable visit/assessment requirements of the QAA;
- communicating and clarifying the visit schedule;
- planning and carrying out assigned responsibilities effectively and efficiently both as part of pre-visit exercise and during onsite visit;
- processing data within the framework of the QAAs criteria;
- verifying and validating the effectiveness of the claims made by the institute;
- maintaining careful notes on all activities peformed by him or her during the visit: interactions with groups, visits to units, chance observations, discovery of new information helpful for finding out quality provisions, verification of documents, etc. and
- documenting the observations made during the visit and reporting and recording as required by the QAA;
- playing the team maintenance role of integrating with other members, facilitating group dynamics; contributing the best of oneís ideas and skills;
- playing the task-maintenance role by gathering new information to reinforce judgements, and by sharing work;
- managing time so as to operate schedules unaltered;
- contributing to writing the report;
- cooperating with and supporting the Chairperson of the team.
- desisting from any activity, official or personal, that may bring the team or the QAA into disrepute.

**Subject Expert (Member)**

Universities and large institutions have departments offering specialisations in specific branches of knowledge. Assessment of departments and programmes / specialisations being offered by them, needs inputs of subject experts. In case of Institutional assessments the subject expert, will assess the quality of the programme / specialization within the framework of the total assessment of the universityís performance. However, in case of programme assessment the scope of the exercise is limited to the specialisation/programme.

All the guidelines given in this handbook regarding assessors and assessment are applicable to the performance of the subject experts as well. However, the general guidelines to the subject expert in case of Institutional assessment are as follows:

- Benchmarking for quality will be uncompromisingly of a high standard; measuring up to international standards is the quality imperative of any QAA;
- Constraint may not be an acceptable excuse; skirting around it to perform with excellence, within a limited area of specialization, is better than performing below levels of excellence with constraints made to justify it;
- Subject experts will work parallel to the other members of the team. However, they will perform in the total context of assessment made by the team as a whole;
- They will enrich team discussions with substantially significant feedback based on authentic records. The institutional scores/quantitative analysis will reflect such inputs;
- The subject experts, being part of the assessing team, will assist in effective group dynamics and promote consensus.

Like the Chairperson, every member is an integral part of the team. The relationship among members is collegial, and not hierarchical as in industry. It is governed more by academic equality rather than by strict democratic equality which leads to a vote in solving issues. The members, therefore, are expected to extend the best of their intellect and skills to enrich the quality of the output of assessment and work towards consensus. The process of assessment demands maintenance of confidentiality in addition to all other responsibilities listed above.

### 3.5.3. Roles and Responsibilities of the Coordinator

The Coordinator of the team is generally a senior official of the QAA and may or may not actively participate in the process of assessment. He or she plays a catalytic role to safeguard the QAAís interests besides facilitating the effectiveness of the assessment. Naturally he/she besides the professional competency possesses skills in public relations, communication, knowledge of QAAís rules and procedures and of team-work.

The Coordinatorís responsibilities in general are :

- preparing for the visit, in coordination with all the three agencies - QAA, Peer Team and the host institution;
- fixing mutually convenient dates for the visit;

- arranging with a representative of the institution to act as an Internal Coordinator who will assist the Peer Team;
- acquiring background information of the institution;
- intervening in times of difficulty caused by breakdown in communication, physical impediments or other eventualities;
- discussing visit schedules with the Internal Coordinator and the Head of the host institution;
- monitoring the communication network from start to finish;
- offering administrative and academic support to the Peer Team;
- ensuring compliance with all formalities and procedures regarding the administrative and academic aspects;
- carrying out tasks and duties assigned by the QAA during the visit and also post visit formalities; and
- doing such other work as occasion demands.

## 3.6. Skills Required of an Assessor

We have so far looked at the various attributes of an Assessor and principles for effective assessment in generic terms. Effective assessment requires a wide range of skills. These may be classified into two broad categories, tangible skills and intangible skills. In this section we shall discuss the intangible skills required by an assessor and illustrate these skills with specific examples from the NAACs processes in order to have a clear idea.

### 3.6.1. Tangible Skills

These are essentially skills of writing, which produce a visible record of outcomes. The skills that help produce a good report on the exercise are tangible. The ability to take notes from group or individual interactions and the ability to make notes from speeches are helpful to compose a draft report. These skills also belong to this category. These will be discussed in detail, in the section under report writing.

### 3.6.2. Intangible Skills

These are skills of speaking, listening and other behavioral skills, which determine the outcomes of interactions with different stakeholder groups, especially, the team discussions themselves. Insights gained from modern management science and from language experts, who have studied in depth the nuances of speaking and listening (generally discussed under the ìCommunicative Approachî to language) have enriched all team activities.

These are called ***intangible skills*** because they are not directly available for immediate record. In fact, they cannot be recorded, as they are unpremeditated. The evidence of their presence, however, can be unmistakably caught. Effectiveness of the assessor and the assessment exercise particularly during the onsite visit phase depends on an appropriate use of these skills.Intangible skills fall under three sub-categories:

**I. Skills of speaking**

- Skills of speaking are governed by three maxims:
  - *Maxim of Quantity*: It insists on the equality of verbal content to the communicative purpose: there should be no verbal excess, which will affect precision and clarity of speaking; neither should there be any verbal inadequacy, which may result in fragmented understanding and insufficient or wrong feedback. This is particularly applicable to members interacting at meetings with stakeholders and other institutional groups. When the questions do not directly and squarely address issues , by means of appropriate open-ended or closed questions, the elicitation of information or feedback becomes poor.
  - *Maxim of Quality*: It is nothing but matching meaning with speaking, seriously and with purpose. The speaker should be task-oriented and he or she should say what they mean. Similarly, each listener should advance the task through effective listening. Pleasantries of conversation, digressions and irrelevant information affect the quality of conversation. It is not unusual to find many conversations, especially when teams visit new places and institutions, not contributing to the purpose of assessment. Minimal socializing interactions are not condemned by this maxim, because they help warm up towards serious conversations.
  - *Maxim of Relevance*: This is implied in the other two maxims. This emphasizes the task under focus and the efforts to maintain it. If the task is ìobjective assessmentî, for instance, all observations, interactions and comments should seek to advance the task. Clarifications made; inquiries for information to fill in gaps in fact finding; obtaining clarity regarding issues; and many other forms of oral activity support the task.

**II. Skills of Listening**

- Skills of listening belong to three major types:
  - *Empathetic Listening* that enables the assessor to rise above preconceived judgments, and attitudes of hectoring and condescension in order to think ìin the shoes ofî the assessee institution.
  - *Active Listening* helps the assessor to keep track of all relevant observations, points of interaction, auditions and chance meetings with stakeholders. Memory supports active listening, and the aids to memory are notes taken from interactions, notes made on presentations, periodic re-caps and, more especially, all the jottings made in the Peer Team Document (Guidance document for the visiting teams prepared by the QAA and sent to the members by the QAA) .
  - *Critical Listening* looks for underlying meanings discerned through interactions, hidden assumptions and retrieval of information by elicitation. It also discriminates between appearance and reality, opinions and judgments and between truth and falsehood.

**III. Team Skills**

One of the most useful contributions of modern management science to team management is the clarity it has brought to bear upon the intangible team skills. It has identified three significant team roles. These are *Self-Oriented Role, Team-Maintenance Role* and *Task-Facilitating Role.* The first role i.e. *Self-Oriented Role* is detrimental to team work and should be avoided by members of any team. Team skills are intangible and tangible; cognitive and behavioral; these go well with the three team roles which members of teams often play: *self-oriented role, team-maintenance role and task-facilitating role.* The skills with reference to the three identified roles are listed below.

**Table 3**

**Skills required with Reference to Team Roles**

| Self-Oriented Role | Team-Maintenance Role | Task-Facilitating Role |
|---|---|---|
| controlling / dominating others in order to display oneís own superiority<br>withdrawing / avoiding participation out of personal dislike when some issues are discussed<br>attentionñseeking: demanding recognition<br>diverting team interaction towards hidden agenda | drawing out members to contribute their best by non-verbal and verbal support such as praise, acknowledgement, nomination, etc.<br>harmonizing through mediation where there is tension owing to difference of opinion<br>promoting mutuality by offering to yield a point of view not essential for true judgment | initiating: getting team started on a line of thought<br>seeking / giving / offering information relevant to discussion<br>coordinating: showing relationships among ideas, clarifying, summarizing, explaining.<br>procedure setting: suggesting decisionñmaking / consensus obtaining strategies |

## 3.7. Conversation Skills

It may be noted that the conversation follows the maxims of conversation. It is also coherent and cohesive:

- *Maxim of Quantity:* There is no verbal excess. Every interaction is necessary and it is couched in precise language.
- *Maxim of Quality:* Speaker and listener are both serious and sincere in the questions they ask and the replies they give. There are no empty words of praise, flattery or excessive formality.
- *Maxim of Relevance:* There is no digression or other forms of distraction from the main purpose of the conversation, namely, settling in for work.
- *Adjacency Pairs:* The adjacency pairs control focus and contribute to the flow of conversation. Each of these is a sequence of two related utterances by two different speakers with the second utterance being an appropriate response to the first.

### 3.7.1. Interactions

Interactions are expected to elicit on-the-spot feedback from stakeholder groups of the institution for the purpose of matching performance with expectations. Most of the QAAs in Europe visit only select departments and concentrate mainly on structured interactions with the teachers, administrative and technical staff and students of the higher education institution and solely rely on the institutional members whereas others include interactions with both the institutional members and associated stakeholders.

In case of NAAC, the interactions involve both the institutional members and associated stakeholders. The content of interaction with different groups incase of NAAC is summed up below:

> **The nine most important requisites for effective interactions are:**
>
> - Careful listening to the responses
> - Braving external distractions
> - Steering clear of emotional responses
> - Avoiding selective perceptions
> - Clarity of language
> - Monitoring feedback
> - Appropriate responses to speeches
> - Task maintenance skills
> - Interpreting Body Language

**(a) Interaction with the Management**

This will focus:

- the institutionís policy (its relevance to the value-framework of assessment);
- principles of governance in both record and practice;
- resource management;
- trouble shooting mechanisms including strategies for redress of grievances;
- mobilization and accountability of finances; and spending on growth and quality enhancement;
- crisis management; and
- any other concerns of administration.

**(b) Interaction with the Head of the Institution**

This will deal with:

- success or otherwise of operational strategies adopted to translate the policy of the management into practice;
- curricular transaction providing for high quality learning experiences for students through the use of modern technology;

- optimal stakeholder satisfaction; inputs for placement counselling and services and academic counseling;
- management of teaching-learning programmes;
- conduct of assessment of student work;
- tangible gains from effective leadership roles;
- strategies for implementing NAACís core values; and
- any other academic, pedagogic and administrative issues and concerns.

**(c) Interaction with the Faculty**

The members will discuss with the faculty :

- management of curricular and evaluatory processes;
- innovation in pedagogy;
- research of both faculty and students;
- student assessment of teacher performance; and
- individual professional development.

Discussions with the faculty will steer clear of institutional controversies and issues.

**(d) Interaction with Students**

This aims at eliciting first hand information on:

- reasons for choosing the institution and the programmes of study (the social status/ accreditation of the institution and its popularity);
- curricular content and flexibility; its effectiveness in meeting their needs and aspirations;
- self-learning opportunities and guidance;
- assessment procedures and instruments;
- personal, academic and professional counselling;
- use of modern technology to acquire learning experiences;
- support systems and welfare programmes;

- on-the-job internship training;
- teacher performance appraisal by students;
- enhancement of competencies to meet global demands;
- extension work and leadership training; and
- matters of real concern to them.

**(e) Interaction with Parents and Alumni**

This revolves around the:

- delivery systems;
- their involvement in the educational programmes and arrangements;
- communication on learner-progression;
- placement, communication, counseling, care;
- discipline and behavioral education, and
- contribution to the development of the institution.

**(f) Interaction with Non-Teaching Staff**

To look at issues on :

- the work ethic; security of service, welfare and motivation prevalent on campus;
- managementís involvement in their training and development; and
- their relationship with others on campus, especially with students in daily transactions.

### 3.7.1.1. Effective interactions

Through the interactions the assessor tries to elicit the information by asking questions. Further the assessor should remember that he is posing the question to scrutinize the institutional practices and provisions. This requires special skills, diplomacy and tact. As mentioned earlier, in an ideal situation the interactions will be open and transparent and may include concerns not covered or expected. For this it is essential that the assessor remains cool and unemotional. The nine major considerations for effective interactions during the onsite visit are:

**(i) Carefully listening to the responses**

Jumping to a hasty and wrong response on the point made by the institutions is not conducive to assessment. The assessor can encourage institutional members to reveal more information by rephrasing a response in order to motivate reflection. There is all possibility that the responses to your queries may be on which you already have heard too much or may be too little. So it is suggested that you concentrate on the important content of the responses and look for areas of interest within the scope of the assessment. Remember that from almost every interaction you can gather something of value.

