



PG 10
DANCE AWAY
'Celeb'rating his graceful steps

Bharatanatyam and Kathakali exponent Karthik Nair tells us about sharing the stage with Hema Malini

PG 11
CANDID CLICKS
Capturing street life

Military man-turned-photographer Sekar Akash snaps human lives in their raw forms



COVER
STORY

GET THAT GRADE

A good accreditation from them can prove to be a big game changer for any institute, such is the value that the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has always had

P8-9



FACTOR IT IN

How much weightage do you give NAAC grades while applying to an institute?

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SPEEDS IN INDIA ON A PERPETUAL BUFFER

As per a report by broadband speed analysis firm Ookla, India's mobile broadband speed is slower than that of our neighbours Pakistan and Bhutan. No wonder that buffering symbol just won't leave us alone!



LESSONS FROM THE CANTEEN

Check out our all new gyaan-free, back-bench column from Harimohan Paruvu about what you will learn from college, but probably not in class | PG 11

Serious discussions in progress



IN TALKS: Dr Sharma in a deep discussion with the Governor of Tamil Nadu, Banwarilal Purohit



WHAT AN HONOUR: Dr Sharma with Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Founder of the Art of Living Foundation, and other dignitaries



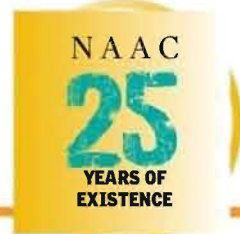
WHEN THEY MET: Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi along with Dr Sharma



SAYING IT WITH FLOWERS: Dr Sharma welcoming a dignitary with flowers during one of NAAC's programmes



ON THE OCCASION: Dr Sharma, Governor of Tamil Nadu, Banwarilal Purohit and other dignitaries



Universities that top the NAAC list

Here is a list of four of the top NAAC 'A++', 'A+' and 'A' accredited universities in India known for quality teaching



1 SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Tamil Nadu: A++ grade



2 JSS Academy of Higher Education and Research, Karnataka: A+ grade



3 Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tamil Nadu: A grade



4 National Law School of India University, Karnataka: A grade

Every college in India is thirsty for a NAAC grade because getting that coveted gold star is the pathway to greater grants, educational status and pull. NAAC's Director S C Sharma walks us through how NAAC has evolved in their 25 years of existence

That uncanny 'NAAC' for great education

When the room in your college that has a board proclaiming it's the 'Internal Quality Assessment Cell' is abuzz with unusually high activity, it probably means that winter is coming. Or in non-Game of Thrones style, an all important accreditation by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is nigh. An autonomous body set up by the National Policy on Education and the Programme of Action, NAAC began its journey of giving Indian colleges a rating in 1994 — a practice that was hitherto unknown and somewhat alien at the time.

Cut to 2019 and NAAC is a behemoth in the grading line. Appreciated across the board for the transparency and thought that has gone into their system of measuring how good a college is, NAAC has applied scientific principles so accurately that they have reduced human error to nearly nought. And in India, that is an achievement to talk about.

Since 2018, NAAC's current director Dr S C Sharma has been piloting this ship and he has set his sights on some pretty tough destinations — to try and handhold colleges in the North East and Kashmir to look inward, get their thoughts and infrastructure organised and get a NAAC rating. A career academician who has worked as the VC of Chhattisgarh Swami Vivekanand Technical University, Bhilai and the Tumkur University, the specialist in Nano Technology talked us through his roadmap for Indian higher education and why he hopes their high bar of transparency will start rubbing off on India's private colleges. Excerpts from a conversation:



SCAN THIS CODE TO READ THE WHOLE STORY

Reach Out naac.gov.in

1 This is a landmark year for NAAC, having turned 25. With the new National Education Policy coming into effect soon, will the functioning of NAAC be changed in any way?

NAAC has been functioning well ever since it was started 25 years ago and it has slowly picked up. From my reading of the NEP, it will continue to function as an independent body. The regulatory bodies (like UGC) and the accreditation bodies will be two independent bodies. This has to be independent because we will (be able to) assess institutions impartially.