**(ii) Braving external distraction**

There may be a number of possible stimuli in the surrounding environment, the noise of the traffic, the noise of the generator or any such distractions. In such situation there is a possibility of missing vital information and listening will be less effective. In unavoidable situations it is necessary to compensate for these distractions and concentrate harder on the responses. To eliminate distractions from situations like other people talking when you are trying to listen or too many people responding at a time, it is required to politely ask people to maintain the decorum of the meeting and advise to respond one after another. The message that every one will get a chance to respond should be communicated.

**(iii) Steering clear of emotional responses**

Over stimulation can distort or interfere with eliciting information. If you find the participants interpreting information in relation to their moods rather than the question itself then try to identify the interfering emotions before interpreting the responses. Take notes and interpret the information while discussing in a team. Further it is important to emphasise in such situations that it is the institution as a whole rather than the individualís performance, which is being assessed.

**(iv) Clarity of language**

Ensure that the message/question is not ambiguous. Realise that different words convey different meanings to people depending on the context. So evaluate the context in which you are putting the question. Do not hesitate to provide examples and clarifications if you feel the respondent has not got the right meaning of the word or question.

**(v) Avoiding selective perception**

At times you may find yourself or the team members or the participants focusing only on information that supports his/her own beliefs like ìA man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the restî (The Boxer ñ Simon and Garfunkel). Deeply rooted convictions and personal prejudices and stereotype visits may distort understanding and influence behaviour. The assessor should learn to moderate his reactions if such a situation arises. To overcome such a situation one need to sensitise the participants to the proposed interactions, and assessors should identify the purpose of the interactions, the information being sought and they should look for supporting material/responses.

**(vi) Monitoring feedback**

Often you find yourself in a situation where people may be making emotional or premature comments. In such a situation allow the speaker to present his or her message. Censor or restrain feedback to inappropriate emotions. Giving feedback to the respondent is an important aspect of being a good listener. Therefore withhold any evaluation until the speaker has finished and provide feedback, either verbal or nonverbal, or both. Also using appropriate skills such as summarizing the responses, rephrasing them in your own words and responding to express that you got the message right, provides the participants with feedback.

**(vii) Inappropriate responses/speakers**

The effective interviewing skill is being able to respond according to the existing situation. At times there is a possibility that the institutional member may become bewildered and non cooperative if the assessor does not respond to the content of his response but follows his own predetermined question. Many a times people get up and start speaking inappropriately, which is not within the scope of the meeting. The situation should be delicately handled by requesting the person to calm down and assuring him or her that his point will be dealt appropriately. It is not always possible to do this but the assessor needs to keep in mind features of the response, which he/she would like to return to, and communicate this to the institution.

**(viii) Task Maintenance Skill**

The conversation contributes to maintain the task of settling in for work. It is about the single idea of settling in for work during the interactions. For example the team sequentially ensures the pre-requisites of interactions: the meeting place, the support and assistance necessary, composition of the group, schedule of interactions so on and so forth.

**(ix) Interpreting the Body Language**

Put in basic terms, body language is like the message we capture or perceive, like for instance when we watch a television programme in mute mode. Movements, postures, sitting position, use of hands, shoulders and other facial expressions while communicating with others, way of walking, dressing, handshake and other similar gestures include body language. While interpreting body language even very small ordinary gestures that usually go unnoticed gain importance. The ability of the assessor to interpret the body language enables him /her to ascertain if the other person is lying, impatient, sympathetic, defensive, agreeing, disagreeing etc. The importance of this to an assessor during onsite visit is obvious.

## 3.8. Illustrative examples of intangible skills

Given below are some illustrative examples of intangible skills from the NAAC processes. (If you want to sharpen your intangible skills the following are suggested for further reading: Austin, 1962; Coulthard, 1985; Richards and Rogers, 1986; Hymes, 1974; Searle, 1981; and others in the list of references at the end of this module).

**Illustration: I**

**An Illustration of the Intangible Skills of Speaking, Listening and Team Skills**

(A simulated Peer Team interaction with the Head of the institution on the last day of the visit)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Head of the institution* | : | *Did you enjoy your stay? I hope our people attended to your needs.* |
| *Chairperson* | : | *Yes, we did enjoy it. Thank you for your fine hospitality. It was indeed superb* |
| *Head of the institution* | : | *Welcome. I have arranged for the Exit Meeting at 12.30 p.m. as suggested by you. Yes, we have not invited the press.* |
| *Chairperson* | : | *That's kind of you. We would like to share with you some concerns of the college. Perhaps you may enlighten us on these issues. I have here two of them. The first is about the library and computer services and the second is about faculty development. Perhaps my colleagues here may want to speak about them.* |
| *Member1* | : | *Thank you Mr. Chairman. Dr. Gopal, we appreciate the efforts you have made to optimize learning resources. We find from records that you have added more than 3000 current titles on many subjects and acquired more than 150 P.Cs. during the last three years at considerable expense. You have also created a textbook library for those who cannot afford to buy books. However, we believe the library services need better attention. Would you like to tell us anything about it?* |
| *Head of the institution* | : | *I am aware of the need indeed. We are short of support staff. The Librarian is on long leave. Within constraints we have managed to enhance hours of library services with the help of junior faculty and senior students. We are actively involved in improving them.* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Member 1* | : | *That's thoughtful of you indeed. Perhaps you may involve more senior faculty too. Speeding up arrangement to offer online services; making them available to all the students during regulated hours at minimal or no cost; and ensuring extensive use of titles by students are some options. The accession of books may be done with no further loss of time. New titles may be kept in the general library after they have been browsed by faculty. Generally they get locked up in department libraries. I am sure, the faculty is quite enthusiastic and they impressed us with their willingness to go the extra mile with you if you initiated measures for improvement.* |
| *Head of the institution* | : | *Thank you for the suggestions, we shall try to implement them soon.* |
| *Chairperson* | : | *My colleague is right in both his observation and suggestions. We do understand your constraints too. Perhaps a better and more diligent use of available learning resources can help you to let more learners earn their degrees and also make it to careers. Professor Karthik, would you like to speak about the faculty?* |
| *Member 2* | : | *Dr. Gopal, we are very unhappy about the knowledge update of your faculty. You should have organized faculty improvement programmes, refresher courses and international and national seminars. You should have sent them abroad on scholarships. We find no research collaborations. In fact, the number of Ph.Ds. on the staff is negligible. What can you say about these weaknesses of your institution?* |
| *Head of the institution. to Chairperson* | : | *Sir, we have already submitted to you all the records of our faculty development programmes: fourteen of the sixty seven members of the faculty have completed their refresher courses during the last two years; three others are in U.K. and U.S. doing their postdoctoral programmes. Earlier in the year we organized a national seminar on genetics. Most of this information was sent to you in the supplementary data file. It is really unfortunate that professor Karthik is not aware of it.* |
| *Member 1* | : | *Perhaps professor Karthik didn't receive the mail. I got mine just a few minutes before I left home to reach here. What he seems to be concerned is about some faculty who, they say, are not able to guide students to the right journals of current knowledge.* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Chairperson* | : | *Dr. Gopal we are indeed sad that there was a communication gap. Perhaps professor Karthik has a point. His complaint about the lack of knowledge update was evident from at least half a dozen well informed students who were quite articulate about the need to acquaint them with current information and web sources. Do the faculty have access to the Internet? How often do they browse, in the company of students?* |
| *Head of the institution* | : | *Neither the faculty nor the students have access to the Internet yet. We are hopeful of extending this facility after the new computer lab is made available before the end of this academic session.* |
| *Chairperson* | : | *Well Dr. Gopal, we do appreciate the team work evident on the campus and the efforts you have made to improve overall quality. However, the two areas we have now discussed need immediate attention. Optimal utilization of learning resources and maintenance of the quality of teachers are of utmost importance in the evaluation of quality of performance. Thank you for your co-operation.* |

**Comments on Illustration : 1**

The conversation is an attempt to show that

- All the three maxims of speaking are followed: there is little verbal excess or inadequacy; interactions are sincere: both questions and replies are spoken in earnest; and the conversation has no irrelevant remark, comment or statement;
- Instances of all the three skills of listening are present: Both the Chairman and Member 1 demonstrate all of them;
- Team roles are well played: The inclusive treatment of the team by the Chairperson helps him to carry the members with him and to maintain the team through interactions; task maintenance is achieved by in-depth observation, asking open-ended and closed questions appropriately to probe the Head; the negative effect of the self-oriented role of Member 2 is also illustrated.

The purpose of assessment has advanced through the use of the skills mentioned. Additional information is gathered and both strengths and weaknesses of the institution in two specific areas have been assessed.

**Illustration: 2**

**The Intangible Skills of Task Maintenance and Conversational Skills - An Illustration of Speech skills: Coherence and Cohesion**

(An imaginary conversation at the airport on the arrival of the Chairman and another member of the Peer Team)

| Adjacency pairs | Speaker/Listener | Conversation |
|---|---|---|
| *Greeting & inquiry* | *Co-ordinator (from the host institution) Karthik* | *Good morning, sir. I am Karthik, from Katre College. I am looking for Dr. Sharma from Gwalior. Are you part of the team that comes on behalf of NAAC to assess our college?* |
| *Greeting & reply* | *Dr. Sharma (Member)* | *Good morning, Mr. Karthick. Yes, I'm Sharma. Glad to meet you.* |
| *Introduction* | *Karthik* | *Meet Dr. Rama Rao from Surat, another member of the team. Yes, we're members of NAAC's Peer Team.* |
| *Response to introduction* | *Chairman* | *Good morning, Dr. Rama Rao, Glad to meet you, how do you do?* |
| *Question* | *Dr. Rama Rao (Member)* | *Very well, thank you. Has Mrs. Jones already arrived? She said she was catching an earlier flight from Vijayawada.* |
| *Answer – volunteers information* | *Karthik* | *Yes, sir, she arrived two hours ago. She has been taken by our PRO to the lodge where accommodation has been arranged for all the three members.* |
| *Asks for more information* | *Chairman* | *Is the lodge close by? Is it near the college?* |
| *Gives the information* | *Karthik* | *Yes, it is, just two kilometers away. It is about half a kilometer from the college. Meet Dr. Muhammad, Dean of Sciences. He will arrange any technical or other support you may need.* |
| *Greeting* | *Chairman* | *Delighted to meet you Dr. Muhammad. How do you do?* |
| *Greeting* | *Dr. Muhammad* | *The pleasure is equally mine sir. Thank you, how do you do?* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Request* | *Chairman* | *Fine, thank you. I would appreciate if I could have the services of a computer assistant till late in the night these two days. We need them for our work.* |
| *Compliance* | *Dr. Muhammad* | *This is Mr. Subbu who will be with you as long as you want. He has been given hard and software support and necessary stationery. You will find him useful.* |
| *Acknowledgement* | *Chairman* | *Nice meeting you. Thank you for your help.* |
| *Initiating next move* | *Dr. Rama Rao* | *Shall we move from here? How do we go?* |
| *Facilitates Move* | *Karthik* | *Yes, sure. The Chairman and you will go by that red car. The rest of us will follow you in the white.* |
| *Offer* | *Dr. Muhammad* | *Would you like to have some light refreshment or a cup of hot or cold drink?* |
| *Declines with deference* | *Chairman* | *No, Thank you. It's going to be twelve and near lunch time. I don't know if others would want.* |
| *Endorse it* | *All* | *We don't need it either, thank you.* |
| *Inquiry* | *Chairman* | *Where can we meet the Principal?* |
| *Explanatory reply* | *Karthik* | *He is waiting at the lodge. He is ready with the file that updates information from the time of the submission of the SSR.* |
| *Appreciation Question* | *Chairman* | *Very thoughtful of him indeed! Is there a change in the schedule of visits to the units of the college?* |
| *Answer* | *Dr. Muhammad* | *I don't think so, Sir but the Principal will confer with you about the schedule and other matters.* |
| *(Meanwhile they arrive at the lodge)* | | |
| *Appreciation* | *Dr. Rama Rao* | *The place is quite cosy and comfortable. I love the broad table and the furniture- an incentive to work in deed! And the PC!* |
| *Joins with a light comment* | *Chairman* | *The bed is equally inviting! Better resist the invitation (laughter as they unpack)* |

## 3.9. Code of Conduct

Many QAAs have conditions for registration of assessors. The common conditions of registration / empanelment that assessors need to follow are:

a) To act in an unbiassed and trustworthy manner with both the QAA with which they are formally engaged and with other organisation involved in the exercise the perssonel.

b) To disclose any relationship or conflict of interest they have with the institution to be assessed prior to the acceptence of the assignment or in the future

c) Not to accept any gift, favour or any other profit from the institution to be assessed, either in person or through their representatives or from any other related organisation / person.

d) Maintain Confidentiality i.e. Not to disclose any part of the findings/ judgement unless they are authorised to do so by the QAA

e) Not to act in any way prejudicial to the reputation or interests or credibility of the QAA

In addition, the following may be a voluntary and self-imposed code of conduct that may be practised by an assessor:

**Codes of Conduct which Broadly Defines the Personal and Work Ethics of Assessors**

1) Assessorsí personal behaviour, while on duty, shall be above reproach: misuse of privileges, acceptance of favours from host institutions, enjoyment of pleasure trips at their expense and such other ways of putting themselves under obligation to others often invoke blame.

2) They shall maintain their self-dignity as senior mentors to whom assessees look up for guidance:attitudes of hectoring, condescension, over-critical observation and indifference often deflate such dignity.

3) They shall be fully committed to the task entrusted to them by observing a strict work ethic: they shall keep schedules of work; perform all duties assigned to them with thoroughness, efficiency and honesty; and desist from any distraction that may come in the way of the discharge of duties.

4) They shall not let down either the QAA or any duly constituted authority by going back on their promises and commitment.

5) They shall work in teams and enrich their performance with individual and collective inputs; extend their utmost co-operation to resolve conflicts, if any; and enable the team to reach a consensus, where members are divided.

6) They shall be objective and impartial in assessment, rising above institutional controversies,rumours, litigations and internal politics, if any.

7) They shall avoid giving and receiving gifts and also desist from carousing at banquets and cocktail.

8) All their dealings with the host institutions as well as QAA shall be transparent and honourable.

9) They shall contribute in every way to uphold the image of QAA by the performance of their work with diligence, integrity and honesty, as assessors.

10) They shall be a helpful team, effective time and crisis managers and work together to keep individuals and institutions from harm in critical situations, and from public reproach.

## 3.10. Tasks in Executing the Assessment Exercise

In the following pages we have provided the details of the various steps and processes the Peer Team undertakes in the successful completion of the task. Any assessment exercise has two main phases - ***(1) Pre-visit Phase and (2) The Onsite / visit phase.*** The details of these two phases and the various agencies/ personnel involved in the processes are detailed below.

Appropriate examples from the field (as experienced in a typical institutional assessment visit of NAAC) are provided. The readers may also need to look at the websites and other documents / procedures of the QAA they wish to look at and relate the provided content in that reference.

### 3.10.1. Pre-visit Phase

Pre-visit Phase is nothing but the various steps in initiating the Visit. The various tasks in this stage include:

- The QAA makes the final decision on the various organizational activities to be covered, the constituents / stakeholders with whom the Peer Team should interact and the time frame of the assessment. This is done normally in consultation with the institution and the Chairperson of the Peer Team

- As a basis for planning the Peer Team visit, the QAA staff should review the adequacy of the auditeeís recorded description (manual/documentation or the equivalent) of the processes. If this review reveals any inadequacies, further information / documents are to be sought from the institution, to be complied with before arranging the onsite visit by the Peer Team.
- Preparation of the Peer Team Document by the QAA staff that enables each Peer Team Member to prepare for, and go through, the assessment process meticulously;
- Discussion with the members and/or Chairperson on the process and issues
- Guide the institution in making logistic and academic arrangements for the visit
- A pre-visit analysis of the documents/information submitted by the institution and arriving at tentative criterion scores and the institutional grade (as applicable) by the Peer Team
- The visit schedule should be prepared in consultation with the institution and communicated to the assessors and the assessee institution. If the assessee institution objects to any provisions of the assessment schedule, such objections should immediately be made known to the Chairperson of the Peer Team. These issues should be resolved between the Chairperson and the institution, and if necessary, the QAA, before executing the assessment. A typical Peer Team visit schedule includes: -
  - ➢ the assessment objectives and scope;
  - ➢ identification of the organizational units to be assessed;
  - ➢ the date and the place where the assessment audit is to be conducted;
  - ➢ the expected time and duration for each major assessment activity;
  - ➢ identification of assessors, the individuals having significant direct responsibilities regarding the objectives and scope;
  - ➢ interactive sessions and the stakeholder groups to be interacted with by the Peer Team
  - ➢ the schedule of meetings to be held with the management of the assessee institution; and
  - ➢ confidentiality requirements and assessment audit report submission.

- Working documents should be designed such that they do not restrict additional assessment activities or investigations, which may become necessary as a result of information gathered during the visit. The Peer Team shall suitably safeguard working documents involving confidential or proprietary information. The documents required to facilitate assessment process also include:
  - ➢ check-list used for evaluating the quality provisions (normally prepared by the assessor who is assigned the assessment responsibility of a specific department or component of the institution);
  - ➢ formats for reporting assessment observations;
  - ➢ formats for documenting supporting evidence for conclusions reached by the assessors.

### 3.10.2. Onsite Visit Phase

It is proper and educationally sound to expect that the assessment brings to limelight the institutioní s progress over the years.  For this the QAA generally expect from the Peer Team, that they:

- have acquired a fairly comprehensive and thorough knowledge of the institution through a careful study of the SSR and other documents submitted by the institution;
- effectively participate in the ìonsiteî visit to the institution, to validate the claims made by the institution in its SSR;
- strictly adhere to the assessment schedule agreed upon;
- ensure the Peer Team report (PTR), which is the outcome of the process, is written well , to reflect parity between its content and scores and with the institutional grade it recommends;
- work within the assessment framework, and adhere to the Code of Conduct as set by the QAA; and
- honour and uphold the group dynamics of the Peer Team.

It is expected that the assessee institution undertakes the following, for the effective conduct of the onsite visit:

- Inform its employees about the objectives, scope and schedule of the Peer Team visit.
- Appoint responsible members of the staff to accompany the Peer Team to reach out to various

departments and facilities of the institution as listed in the schedule.

- Provide all resources needed for the Peer Team to ensure an effective and efficient assessment process.
- Provide access to facilities and evidential material as requested by the team.
- Cooperate with the team to permit fair and unbiased validation of the claims made.

For achieving the objectives of the assessment exercise most of the QAAs across the globe have included the following steps for onsite visit.

**a. Opening meeting**

The purpose of an opening meeting is to:

- introduce the members of the peer team to the assesseeís management and staff;
- review the scope and the objectives of the assessment;
- provide a short summary of the methods and procedures to be used to conduct the assessment;
- establish official communication links between the Peer Team and the institution;
- confirm that the resources and facilities needed by the Peer Team are available;
- confirm the time and date of the Exit Meeting and any interim meetings of the Peer Team and the institutionís management and/or staff; and to
- clarify on details of the audit schedule which are not quite clear.

**b. Collecting evidence**

Evidence should be collected thorough interviews, examination of documents, and observations of the activities and conditions in the areas of concern. Clues suggesting discrepancies should be noted (if they seem significant), even though not covered by the check list, and should be further investigated. Information gathered through interviews and interactions should be tested by acquiring the same information from other independent sources, such as physical observations, and institutional records.

**c. Peer Team observations**

All assessment observations should be documented. After all activities of the institution have been assessed, the Peer Team should review all of its observations, to determine which are to be reported as recommendations and commendations. The Peer Team should then ensure that these are documented in a clear, concise manner and are supported by evidence. Discrepancies and recommendations should be identified and reported in terms of the specific requirements of the standard or other related documents against which the assessment has been conducted. Observations should be reviewed by the Chairperson with a responsible representative of the institution. All observations recorded should be acknowledged by the institution.

**d. Exit meeting**

At the end of the assessment, prior to preparing the Peer Team report, the Peer Team should hold a meeting with the head of the institution (or management) and/or those responsible for the functions concerned. The main purpose of this meeting is to present assessment observations to the senior management, in such a manner so as to ensure that they clearly understand the results of the assessment. The Chairperson should present observations, taking into account the perceived significance. Records of the closing meeting should be kept. Recommendations are not binding on the assessee. It is up to the institution to determine the extent, the way, and the means of actions to be elicited, to improve its quality provisions.

## 3.11. Some Examples/Illustrations of Efficiently Executing the Assessment

Now let us take a few examples of how to proceed with validation of the information submitted by the institution to the QAA. We shall consider here the NAACís frame of reference and the institutionís submission of the SSR within the said framework to NAAC. The examples cover all stages / processes of institutional assessment by NAAC.

### 3.11.1. Identification of Strengths and Weaknesses: An Example of Pre-visit analysis

You may perhaps want to experience analyzing an SSR. The following is the reproduction of the self-analysis made by an accredited college under **Criterion 1: Curricular Aspects**

1. *The college has the distinction of being the first institution to translate the concept of work experience by sandwiching "the world of wisdom with the world of knowledge" and providing opportunity for the students to "earn while they learn". This concept highlighted in the Kothari Commission Report was implemented for the first time by the college under which students experienced the pleasure of working side by side with skilled labourers, thus adding a new dimension to the concept of higher education.*
2. *The college was the first to introduce all basic science courses having an applied component at the inception itself, unlike the practice of other colleges giving importance to starting courses in humanities.*
3. *The curriculum is looked upon not merely from the class room teaching angle but its direct relevance in terms of application in the field and factory where students are exposed to work situations and have the benefit of "earning while learning".*
4. *The various programmes undertaken aim at making students self-sufficient and becoming "job creators instead of job seekers" by applying the knowledge gained to real life situations.*
5. *The contents of the curriculum are used for transmitting skills from "the lab to the land", by undertaking an applied research approach that addresses the needs of the local community.*
6. *The obvious limitations of the aided conventional courses were quickly redressed by the introduction of student preferred vocation oriented self-financed courses by the college. As a result, the college presently conducts 5 UG courses, 3 PG courses, 6 M.Phil and 5 Ph.D. programmes under the self-financing category, which cover different disciplines.*
7. *The college has taken special care to integrate work-related subjects, wherever possible, with the parent discipline even in conventional courses and, as a result, offers sericulture, environmental science, entomology and pest management and seed multiplication along with Botany and Zoology; Electronics with Physics; Polymer chemistry and Industrial chemistry with chemistry; clinical lab techniques with biochemistry; tissue culture with biotechnology and financial and business accounting with B.Com in addition to offering B.Sc., computer science, B.Sc. and M.Sc. computer*

*applications; and B.A. English language and literature as a vehicle of communication in the global scenario.*

8. *Course study is supplemented with group discussions, industrial visits and projects as required and relevant.*

9. *All the teaching faculty are represented on Boards of Studies at autonomous colleges and the affiliating university, and they use these forums for bringing about need-based changes despite rigidities of the system.*

10. *The college enjoys the advantage of having as its Secretary and Director of Research, one of the founders of the college who had chartered its growth and development for over 21 years as its Founder Principal and for the past 7 years as its Secretary. This educational experience of the Secretary has been strengthened with additional exposure, in his role for a second term as President of the Association of Management of Private Colleges in the state. This extensive experience derived from playing the role of an educational administrator by regular interface with policy makers and the regulatory establishments connected with higher education has helped in developing a "horizon review" on curricular matters and enables the college to plan ahead in innovative areas that are student–centred and socially relevant.*

**Weakness:**

1. *A major limitation obstructing the time-bound implementation of an across the board revamp of the curriculum is the affiliating status of the college and the attendant limitations of the affiliating system. No sooner the college gets autonomous status, it has plans to reconstruct every UG and PG programme I.T. Industry–oriented so that the present mis-match between the skills delivered in higher education and expectations from the work spot are fully bridged.*

2. *The revamp of courses will be done by co-opting experts from the relevant areas in industry so that course content matches the required level of skills for students to be "employment ready" when they graduate from the college.*

3. *The original mission of the college to inculcate the concept of "universal brotherhood" and follow the Indian ethos (value based education) has not been possible under the present system which will be remedied no sooner the college gets autonomy.*

### *a*) Validation of Claims

At this stage, validation of claims can be made only on the basis of the facts cited in the SSR with evidences thereof. More complete validation has to wait until the total picture of institutional performance has been obtained through the visit. The strengths identified should be validated according to identified Key indicators. For instance, take the Key Indicator ìAdmission Processî. A mere description of the process found in the SSR is not a valid expression of the process. Any one who looks for information on ìAdmission processî, looks at how transparent the process is, how the admission standards are maintained and how rigorous it is and so on. The process should be transparent. Therefore the various steps followed in the process make  the strengths listed valid. Once the strengths satisfies the norms of the QAA, the obvious corollary of validation is its authentication by evidence. If evidence proves the transparency and various other strengths of the admission process, then, the process of validation is complete, not otherwise.