2 Will enforcement not be easier if the accreditation bodies work with the regulatory ones to take action when institutions are found lacking?

NAAC functions a lot like the Lokayuktas. Lokayuktas function independently and autonomously and there is no interference from the government. They have freedom to operate. Similarly, NAAC is only an assessment and accreditation body. It will only give the benchmark for quality in higher education. We will tell you what the quality of a particular institute is based on the qualitative score and the quantitative score. The regulatory body has nothing to do with it.

3 From time to time, institutions resort to falsifying documents to get a better grade. How is this dealt with?

I can boldly say that in 99.9 per cent of the cases — random error and error of judgement are eliminated, but the only experimental error remains and this happens when someone has submitted a fudged document or if there is an oversight — justice is upheld. When a university fudges documents we blacklist the institution for five years. We are very stringent with our actions.

4 How have urban colleges been faring in comparison

to town and village colleges as far as NAAC's grading is concerned?

The divide between rural and urban colleges is only a thin line. Except in remote places where there are no bus facilities or internet. MHRD, NITI Aayog and the PMO have been doing a great job. If you look at history, inclusive growth is the buzzword. Even in the smallest of villages there are computers with internet connectivity. Of course, there may be power shortages but they can make do with a generator or UPS.

5 There have been times when deserving colleges may not have the know-how to make their case before NAAC. What happens then?

In such cases, NAAC makes the effort and goes to them, raises awareness and makes them work hard and asks them to earn their grade and see to it that they are brought into the ambit of NAAC. Some of my senior colleagues have gone 24 times to the North East to bring colleges into the fold. Kashmir is another place that we are reaching out to colleges to help them get a good grade. Now, we are focusing on UP and Odisha.

6 How much of a role do you foresee for quality assessors in the future?

The next 20 years should see the doing away of this kind of gradation. Institutions should either be accredited or not. If a person voluntarily comes forward and discloses details and get the NAAC grading — like they do for Income Tax — without it being a mandate, that is when we can say that our country has progressed in the quality of higher education.

NAAC'S GRADING SCALE

Decoding the whole process

Institutions are graded for each key aspect under four categories, viz A, B, C and D, denoting Very good, Good, Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory levels respectively. The summated score for all the key aspects under a criterion is then calculated with the appropriate weightage applied to it



There is no incongruence between the NIRF and NAAC's guidelines. NAAC has a stock-barrel approach while NIRF is dynamic and the parameters are adjusted every year

Dr S C Sharma, Director, NAAC



Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA)

7 parameters of excellence

THE FOUR-POINT RULE

Dr Sharma is almost forcefully sure that NAAC will not yield or bend when it comes to accreditation and tells us that the pillars they lean on to do their job right are

- Transparency
- Honesty
- Pure merit
- Give a patient hearing to HEIs if NAAC has gone wrong anywhere



What does NAAC look for in a college?

- Curricular Aspects
- Curriculum Design and Development
- Curricular Planning and Implementation
- Academic Flexibility
- Curriculum Enrichment
- Feedback System



Teaching-learning and Evaluation

- Student Enrolment and Profile
- Catering to Student Diversity
- Teaching-Learning Process
- Teacher Profile and Quality
- Evaluation Process and Reforms
- Student Satisfaction Survey



Research, Innovations and Extension

- Promotion of Research and Facilities
- Resource Mobilisation for Research
- Innovation Ecosystem
- Research Publications and Awards
- Consultancy and Collaboration
- Extension Activities



Infrastructure and Learning Resources

- Physical facilities
- Library as a Learning resource
- IT Infrastructure
- Maintenance of Campus
- Infrastructure



Student Support and Progression

- Student Support and Progression
- Student Participation and Activities
- Alumni Engagement



Governance, Leadership and Management

- Institutional Vision and Leadership
- Strategy Development and Deployment
- Faculty Empowerment Strategies
- Financial Management
- Internal Quality Assurance System



Institutional Values and Best Practices

- Institutional Values and Social Responsibilities
- Best Practices and Institutional Distinctiveness

Photos: Nagaraja Gadikal