### b) Noting Information Gaps

Any gaps between the electronic data provided and the information presented in the SSR.: between norms set down by NAAC under the seven criteria and the corresponding Key indicators on the one hand, and the account of performance recorded in the SSR on the other; and any other conspicuous differences, may be noted for further verification during the visit.

### c) List of Additional Documents

A list of the additional documents / evidences / statistics necessary to authenticate claims made in the SSR, and which the pre-visit analysis has brought to light, may be prepared.

### d) Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses

The analysis by the assessor may begin with an appraisal of the Key indicators of NAAC (Annexure I) under this criterion. These are:

- Goal orientation (The institution has clearly stated the goals and objectives that are communicated systematically to all its constituencies).
- Curriculum Development (Programmes are consistent with goals - curriculum is developed through need assessment with the help of experts and feedback from stakeholders. They suit career needs of students.)
- Programme options (A wide range of options is made available to learners through both regular and parallel self-funded courses)

- Academic flexibility (It is facilitated by flexibility in time and by curricular transactions like the Credit System)
- Feedback Mechanism (Responses from students, academic peers and employees help review existing programmes and modify them; and also to design new courses).

**Table 4**

**Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses**

**(CRITERION I: Curricular Aspects)**

**A) Strengths**

| Sl. No. | Strengths listed in report | Strengths that match Key indicators | Residual strengths | Observations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Simultaneous imparting of knowledge & work experience | Sl. No. 1-7 match KI-1, goal orientation in curriculum (although goals are stated elsewhere in the report) | Sl. No. 10 is a chance, but unique, strength | analysis misses information dispersed in other parts – ex. genesis and goal |
| 2 | Preference for science courses | Sl. No. 8 and 9 have potential feedback from industry and peers (KI-5) although it is informal. | good practice of "earn while you learn" | strategies of implementation not explicit |
| 3 | Application of knowledge encouraged | Sl 7 specifically achieves the purpose of the second Core Indicator | Learner-centred curriculum forward looking: autonomy | |
| 4 | Entrepreneurial skills emphasized | Sl. No. 5 addresses KI-3 | | |
| 5 | Curricular provision for vocationalisation through alternative strategies | | | |
| 6 | Innovation to integrate vocational components with disciplines | | | formal systems not evident |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | Curriculum innovatively reflects goal | Sl. No. 9 and 10 facilitate review and re-design (KI-3) | | imaginative and useful curricular effort under affiliating system |
| 8 | Teaching is goal-supportive and guided by the entrepreneurial thrust of the curriculum | | Net-work: agriculture commerce technology triangulated in curricular arrangement | |
| 9 | Teachers have opportunities to influence curricular change | | | |
| 10 | Creative leadership to effect curricular change | | | |

KI = Key Indicator (*For the key indicators identified by NAAC refer to Annexure I)*

**B) Weaknesses**

| Sl. No. | Weaknesses listed in report | Weaknesses which affect realization of KIs | Additional weaknesses perceived | Comment |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Constraints contingent on affiliation | goals and objectives not made explicit; neither are they systematically disseminated or reviewed, even if they are laid down by the affiliating university. (KI-1) | curricular options not well articulated<br>enrichment outside given curriculum not thought of | Some weaknesses are inevitable under the system; but enrichment of curriculum is indispensable for quality |
| 2 | Value based education not provided | potential for feedback not utilized formally (KI-5)employment oriented, yes but employer – oriented, no | courses not reviewed | |

KI = Key Indicator (*For the key indicators identified by NAAC refer to Annexure I)*

A detailed analysis of all Key indicators made at this stage can make tasks easier when the Peer Team finalises the outcome and assigns scores or grades to the institution.

**e) Assigning Tentative Scores**

The scrutiny of strengths and weaknesses thus made provides the output for measurement. It can be made by using NAACís scores assigned to Key indicators. Let us see how this can be done. Let us use the same illustration given above. The scores we may arrive at are only tentative because they are likely to be modified by:

- new information acquired during the visit;
- the more rigorous validation that will be made on the basis of authentication (to be discussed in greater detail in the next section); and by consensus that will be gained by team discussions during the visit.

NAACís scores for the Key indicators ( Annexure I) under Criterion I-Curricular Aspects are the following, in the case of an affiliated college:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Criterion 1: Curricular Aspects | | Total | 100 |
| | Key Indicators | | |
| 1 | Goal Orientation | | 25 |
| 2 | Curriculum Development | | 20 |
| 3 | Programme Options | | 15 |
| 4 | Academic Flexibility | | 15 |
| 5 | Feedback Mechanism | | 25 |

Tentative measurements may follow *prima facie* assessment based on the SSR alone. They should be based on performance visëa vis Key indicators.

KI - 1 *Goal orientation* comprises (a) clearly stated goals and objectives and (b) their systematic dissemination to all units of the institution. The SSR does not make these explicit. Goals are stated elsewhere in the report. Dissemination of goals is informal. However, the first seven strengths identified make it clear that the implied goal of combining work with learning (discussed elsewhere) has substantially driven the curriculum. 8 of the 10 strengths reinforce goal orientation. Obviously the performance under KI-1 measures justifiably upto 80 to 85 per cent. We may, therefore, tentatively assign 20 upon 25, if not more.

KI-2 *Curriculum development*, among other things, is based on (a) need assessment, (b) expert consultation, (c) stakeholder feedback, (d) suitability to needs (of the target population) and (e) goal orientation. These are, again, not explicitly stated in the SSR under the present section. A complete reading of the SSR shows that this college was founded by farmers through their self-sacrifice in order to fulfil needs of an agricultural rural community. The whole curriculum is oriented towards the ëlab to landí concept and it comprises mainly biotechnology and several farm related sciences accommodated in the curriculum. Courses in humanities are not offered. There is no doubt that KI-2 requirements, i.e (a), (c), (d) and (e) are fulfilled consciously. Again, all the 10 strengths listed make it clear that the score under KI-2 may justifiably measure up to a percentage even more than that assigned to the first. It may be 19 upon 20.

KI-3 *Programme options*, according to NAAC, should cover a wide range and offer adequate academic flexibility. New programmes and self-funded courses may provide such a range and flexibility. Being an affiliated college and rural in character it cannot afford to offer a wide range of options. Nevertheless self-funded programmes are offered to meet goal-based needs. The goal, moreover, delimits curriculum within the framework of skills sciences offer. The absence of supplementary enrichment programmes made on the collegeís own initiative is obviously a weakness. The absence, moreover, of a clear listing of courses (a point to be verified during the visit) makes the assessment very tentative at this point. However, all the strengths listed, 1,2, 4, 5, 6, and 7 in particular, indicate a stretch of strategies, which meet the requirements. Taking into view both strengths and weaknesses the score may be tentatively determined as 10 upon 15.

KI-4 *Academic flexibility* refers to freedom in the use of the time-frame of courses, horizontal mobility, inter-disciplinary options and others often facilitated by ìcurricular transactionsî. This seems to be the weakest point of the institution. Time-frame flexibility is made impossible under the affiliating system. The college does not follow the Credit System for curricular transaction owing to obvious constraints. There are, however, evidences of horizontal mobility from lab to land for fulfilment of academic requirements. Departments come together for more holistic functioning. The score may justifiably be determined as 9 upon 15. It may be even more.

KI-5 *Feedback mechanism* is absent. No formal arrangement to ascertain views of stakeholders seems to exist. However, the unique residual strength of the institution i.e No.10, the creative leadership given by the Founder-Secretary in assessing needs from different stake-holders, cannot go unnoticed. The score may be 20/25.

The tentative Key Indicator (KI) scores would be:

| | |
|---|---|
| KI-1 | 20 |
| KI-2 | 19 |
| KI-3 | 10 |
| KI-4 | 09 |
| KI-5 | 20 |
| Total | 78 |

There may be a marginal variation according to the perceptions of individual assessors. Nevertheless, this procedure prevents wild variations incidental to a totally impressionistic assessment.

**f) Tentative Grading**

This may not be difficult to arrive at if all the Key Indicator scores are added up and the percentage worked out with the raw scores, to begin with. It must, nevertheless, be borne in mind that the whole is not always the sum total of the parts, especially when team judgement is involved. The final grading, at the Pre-Visit stage, should take into account:

- tentative scores of Key Indicators under each criterion;
- the additional scores assigned to residual strengths and good practices; and
- any other judgement of the individual assessor, which will be, examined through later team discussions.

### 3.11.2. Examples of the Onsite Visit

**a) The Programme Schedule**

In the case of NAAC, A typical three-day visit generally follows the pattern and processes given below:

*Day 0* *Making preliminary arrangements and holding the first Peer Team meeting to discuss outcome of individual home work done on the SSR.*

*Day 1* *The Peer Team meets and interacts with the Principal or the Vice Chancellor, faculty in their departments; and students, alumni, parents and non-teaching staff. At the end of the day the second Peer Team meeting is held followed by drafting or revising the tentative report.*

*Day 2* *The Peer Team visits departments not visited on the first day, reviews support systems and checks documentary evidence. The day ends with the third Peer Team meeting followed by refining and finalizing the draft report to be shared with the Head of the institution the next morning. It also reviews and finalizes tentative criterion scores and the institutional grade, with team consensus.*

*Day 3* *The third day is devoted to fine-tuning the draft report; discussion of outstanding issues with the Head of the institution; and the sharing of the report with him or her. The report is then finalized and handed over to the Head at the Exit Meeting where the Chairman of the Peer Team discloses highlights of the report without divulging the score. It is kept confidential until approval by the Executive Committee of NAAC.*

**b) Team Discussions**

Team discussions prior to and after visits are part and parcel of a QAAís visit schedule. These mainly aim at providing an opportunity to the members to come together and share their observations and impressions, which will assist in having an objective assessment, that leads to consensus decisions while reporting the outcome. This will also enable the members to cover the information gaps and have a logical approach to the whole process. Taking the example of NAAC we have already reviewed the previsit exercises to be undertaken by the QAA and the team members. In this section we shall consider the team discussions in the NAACís validation process.

**Team Discussion I**

Pre-Visit preparations are completed at the first meeting of the Peer Team the day before the commencement of the actual visit. The discussion will:

- compare notes on the observations and findings from validating the information provided in the SSR;
- identify issues to be probed further;
- objectively examine disagreements, if any;
- compile list of documents to be called for from the institution the next day;
- compare the criterion scores and institutional grading made severally by the members of the team;
- take stock of agreements and consensus on institutional grading;
- finalize logistics of the visit; and
- keep minutes of gains of discussion.

**Team Discussion II**

This will take place at the end of Day 1 at the place of stay. This is intended to reinforce the tasks initiated at the first discussion. This will comprise:

- filling information gaps with evidences obtained during the first day of the site visit;
- review of tentative evaluations already made by members in the light of new awareness, insights, knowledge and information gained or gathered after arrival through the first dayís visit;

- sharing of individual findings on visit which may result in revision of earlier impressions and tentative judgements;
- modification of draft report in the process;
- firming up tentative scores;
- discussion of sensitive issues which have worried assessors and of intra-team difficulties in arriving at consensus, if any; and
- review of new evidences collected for inclusion in the report.

At the end of the first day the team will share the responsibility to write the draft report. It will be shared with the Head of the institution on the last day of the visit. In all the tasks the instruments used for noting additional evidences such as the Peer Team Document will play a key role in comparing and analysing experiences of the members of the team.

**Team Discussion III**

This is held at the end of Day 2 of the visit at the place of stay. This is intended, chiefly, to consolidate results of tasks performed on the first two days and to finalize the draft report after settling differences of opinion, if any, about criterion-wise scores and the institutional grade. The discussion will deal with:

- agreement on final scores and the institutional grade in the light of the entries made in NAACís ìFrame of Referenceî and ìPeer Team Documentî; and with reference to Key Indicators; and
- the finalization of the draft report: form and structure, enumeration of strengths and weaknesses along with well-authenticated validating statements, selective use of significant evidences, unification of language and style of presentation, refinement of tone, readability and other nuances of report writing may be checked. We shall discuss this in detail in section 4.

**c) Authentication and Validation**

The reliability of assessment depends largely on an effective use of both documentary and non-documentary evidences and interactions with various constituents of the institution. Documents which cover institutional performance under the seven criteria need to be checked. Non-documentary evidences are the notes obtained from interaction with different groups of the institution.

NAAC suggests the following documents to be perused:

- Acts and Statutes of the university or the constitution and by-laws of the college;

- Composition, powers, and functions of different academic and administrative bodies such as the Governing Body, the Academic Council, Boards of Studies and various committees;
- Records of admission of students and selection of faculty and administrative staff;
- Records of MoUs and collaborations;
- Details of consultancy and income generated through it;
- Guidelines of the committee for redressing grievances; and minutes of the grievances redressed;
- Current list of academic programmes;
- Records of staff development programmes organized;
- Institutional calendar with rules for admission, withdrawal, refund, etc.;
- Annual reports of the last two years;
- Master plan;
- Records for obtaining and analyzing student and other stakeholder feedback;
- Audited account statements and budget copies for the last two years;
- Results of student assessment of teacher performance;
- Mark registers;
- Minutes of meetings of important academic and administrative bodies;
- Cases of disciplinary action taken, crises handled; and
- Any other documents the team may wish to peruse.

**Process of Verification of Documents**

The documents are often numbered and they are shared among members of the team. They are verified at the end of the first and the second days of the visit. The verification process is not that of file inspection often marked by insistence on formal perfection and office seals. The intention is not that of finding procedural perfection ñ although it is desirable ñ but it is that of assuring for oneself the genuineness of the information obtained. While faked documents will no doubt be exposed, any piece of authentic evidence will serve the purpose. In the perusal of files, attention will be bestowed upon:

- contribution to criterion-wise performance as well as Core Values;
- focus of purpose;
- proof of claims made in the SSR;
- validation; and
- identification of facts not available in the documents already perused.

**d) Final Judgment and Outcome**

This is the most crucial point of the whole process of assessment. The work done at both the Pre-Visit and the On site Visit stages culminates at this point. The recommendations of the outcome and/or grade should depend on:

- the observations, discussions and the scores assigned by individual members of the team, revised through the visit and recorded at appropriate intervals as minutes or other formats;
- the tentative scores and grades made severally by individual members of the team, revised through the visit;
- consolidation of these by consensus;
- weighing the overall institutional grade using the outcome of the two procedures stated above (tentative individual scores and consolidation by consensus).

When the overall outcome/grading is finalised and when any intra-team variances based on differences in individual judgements are found to be significant, Team Discussion III should go through an open and free interaction in order to reach consensus. Where it is difficult to achieve, the Chairperson may use his or her discretion to bring about a compromise to reach a final decision.

At this point the team may examine all the residual strengths not covered under the criterion or the indicators. Innovative good practices and other unique circumstances, which favour the institution, may be identified. One shall not miss them. These, along with the observations/scores made earlier and modified through the visit, constitute the final outcome and the institutional grade.

**e) Sharing the Report**

In most of the QAAs, the accompanying QAA staff/officer is responsible for finalizing the report in consultation with the chairperson and other members. This is normally done after returning to their respective destinations and may be within three weeks from completion of the onsite visit. Once consensus has been reached , the report it is shared with the institution for its comments and observations. The observations of the institution are sent back to the members for endorsement before the report is accepted and finally published. In case of NAAC, the draft report will be shared with the Head of the institution on the final day of the visit, before the exit meeting . The purpose is to:

- find factual errors, if any, and correct them;
- discuss outstanding issues, if any, chiefly, for clarification; and to
- offer instructions regarding the use of the report until the scores are formally approved.

**f) Exit Meeting**

In this meeting the assessors are expected to -

- effectively balance disclosure and transparency;
- indirectly, but clearly, indicate strengths and weaknesses in order to enable the listeners understand where exactly the institution stands in the quality scale. This requires discretion in oral communication which cannot afford to be too overt or too covert; and
- adequately substantiate observations made in order to leave no room for wild speculations or unfounded suspicion in the minds of listeners.

Almost all the interactions through the Visit Phase depend for their success on:

- the thoroughness of the work done during the pre-visit phase;
- analysis of strengths and weaknesses mentioned in the SSR, through their validation by the team;
- constant review of conclusions reached, in the light of new information and evidences collected; listening in groups which interact with the Peer Team;
- effectively managing discrete oral communication in order to probe, elicit, clarify and consolidate ideas for report writing; and on
- effective team performance with members playing the right individual and team roles.

## 3.12. Summary

In this chapter we have

- reviewed the roles and responsibilities of assessors while they are on the job;

- had an appraisal of the skills and competencies required of an assessor. These are:
  - Tangible Skills: the skills of noting and writing which shape the Peer Team report;
  - Intangible Skills: skills indispensable for navigating through interactions by speaking, listening and playing team roles: these in turn, are:
    - *Skills of Speaking: achieved by the observance of the maxims of quantity, quality and relevance; and the skill of using adjacency pairs that ensure flow of conversation;*
    - *Skills of Listening: empathetic, active and critical listening, all of which advance the task of assessment;*
    - *Team skills: task maintenance and team maintenance roles and the skills thereof: and*
- read about the professional ethics of assessors: this comprises (a) the practice of the principles of assessment through appropriate behavioural skills and (b) the code of conduct they will conform to in order to be exemplary in quality in all its aspects because assessee communities look upon them as mentors.

In this section using NAACís process as an example we have

- understood use of external peers in quality assessment;
- gone through a demonstration of how an SSR may be scrutinized before the visit on the basis of
  - identifying strengths and weaknesses;
  - noting residual strengths, if any, and other good institutional practices;
  - preparing tables for all criteria in order to indicate these at a glance; and
  - arriving at tentative criterion scores and the institutional grade.
- reviewed the processes to be gone through during the visit which include:
  - a conscious attempt to adhere to programme schedule;
  - the crucial interactions which help supply gaps in information, review modifications, for reporting assessment outcome and judgment in the light of new information acquired and of the enrichment of knowledge of the institution through the visit

- the consolidation of the outcome by team work;
- judgment by consensus; and

- come to know other formalities to be complied with, such as the documents to be verified and the content of interactions with various groups of stakeholders at the institution; and
- validating them in terms of the Core Values and the QAA framework.

It is clear from this section that the Pre-Visit preparations begin with the individual assessorsí scrutiny of the SSR and culminate in the determination of tentative criterion scores and the institutional grade or any other designed outcome based on the framework of the given QAA. Team Discussion I is the cardinal means to bring to a peak the work done through this stage.

## 3.13. Practice and Reflective Exercises

1. You may now read the following imaginary team interaction and comment on the presence or absence, use or non-use, of some of the crucial intangible skills and team skills and roles. It is assumed that the dialogue takes place at the end of the second day of the visit.

**Communication: Intangible Skills**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Chairperson** | : | Perhaps you will agree that our impression of the support services, especially the well monitored library services as well as the utilization of learning, resources, has significantly improved. You may share any reservations you have on the matter. |
| **Member 1** | : | I think so too. The documents we have additionally seen, and the gaps in information that interaction with students have helped us to fill, have substantially improved our first impressions. |
| **Member 2** | : | I donít think so. They have been eroded rather. The claims made in the SSR cannot be justified because a college with 25 years of existence should have double the number of journals and much more access to the internet. I am inclined to reduce the original score to nearly half of what I had recorded initially. |
| **Chairperson** | : | Perhaps you are right, Professor (Member 2). Your point about the need for improving library learning resources and support services is well taken. We should make our due recommendations to the institution to re-set its priorities in this area. Wouldnít you, however, support the observation that the extent of the use of available resources made by both students and scholars would be more important than their quantum? Professor (Member 3) could we have your observation on the matter? |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Member 3** | : | Well, there is evidence to support the observation you have made just now. Here are the notes I have taken to assess the intensity of use. Here is the new statistics we have gathered from various interactions and perusal of additional documents. The use of the library till 11 p.m., the average 70% of the total population who use the library every day one way or the other, the projects prepared with the library assistance that fetched 70 lakhs for research, the special assistance given by research associates in the library who guide student projects and others, which are well authenticated, go to prove the point. I would, however, go along with Professor (Member 2). for optimizing the services for the reason that a well motivated community such as this can double its output in research and other areas if the quantum of the services is also enhanced. |
| **Chairperson** | : | Would you like to respond to that, Professor (Member 2)? |
| **Member 2** | : | Well, I see the point. Perhaps I should have checked the new statistics before I made that comment. I would still insist on optimizing library resources as Professor (Member 3) has observed. |
| **Chairperson** | : | Thank you for your gesture. We shall discuss further the form of the recommendation that should go into the report. Would you mind writing out a draft recommendation on library services, which can be reviewed a little later? Perhaps Professor. (Member 3) may share the new statistics with you. We shall meet again soon. |

2. You may read the following team conversation and comment on the extent of use or non-use of communicative speech skills discussed above. Suggest alternatives for improvement.

**Communication: Speech Skills**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Chairperson** | : | May we meet here? The room is cosy and least noisy. We have desks to keep our materials on, moreover. |
| **Rest of Team** | : | Yes, we shall. All of us are here. |
| **Chairperson** | : | Well now, at the end of the second day we shall review and compare our notes, additional information gathered and any new observations any member of the team would like to make. We can also share our general impressions of the faculty, students, alumni and the Management. And finally, we shall review our tentative scores. Would anyone like to make any point. |
| **Member 1** | : | I liked the entertainment. The students have remarkable talents. Some of them are just the material for international competitions. It is unfortunate that none has made it to that level. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Member 2** | : | I have never come across another college, which can excel in hospitality. They have taken much effort to keep us all comfortable and to give us the best of our stay. |
| **Chairperson** | : | The community that runs the Management is known for its hospitality. I think the college deserves a B++ or even an A. What do you think, Professor (Member 3) |
| **Member 3** | : | May we not compare our notes on todayís review especially of departments? Perhaps we may discuss their enrichment programmes? |
| **Chairperson** | : | Thatís a good idea. Iím really impressed with their novel Credit System that has been helpful to improve learner options among additional programmes not offered under the affiliating arrangement. |
| **Member 1** | : | Iím really impressed with the communicative abilities of students. I enjoyed every one of their questions during our interaction with them. |
| **Member 2** | : | The hostel food is nutritious and the prices of food items in the canteen are reasonable. |
| **Member 1** | : | But they do not have space in their rooms to sit and study. |
| **Member 2** | : | Perhaps they make use of the library space better! |
| **Messenger** | : | The Principal wants to meet the Chairman to have just a word with him. |
| ***Chairperson*** | *:* | *Friends, please do carry on the discussion. I'll join you after dinner. Why don't you also eat now? We shall continue our discussion after dinner.* |

(Note: Let us hope that the post-dinner interaction would be more focused, better monitored, less incoherent and substantially contributive to report drafting and that time-management would help keep schedules better.)

3. Reflect on what shortcomings and problems an assessor may have to confront, if principles of assessment are not put into practice. You may write down concrete instances, real or imaginary, in the context of problems faced by some institutions that have been assessed.

4. Reflect on how a voluntary adherence to a code of conduct can:

   - make the task of assessment easier;
   - more than prepare the institution to accept the outcome of assessment; and
   - enhance the credibility of NAAC.

You may write down your comments on a sheet of paper and discuss them in a group.

# 4. REPORTING THE OUTCOME

Imaterial of the QAAís frameworks and their geographic locations, the final outcome of any assessment is the qualitative report. The importance and purpose of the document can be easily understood when one realizes that it:

- is the *agenda and signpost* of the institution for planning and developing strategies to sustain and enhance quality for at least the next five or seven years;
- is a *judgement* of the performance of the institution in the past;
- is a *public document* to guide other institutions/stakeholders/freshers to make academic and administrative decisions;
- *determines the status* of the institution through accreditation;
- *facilitates or prevents external support* when accreditation is linked to funding by public or private bodies;
- *boosts or deflates the morale* of the institution; and
- *sets the continuum of the quest* for excellence in motion.

Therefore, the report has to be prepared with much care in order to make it:

- consistent in content (assessment) and grade (accreditation)
- credible, by being factual and objective;
- acceptable to the institution without reservation;
- helpful to motivate quality sustenance;
- fair; and
- free from flaws of different kinds caused by professional indiscretion, especially in spelling out directions of recommended change.

The three common areas where many reports are likely to fault are : (a) *validation* of claims; (b) *consensus judgement* by team and (c) *verbal phrasing* to ensure the match between assessment and *a faithful presentation* of its outcome.

## 4.1. Form and Structure

The self appraisal report and other information submitted by the institution to the QAA for undergoing assessment and accreditation should be validated/assessed against the criteria set by the QAA. At the end of the assessment exercise a summary report should be prepared to record the findings of the review / validation highlighting the strengths and potential weaknesses which the institution may need to act upon. These reports are generally confidential until processed by the QAAs. The timing and mode of disclosure of the report is at the discretion of the QAA. The form and structure of reporting and the mechanism of disclosure vary from QAA to QAA but the overall contents and issues to be recorded in the report are more or less similar. While writing the report, the assessor should ensure that the reports have the following issues covered, as applicable:

- ✓ the scope and objectives of the assessment;
- ✓ details of the schedule of visit, identification of the team members and the representatives of the QAA and the institution, assessment dates and identification of the institution being assessed;
- ✓ identification of criteria against which the assessment is executed (the quality manual, the SSR , quality benchmarks etc.)
- ✓ observation made and suggestions for improvement
- ✓ the institutionís ability to achieve the defined objectives; and
- ✓ the judgment of the assessment teamís on the extent of the institutionís quality provisions, compliance with the applicable standards/regulations and related documentation.

As the assessment reports are made public and expected to provide the stakeholders with information on the quality provisions of the institution assessed, the:

- ✓ Findings recorded, must be supported by objective evidence and such evidence should be detailed in the report.
- ✓ Report should be concise and not longer than necessary, but must be easily understandable.
- ✓ Suggestions/recommendations made in the report should be worded in a manner that prompts required action for improvement.
- ✓ Report should be free from praise or blame of individuals .
- ✓ In a system of grading institutions, as used by some QAAs, one should maintain grade - report parity.

If the above conditions are followed while recording the findings, then the strengths and weaknesses will be easily understood and retrieved by the users of the report.

There is no specific form of reporting the assessment findings. Each QAA designs its own formats, which best suits, its purpose. For example NAACís format for presenting the assessment findings has three parts : *Introduction, Criterion-Wise Analysis* and *Overall Analysis,* which includes commendations and recommendations. A section on information about departmental performance is generally appended incase of univeristy systems.

- The introduction offers a brief and succinct account of the genesis, purpose, governance, stakeholders and academic status of the institution. These are given in order to appraise the reader of the backdrop to place the outcome of assessment in the right perspective.
- The second section is the criterion-wise presentation of the assessment completed with appropriate validation and authentication.
- The third section commends healthy practices and offers suggestions on internal micro improvements. They help to remove the weaknesses identified by the team. The section would also include suggestions for macro-planning by signposting the direction of development, the institution may prefer to take in order to sustain quality. The suggestions would help the institution to make its strategic plan for at leat next five years.

It is only in writing the third part of the report that the specific expertise of the educator-assessor comes into play. The rest of the report is entirely based on the institutionís own self-assessment on the one hand, and the criteria of NAAC on the other.

### 4.1.1. Internal Structure

The internal structure of the assessment report under each criterion-analysis is more or less analogous to a SWOT analysis. It describes strengths and weaknesses in the performance of the institution with reference to each criterion. Threats, and the strategies to convert them into opportunities and strengths, are often accommodated in the last section of the report, ìOverall Analysis,î which carries the suggestions offered by the team.

### 4.1.2. Types of Paragraphs

The internal sections of the report may follow convenient paragraph types which suit the ideas conveyed. Two such types are commonly used in reports. The *Deductive Paragraph* states the most obvious and non-controversial validation and it begins with a general statement and proceeds to expand it with illustration, argument or comment. It is often used to convey judgement that is received without hesitation. The second type known as *the Inductive Paragraph* is often used to convey ideas which are not readily acceptable but the assessor, nevertheless, considers important. For instance, the validating statement that a certain rural college has evinced a strong predeliction for research insights in the realization of the extension-curriculum interface (by combining research with extension activity) and that, therefore, it should be accredited at par with research programmes, leaves room for reservation. All may not subscribe to the equation. A Peer Team, for example, may feel that that it deserves the credit equivalent to that accorded for research on the basis of its sound validation, and substantial arguments. In that case, convincing arguments will precede the concluding general validating statement. Arguments precede inference in the inductive approach. One need not bother much about the internal structural propriety so long as ideas are organized with clarity. That which is presented here is an ideal, very much in current practice, in writing reports of all types.

## 4.2. Content Validation

*Validation* is the most important process of evaluation. It is more than proving a claim. As the dictionary defines it, it is ìan official statement that something is useful and of an acceptable standard.íí If, for example, a practice is stated to conform to an officially laid down criterion, the statement becomes a value statement or the validation of the practice it describes. Thus, when we say the curriculum of an institution reflects its goals, we validate the curriculum from the point of view of one of the Key Indicators identified by NAAC.

It must be noted that a value statement made on the basis of an official criterion alone does not prove a claim. The necessary corollary of validation is *authentication*. Although the two terms are used interchangeably by many assessors, they are not exactly the same in meaning. Authentication provides the evidence necessary to prove the validation. Both are complementary. Taking the example cited above we may state the validation and the authentication of a claim as follows:

- validation : The curriculum of the institution reflects its goals. (claim)
- authentication : The curriculum is weighted in favour of agriculture and farming sciences, according to one of the goals of the institution. (The goal seeks to upbuild the large farming community of the area by providing appropriate education. The institution was founded by farmers for this purpose. ñ Here the claim is *authenticated* by an *evidence*).

It, therefore, follows that both are essential for assessment. The one without the other makes assessment less credible. The first is based on a criterion statement of NAAC and the second on a practce of the institution which contributes to curricular aspects.

The following illustrations may help to make validation more complete:

**Table 5**

**Authentication and Validation : Illustration - I**

| Unacceptable | Better | Substantially assessment-supportive |
|---|---|---|
| The college meets the needs of slow and advanced learners | The remedial support given to slow learners is well planned and effectively monitored | (Repeat the validation statement in the previous column and add the following) The diagnostic test devised to identify slow learners in almost all subjects difficult to freshers; the bridge course offered to them for a duration of 50 hours each; and the remedial courses which span a whole semester are well planned and effectively monitored by both internal and external experts. |

**Explanation:**

The statement made in the first column is unacceptable in a PTR because :

- it merely *repeats* that which is found in the SSR;
- it is too *genera*l; and
- the *application of mind* by the Peer Team has not been made *explicit*.

It, therefore, remains an unassessed endorsement of the claim made by the institution.

The second statement made under column 2 is well made. It has an evaluative tag ìwell planned and effectively monitoredî. However, it is *general and not explicit*. Though ìbetterî than the first, it is still unacceptable because it lacks authentication.

The statement under column 3 both evaluates and authenticates. It moreover adduces tested (verified) evidences, which show meticulous application of mind on the part of the assessor.

The foregoing validation has to be fine-tuned if it has to be more precise and complete in order to match the Key Indicator of a criterion. The Key Iindicator, here, speaks of ëdifferentialí curricular provision made to support the slow learner and challenge the advanced. The validation may be improved by referring to (a) both slow and advanced learners; and to (b) both the process and the result of the good practice.

**Table 6**

**Authentication and Validation : Illustration – II**

| Revised Validation | Authentication of Process & Result |
|---|---|
| The remedial assistance given to slow learners and the challenges offered to the advanced are well planned and monitored as well as result-oriented. | The diagnostic test devised to identify slow learners in almost all subjects difficult to freshers; the bridge courses offered to them for a duration of 50 hours each; and the remedial courses which span a whole semester are planned and effectively monitored by both internal and external experts. The advanced learners are initiated into preliminary collection of data for senior researchers, presentation of papers in inter-collegiate seminars and into public speaking. (authentication of process)<br>95% of the slow learners have cleared the final examination with half of them placed in I and II class. About 75% of the advanced learners have excelled in academic attainments: 15 have made university ranks, 5 have obtained merit scholarships to pursue research and 2 have won talent search competitions. (authentication of result) |

If such validation of each Core Indicator under each criterion is also accompanied by assignment of scores determined in proportion to the weights allotted by NAAC to Key Indicators and to the criterion as a whole, the parity between assessment and scores can be ensured.

The process of validation in terms of Key Indicators of criteria leads to validation of the content of the report as a whole. Thus, the validation is made on the basis of:

- criterion-wise analyses made of performance that fulfils requirements of the Key Indicators of NAAC; such an analysis is well supported by the validation and authentication of claims made in the SSR with reference to the criterion concerned;
- analysis of strengths and weaknesses classified and presented in the criterion-report;
- an assessment of strengths and weaknesses on the whole that highlights salient features of the institutional performance in its totality; this is presented in Section III under ìOverall Analysisî;
- coherent presentation of content in organized form; and
- parity of content and scores as well as the institutional grade.

Unless the content of the report adheres to these five bases or norms, the writer of the report will be left without proven facts on which he or she should base judgment; and objectivity will be at a disadvantage.

## 4.3. Grade - Report Parity

The report should match the institutional grade. This, in turn depends on the content of the criterion report matching the scores assigned to Key Indicators. The grade-report parity essentially rests upon:

- fact-based writing: This is nothing but the validation and authentication of claims made in the SSR;
- explicitness in writing which leaves no room for imposing an external interpretation based on impressions;
- control of writing and scoring by team consensus arrived at, after an in-depth discussion of issues;
- cross verification of outcomes of similar assessments made of the performance of the institution by responsible bodies such as the UGC, ISO evaluators and internal self assessment made by external peers on the institutionís own initiative; (random surveys made by private or public agencies may not be helpful for obvious reasons); and
- a comparison of grades of similar institutions in the same area assigned by Peer Teams.

The last two are only tangential strategies that can at best help the process of verification of assessment. The grade-report parity essentially rests upon the first three.

## 4.4. Good Report Writing

A Peer Team report, like any other report, should be well written. Modern ìcommunicative writingî is based on two cardinal principles, namely, *coherence* and *cohesion*.

### 4.4.1. Coherence

When writing the reports it is important to keep in mind that it is the institution, which has to act on the findings and not the Assessor or the QAA. For this reason the report should be above all *factual*. Further, it should be *complete* (reflecting all the necessary information), *helpful* ( lead the institution to see the root cause of the existing problems if any and evolve improvement strategies) and *brief*. Thus, the report which follows the principle of coherence reflects

- logical soundness of thought;
- spontaneous sequencing of sentences in a paragraph to match flow of ideas; and
- sequential arrangement of the components (criteria-reports, for instance) of the report.

### 4.4.2. Cohesion

The language of the report should be precise, clear, simple and direct. Cohesion can achieve these attributes of verbalization. It is nothing but avoiding verbal excess, ambiguity, involved sentences which are difficult to read, roundabout expressions, repetitions, exaggerations and poetic language. Thus, a report which is written following the principle of cohesion has statements which are clear, concise and meaningful to enable the institution to fully understand the situation and take necessary steps for improvement/corrective action.

### 4.4.3. Illustrations of Coherence and Cohesion

Some of the features of coherence and cohesion are critically illustrated in the following four excerpts taken from NAACís Peer Team reports;

**Coherence - Illustration - 1**

> *There is a student training cell, which works in collaboration with..... Industries Association and the college........... Training Programme. The Entrepreneur Development Cell of the college trains students for self-employment in collaboration with the..... State Centre for Entrepreneur Development, ..... City. A few industrial units collaborate with the college to identify potential students for employment training. The college also collaborates with IACIT ... University, Lions Club and other NGOs for the same purpose. Student progression to employment has improved in quantum up to 50% of successful graduates each year.*

The paragraph quoted from one of the reports is coherent. The first sentence (usually a single sentence summary of the ideas expressed in the whole paragraph often described as the *Topic Sentence*) states the central idea of the paragraph, namely, collaboration with industry for student entrepreneurial development. Sentences 2, 3 and 4 follow up the idea with three illustrations thereby authenticating the main statement with significant facts as evidences. The last sentence authenticates the observation with a value conveyed through one of NAACís Key Indicators, namely, student progression to employment through entrepreneurial programmes.

**Coherence - Illustration - 2**

Let us look at the following passage, also quoted from another report:

> *The college has a transparent admission process. Students are admitted to various courses through entrance tests, interviews and past academic record. However, as the college is government aided, admission of students is governed by the government policy of reservation of seats for different categories of socially discriminated students. Student performance is assessed with periodical tests. The college supports the educationally disadvantaged students by conducting remedial courses for them. Advanced learners are encouraged to arrange as well as participate in seminars, competitive events, etc. (NAAC, Great Institutions of Higher Learning: Accredited Colleges in India, 2005, p.9)*

The opening statement is well written and it introduces a key Core Indicator of NAAC, namely, transparency in admission processes. Sentences 2 and 3 logically develop the idea: 2 illustrates the transparent process and 3, logically, comments on a limitation of the process. The thought well developed with logical consistency thus far, however, is dropped in the middle. The writer jumps to a second idea in sentence 4 (i.e. assessment) and to a third idea in sentences 5 and 6 (i.e. differential pedagogy for slow and advanced learners). Three ideas in a paragraph cannot contribute to coherence and logical consistency, which depends on a single idea in each paragraph.

**Coherence and Cohesion: Illustration - 3**

(The sentences are numbered in order to facilitate our discussion)

> *"Criterion III : Research, Consultancy and Extension[1] Teachers of the college are encouraged to undertake active research programmes.[2] About four teachers of the college have registered themselves for the Ph.D. degree.[3] The college, however, undertakes such activities as NSS.[4] There are literary associations, study societies in the college which are active in conducting various extension activities like community development, health and hygiene awareness, adult education and literacy, AIDS awareness, social work, medical camp and environment awareness, etc. of the college.[5] There are no on-going research projects.[6] As such, the college does not offer any consultancy services." (Kurukshetra University, 2005)*

**Analysis**

The following table presents an analysis and suggested improvements in the areas of coherence, cohesion and assessment in general.

**Table 7**

**Coherence and Cohesion in Writing Reports - Illustration I**

| Coherence | Cohesion | Assessment |
|---|---|---|
| 1. The paragraph may begin with a general evaluative statement about the theme. As at least two themes are involved (research and consultancy; and extension) two paragraphs may be better. | 1. The first two sentences have cohesion: the term “about” introduces an illustration of the initial idea.They are cohesive. | 1. Mere listing of that which is in the SSR may be replaced by assessment. It is missing because there is little validation. |
| 2. Hence sentences 1,2,5 and 6 may be put together. 3 and 4 may constitute the second paragraph. | 2. Sentence 3 is abrupt. The connection of “however” with the earlier sentences is not clear. 4 naturally follows. | 2. Key indicators may govern reporting the assessment. |
| 3. Fact-based ideas may be included to expand the scanty observations in order to provide substance to the paragraphs. | 3. Sentences 5 and 6 do not have cohesion with the earlier sentences. “There” does not help to reinforce cohesion as it is an indefinite word without a connective potential. | 3.Strengths and weaknesses may be clearly dealt with in separate sub-sections. |
| 4. Illustrations, critical observations and assessing comments may help logical sequencing of ideas better. | 4. Formal and structural cohesion may be provided. The paragraph may be provided a beginning and an end. Internal structure may follow classifications like strengths and weaknesses, observations and suggestions, etc. | 4. Assessors’contribution to suggestive evaluation is not evident.<br>5. Holistic assessment of a criterion may be kept under focus while individual Key Indicators are dealt with. |

**Coherence and Cohesion : Illustration - 4**

The following passage is better organized. However, it needs improvement in order to be an assessment of performance. The table that follows the passage may give you an idea of the improvement it needs.

“**Criterion III :** Research, Consultancy and Extension

The college has research potential and it promotes research by encouraging, motivating and supporting teachers to undertake research activities. As many as 35 teachers have research degrees and most others have also registered for them. The Departments of Tamil, Hindi, History, English, Zoology and Chemistry have teachers with Ph.D. degrees. Some teachers have also published research papers in journals of national repute. As a degree college, it has put in its optimal effort into research although the quantum is small.

The college has not established any formal consultancy service. Some teachers of the college provide honorary consultancy to the rural neighbourhood. The college may establish a consultancy cell to promote consultancy service. Faculty may be advised to apply for research projects and to pursue research more intensively. They may also be encouraged to acquire research degrees if they have not done so.

*The college is very well known for its extension activities. Being a service-oriented institution, it has adopted some villages in its neighbourhood and rendered significant services for their development. Staff and students also participate in government community development programmes. The extension activities taken up by the college include social work, health and hygiene awareness campaigns, medical camps, adult education and literacy programmes, pro-life awareness, personality development and leadership training. The college has some outreach activities. All of them are well planned. Students and staff are encouraged to participate in them through incentives and rewards including issue of certificates. The very system of education which is followed by the college is an inbuilt extension programme. Therefore staff and students voluntarily take up those activities without any pressure from any quarter".*

**TABLE 8**

**Coherence and Cohesion in Writing Reports : Illustration - II**

| Coherence | Cohesion | Assessment |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Ideas are classified under two themes, each accommodated in a paragraph. | 1. Language needs precision: the terms "encouraging, motivating and supporting" are not specific and they are not justified by evidence.2. The repetition of "The College" may be avoided by substituting it with the pronoun "it". | 1. Of the seven Key Indicators provided by NAAC three have not been mentioned. The first, viz. promotion of research, is neither validated nor authenticated. Instead, the presence of research alone is mentioned. The core indicator of honorary/paid consultancy is mentioned only in passing without validation. |
| 2. However, the sentences introducing the themes need greater focus and precision. The first sentence may mention either the presence or quantum of research which is illustrated. Similarly, the lead sentence of the second paragraph may appropriately introduce activities rather than mention their popularity ("well known") | 3. "most others", "some teachers", "some villages", etc. are not specific enough to be included in a factual report. | 2. Validation may go hand in hand with authentication. The second paragraph is more illustrative than validating.<br>3. Tentative remarks (.."if they have not done so") betray imperfect scrutiny-a lacuna in assessment. |

These analyses only seek to identify that which an assessor should bestow extra care upon. One may assess without depending on them too closely. They are presented here only to impress upon you the need to get habitually used to clearer perceptions of nuances of assessment in some detail. This will help you to keep assessment free from *adhocism* and *arbitrariness*.

## 4.5. Errors in Cohesive writing

Some of these are illustrated below :

**Table 9**

**Errors in Cohesion**

| Name of the Cohesive flaw | Explanation | Example | Improved Version |
|---|---|---|---|
| Camouflaged Vocabulary | The word that should be a verb is disguised as a noun. (This affects directness) | The establishment of IQAC was recommended. | They were advised to establish the IQAC. |
| Redundancy | Verbal excess or duplication | return backrepeat againmidway betweenend resulteye witnessperiod of five years the fact that actual truthon the occasion ofin spite of the fact that | return repeat between result witness (except in some legal contexts) five years thattruthat or when although |
| Cliché | overused expressions which mar freshness in reports | Subsequent to the first accreditation the college spared no effort to tone up the quality of its pedagogy. | The college has been working hard to improve the quality of teaching, after the first accreditation. |
| Hyperbole or Hype | exaggeration | The college has done yeoman service to the children of the farmers in the region by giving them excellent education | The college has been particularly helpful to youth from local farming communities. They receive special education to improve farm assets. |
| Over-Reaching Brief | Doing things beyond one's legitimate term of reference. | The achievement of the college is fantastic and it deserves the status of Deemed-to-be-University | The college has done well to deserve encouragement |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Long, unfamilar words | They cloud meaning by their unfamiliarity | Antagonistic obliterate endeavour ascertain terminate demonstrate | opposite destroy attempt or try find out or make sure to end show |
| Metaphorical or poetic language | literary style unsuitable for report language | The students of the college have bagged many university ranks.<br><br>The IQAC has scaled new heights by getting the ISO 9000 : 2000 certification for the college. | (a metaphor from shooting birds and collecting them in bags) "obtained" can replace it.<br><br>The effort of the IQAC in obtaining the ISO 9000: 2000 certification for the college is unique (or remarkable). |
| Circumlocution | round about way of stating an idea (This often results from writing long sentences) | The Peer Team after going through the Self-Study Report and visits to various academic and physical facilities, meetings and discussions with various constituencies and verification of records, is of the opinion that ... college is making considerable contributions in meeting the higher education needs of this economically and socially backward region in the ... district of .... | At the completion of its assessment, the Peer Team was convinced that the college has successfully met needs of the local community with its educational programmes and performance. |

## 4.6. Style

Style plays an important role in facilitating communication both orally and in writing. It promotes sound inter-personal transactions. Style is not verbal decoration: it is more a social construct than a linguistic display. Report writing is concerned with perspectives of the writer and the reader or the recipient. If the writer adopts, for instance, a condescending tone and resorts to hectoring (as it happens is some NAAC assessment reports), that which is conveyed is either ignored or shelved. On the other hand, suggestions and comments made with deference to the point of view of the institution are likely to receive better attention and follow up. Report writing, therefore, generally favours the *You-Attitude* as against the ìIíí/ We-Attitudeî. The following may be a helpful checklist for assessors:

**Table 10**

**A. Features of Attitudes**

| I/We -Attitude | You – Attitude |
|---|---|
| egocentric | exocentric (other-oriented) |
| condescending | courteous and deferring (respectful) |
| closed | open |
| negative | positive |
| cold | warm |
| hectoring (aggressive) | pliant (flexible, accommodating) |

**B. Illustrations**

| I/WE- Attitude | You – Attitude |
|---|---|
| "The college has reached a state of stagnation" (and there is no hope of regaining its past glory).<br>(closed - condescending) | The college will and can overcome adverse circumstances through sustained institution-building strategies.<br>Some are already evident.<br>(open - helpful - deferring) |
| "The Assistant Director of Collegiate Education who attended the session could not provide facts and figures regarding the management of the college"<br>(hectoring) | The institution can be helped if the government is positively involved in its performance and progress.<br>(accommodating - suggestive) |
| "The credibility of NAAC will be undermined if the college fails to make a U turn"<br>(egocentric and judgemental negative.) | A planned programme of reform following the present introspection can help the college uphold the credibility of NAAC's processes. (positive - exocentric) |

## 4.7. Tips for Good Report Writing

Most of the tips offered by the QAAs are summarized in the following table, which presents, in parallel dots, positive and negative tips for good report writing.

**Table 11 : Tips for Good Report Writing**

| Tips For | Tips Against |
|---|---|
| • Match grade with content of report.<br>• Let judgement be clear and stand firmly on QAAs criteria of validation.<br>• Let assessment complement internal quality processes.<br>• Recommend that which is helpful and practical in the context of the institution.\<br>• Validation statements should be well authenticated.<br>• Let the report be clear, precise and positive.<br>• Let the report be organized with logical soundness.<br>• Let the language of the report be cohesive and precise.<br>• Maintain the perspective of the assessee-institution.<br>• Write in a tone that is pleasant and acceptable.<br>• Be indicative in suggestions.<br>• Let the report follow the flow of ideas without interruption. | • Avoid arbitrariness in both validation and determination of scores.<br>• Do not let one's own insights supersede validation made with QAA's criteria.<br>• Do not impose, directly or indirectly, any external practices not compatible with those of the institution.<br>• Do not recommend that which violates norms of either the institution or the government.<br>• Avoid subjective judgement based on impressions and not on evidence.<br>• Avoid ambiguous ideas and expressions.<br>• Avoid errors of logic in the assessment.<br>• Avoid descriptions which are not necessary for validation.<br>• Do not judge or write from one's own perspective.<br>• Do not take a magisterial stance.<br>• Do not be prescriptive.<br>• Do not include tables, graphs, pictures, etc. in the running text. |

### 4.7.1. Check-list for Finalizing a Good Report

The following check-list may help finalize a good report:

Content is :

- clear;
- evidence ñ based;
- evaluative;
- logically structured;
- criteria / Indicator-based;
- analytical, to project strengths and weaknesses ;
- not violative of institutional and government norms in recommendations;
- not impressionistic;

- not based on personal experiences of members of the Peer Team; and is
- well-organized in form and structure.

Writing is:

- logically coherent, well argued and convincing;
- cohesive: language is clear and unambiguous;
- institution - oriented in attitude;
- not hectoring or condescending;
- couched in language not repetitive;
- substantial, and not inadequate; and
- free from offensively negative comments.

Score - Content Parity is achieved by:

- measurement by score that matches content;
- an institutional grade which reflects a holistic assessment of both Key aspects/assessment Indicator-wise scores and that of overall assessment of performance;
- content not being inadequate to justify score; and
- a standardized measure adopted through the report.

The report:

- adheres to rules of length
- is consistent in parts;
- does not contain tables and charts in the body; and
- is well-documented with supportive enclosures and references.

## 4.8. Errors, which undermine good Reporting

Consistency in thought (logical coherence) is often affected by illogical statements. The following table names such errors and explains them:

**Table 12**

**Errors of Reasoning**

| Name of Error | Explanation | Example (all taken from reports) |
|---|---|---|
| Hasty Generalisation | making a sweeping judgement on the basis of insufficient evidence or special cases | *The college has now reached a stage of stagnation. Its bifurcation has perhaps affected its progress. It should have remained as a co-education institution* |
| Hidden Assumption | hiding a questionable major premise | *It is important that many teachers need to be induced to avail the funding facilities provided by UGC.* |
| Bi-Polar (impossible) Alternatives | setting up two alternatives neither of which is feasible or probable | *The government may set up a satellite town at ... This is the most urgent need of the population in this drought prone area (without it they have no hope).* |
| Illogical Statement | not strictly logical - states a parpal truth. | *Library facility is fairly good as there is sufficient space for students to study here.* |
| Begged Question | assuming as proven what the reporter is seeking to prove | *"Tests and mid-term and preparatory exams indicate learning absorption".* (The assessor is seeking to prove that knowledge assimilation has taken place because of the use of some instrument. However, it is oblivious that tests which are terminal and assess memory skills are not often serviceable in knowledge acquisition) |
| Missing Logical Connnections | forgetfully contradicting an earlier observation or statement | *Even though (the Principal) has the requisite knowledge and information to run the college, the administration and management structure prevents bringing any new ideas and changes for the betterment of the institution. A little later, on the same page: ".. the Principal has made enormous contribution in providing leadership and bringing in oneness in the college... Her approach provided excellent interpersonal relationships."* (The logical discontinuity leaves the failure of the Principal's excellent interpersonal skills with the Management unexplained.) |

## 4.9. SUMMARY

In this chapter we have

- understood the purpose and importance of the Peer Team Report;
- had an appraisal of the form and structure of the report: the tripartite division - introduction, criterion - wise analysis and overall-analysis ñ with NAACís practice as an example;
- looked at an illustrated process of validation based on evidences in terms of the seven criteria of NAAC and their Key Indicators;
- discriminated between criterion-wise validation of parts of the report and the overall content validation and between consistency of what has been written and the quantitative scores/ grades;
- become aware of the importance of the assessment outcome/grade-report parity achieved by fact-based writing, explicitness in presentation and by control of writing visëa-vis its measurement, with team consensus; and finally
- gone through the tips offered for good report-writing and the check-list provided for finalizing the report.

## 4.10. Reflective Exercises for Practice

1. Study the following section of an institutional peer team report (PTR) from the point of view of the validation and authentication processes adopted by the assessors: assign criterion score according to Key Indicators (This exercise is with reference to the NAAC process and the details of which can be obtained from the website www.naacindia.org)

> *"**Criterion V: Student Support and Progression** During 2003-04 the percentage of students appearing for the qualifying examination after the minimum period of study ranges between 80% in arts and 90% in computer sciences. The dropout rate in commerce and science was 5% and it was 10% in arts, 0.045% in computer science. Progression to employment and to further study from UG and PG is approximately 20%. The alumni of the college are stated to occupy prominent positions in different walks of life. About 35 old students of the college have passed the All India competitive examinations during the past five years.*
>
> *The college publishes its updated prospectus annually. Eligible students can avail themselves of different kinds of aid from the central government, the state government and the university. The Kargil Free Education Scheme introduced by the Management has benefited many students. The*

*college has an employment cell and a placement officer who helps students in their search for employment. College teachers also participate in academic and personal counselling to students within and outside the classroom as and when needed.*

*Educational tours are organized by all the postgraduate departments once or twice every year. Students of professional courses are taken to different industrial organizations to acquire practical skills in order to help them develop their employability. High achievers, distinguished sports - persons and artistes are awarded medals, freeships, fee concessions, free books and cash awards. Some philanthropists have donated cash awards and medals to students for distinction in performance. The recreational / leisure time facility available to students includes indoor games, student magazines, cultural programmes, Rotract Club and Science Prudentia Association.*

*Several alumni of the college are known to have excelled in many fields as cricket test players, tennis stars, heads of overseas universities, Vice Chancellors, Chief Ministers. The college is the nursery of many budding radio / TV artistes and sports - persons of national and international repute. The Peer Team was pleased to know that one body builder of the college has won three silver medals in the Asian weightlifting competition, three gold medals in South Asian Games and Participated in the World Championship meet and has been decorated with the Arjuna Award. It is commendable that one student has won the Indira Gandhi National NSS Award, another the Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh Award and yet another the governor's award for social service. (NAAC, Great Institutions Of Higher Learning: Accredited Colleges in India, 2005, pp.43-44)*

2. Reflect on how an inter-play of QAAís core values and the assessment criteria framework may be made explicit. Make notes on how this can be done when you go through a Self Study Report and when you write a Peer Team Report.

3. Reflect on the ways measurement can be made to contribute to a fairly good degree of objectivity in assessment.

4. Obtain a Self-Study Report from either NAAC or any other QAA or a college (it may be your own, if it has been accredited) and examine the corresponding PTR in the light of the discussion found in this part of the handbook.

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# Glossary

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Accreditation | : | Official approval given by an organization stating that something or somebody has achieved a required standard ñNAAC, however, delimits it to mean the process of identifying such a standard using weighted scores and a grading system. |
| Adjacency Pairs | : | A set of exchanges between two people in a conversation - the exchanges are closely related to each other, i.e. they are adjacent. Thus, greeting is followed by return of greeting, request by compliance or declining and so on. Adjacency Pairs control coherence and focus of thought. |
| Assessment | : | A considered judgment of educational performance carefully made by an official body. |
| Assessor | : | A person who evaluates the performance of an educational institution as part of a Peer Team. Generically it means one who evaluates something as a member of an official body, applying standards that are given or are evolved. |
| Audit | : | An official/or informal examination of the quality or standard of something ñ ìAcademic Auditî is often internal and informal, through regulated processes |
| Authentication | : | Generally used as a synonym of ìvalidationî but it refers specifically to evidences used for approving a claim made by validating it (i.e. fixing the validity) according to given criteria of judgment. It is a process leading to an end. |
| Coherence | : | An indispensable element of writing - A coherent text has consistency in both paragraphs and discourses, natural flow of thought and logicality in the sequence and structure of meaning. |
| Cohesion | : | A communicative device, which promotes verbal unity in writing-, it primarily refers to *discoursal unity* across sentences within and beyond paragraphs (as in a report, for instance). It is obtained by using sentence-connectors and by avoiding verbal redundancy. |
| Communicative speech & writing | : | Observance of coherence of ideas and cohesion of expression without repetitive redundancy constitutes communicative speech and writing. |

Core Indicator : It indicates a vital aspect that needs evaluation in order to assess the performance of an institution under a given criterion. ìCourse optionî, for example, is a Core Indicator under the Criterion, ìCurricular Aspectsî.

Core value : The most important part of the value system which underlies an activity. NAAC has spelt out a set of five core values, which underlie institutional assessment as a whole.

Criterion : A standard or principle used for making a decision. NAAC has evolved a framework of seven criteria to assess institutional performance as a whole. These are the bases of validation of claims of performance made by an institution in its Self-Study Report (SSR); or Re-accreditation Report (RAR).

Feedback : ìadvice, criticism or information about how good or useful some activity isî ñ This is exactly what assessment seeks to offer to the assessee. Every stakeholder has a right to provide feedback on aspects or the whole of performance of the institution of which he or she is a part.

Institutionalization : Counter-part of internalization - it means making some activity ìpart of an organized system.î An *ad hoc* good practice gets institutionalized when it becomes part of a curriculum or para-curriculum with provision made for its continuance.

Intangible skill : Skill that is not available for instant visible record although it may be made available subsequently by secondary documentation. Skills of listening and speaking are called ì*intangible skills*î in this handbook.

Internalization : Making a feeling, an attitude or a quality part of the way one thinks and behaves ñ constant generation of good practices in all aspects of an activity or process is an illustration.

Maxims of conversation : These are unwritten conventions. the *maxim of quantity* emphasizes verbal adequacy and avoidance of verbal redundancy; the *maxim of quality* insists on the sincerity of each interaction in conversation. This is evident in the absence of empty verbal filling such as flattery, hypocrisy, eulogy etc. The *maxim of relevance* insists on focus on the theme of discussion.

Peer : A companion assessor, a colleague while making an assessment

Peer Team : A group of peers in assessment - The Peer Team is set by NAAC, comprising a limited number of senior educators, to visit and assess an institution assigned to it for the purpose.

| | |
|---|---|
| Programme assessment: | In AmE. ìa course of studyî especially, ìan individual unit that forms part of a longer period of studyî- In Br.E it is called a ìmoduleî. The term ìcourseî can also mean, in Br.E., a period of study at a college or university as in ì a two year courseî In NAACís literature programme assessment means an evaluation of subjects studied by students of a department. |
| Quality Assurance : | Assurance is a synonym of ìpromiseî. ìQuality Assuranceî is a statement that something will certainly be true or will happen, particularly when there has been doubt about itî. This meaning of the lexicon differs from the connotation of NAAC: Quality Assurance is a certification made by NAAC to the stakeholders of an institution about its standard of performance. |
| Quality enhancement : | Increase or further improvement of the good quality or value or status of performance. |
| Quality sustenance : | The process of making quality prevail ñ This is often achieved by internalization and institutionalization. |
| Skills of listening : | The *Intangible Skill* of listening has the following sub-skills. empathetic listening, active listening, critical listening and deferential listening. |
| Skills of speaking : | Speech skills required for assessment reinforce conversational interaction in teams. They are governed by unwritten maxims. (see ìmaximsî) |
| Stake-holder/ stakeholder: | Person involved in a particular organization or project or system by virtue of being one of its members and who has a common interest in its success. Stakeholders of an educational institution are students, faculty, alumni, employers, knowledge producers and society which expects its service. They are directly or indirectly involved in the performance of an institution. |
| Tangible skill : | Skill that is made visible in record by writing ñ Writing skills are called *tangible skills* in this handbook. Visual aids may also be called tangible. |
| Team skills : | Team playing requires skills for working in groups. These are mostly intangible. They include *team maintenance* and *task facilitation* skills. The former promote inter-personal co-ordination and co-operation in the observance of group dynamics. |
| Validation : | ìproof of some truthî, ì official statement that something is useful and of an acceptable standardî- note that evidences are necessary to make such a statement. The statement constitutes validation; and the proof, its authentication. In NAACís process, validation is based on a set of given criteria. |

# Annexure

**The key Indicator—Wise Weightages Used by NAAC for Assigning Institutional Scores**

| Criteria and Key Indicators | University | Autonomous College | Affiliated College |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Curricular Aspects** | | | |
| Goal Orientation | 25 | 25 | 25 |
| Curriculum Development | 70 | 70 | 20 |
| Programme Options | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| Academic Flexibility | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| Feedback Mechanism | 25 | 25 | 25 |
| **Total** | **150** | **150** | **100** |
| **Teaching-Learning and Evaluation** | | | |
| Admission Process | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Catering to Diverse Needs | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Teaching-Learning Process | 120 | 150 | 250 |
| Teacher Quality | 50 | 50 | 50 |
| Evaluation of Teaching | 20 | 20 | 30 |
| Evaluation of Learning | 20 | 20 | 30 |
| Evaluation Reforms | 20 | 40 | 20 |
| **Total** | **250** | **300** | **400** |
| **Research, Consultancy and Extension** | | | |
| Promotion of Research | 20 | 10 | 10 |
| Research Output | 60 | 40 | 5 |
| Publication Output | 20 | 10 | 5 |
| Consultancy | 10 | 10 | 5 |
| Extension Activities | 10 | 10 | 10 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participation in Extension | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Linkages | 20 | 10 | 5 |
| **Total** | **150** | **100** | **50** |
| **Infrastructure and Learning Resources** | | | |
| Physical Facilities | 35 | 35 | 35 |
| Maintenance of Infrastructure | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| Library as a Learning Resource | 35 | 35 | 35 |
| Computers as Learning Resources | 25 | 25 | 25 |
| Other Facilities | 40 | 40 | 40 |
| **Total** | **150** | **150** | **150** |
| **Student Support and Progression** | | | |
| Student Profile | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Student Progression | 35 | 35 | 35 |
| Student Support | 30 | 30 | 30 |
| Student Activities | 25 | 25 | 25 |
| **Total** | **100** | **100** | **100** |
| **Organization and Management** | | | |
| Goal Orientation and Decision-Making | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Organization Structure, Powers and Functions of the Functionaries | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| Perspective Planning | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Human power Planning and Recruitment | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Performance Appraisal | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Staff Development Programmes | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Resource Mobilization | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Finance Management | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| **Total** | **100** | **100** | **100** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Healthy Practices** | | | |
| Total Quality Management | 30 | 30 | 30 |
| Innovations | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| Value-Based Education | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Social Responsibilities and Citizenship Roles | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Overall Development | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| Institutional Ambience and Initiatives | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| **Total** | **100** | **100** | **100** |
| **Grand Total** | **1000** | **1000** | **1000** |