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Challenges and Future Prospects in Online Submission of SSR

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**Dayanand Arya Kanya
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Online SSR Submission: The Challenges and the Antidote**Dr Pranjali S. Kane**

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Abstract:

HEIs and NAAC have become inseparable part of each other. Going forward in embracing NEP 2020, quality sustenance and enhancement are going to be the buzz words. The TL process, administrative process and Research domain are the three pillars which play pivotal role. The first part of this paper is going to concentrate upon the challenges that HEIs face in the submission of the revised formats of SSR and AQAR of NAAC. The second part will deal with the probable solutions for the problems raised.

Keywords: NAAC, SSR, Revised formats, Mandate, Criterion

Introduction:

The post millennial age has been an age of changing perspectives and focused methodologies as far as the education field is concerned. Gone are the days of the traditional ways of imparting knowledge and the timebound system of evaluation. The autonomous body of NAAC has propounded the mandate of quality initiation and sustenance in HEIs through a defined process. Reluctantly though, the higher education institutions are following it with nearly 25% Colleges already accredited atleast once. According to the announcement of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, it was going to cover all the HEIs of the country by 2022. The Paramarsh scheme encourages HEIs to apply for NAAC. The pandemic has delayed the plans, but at the same time, it has given them some leverage in bringing PAC for the Colleges applying for the first time. The provisional accreditation will bring the college under the ambit of NAAC.

The pandemic has not only delayed the accreditation process for many, but also posed one more issue. According to the new AQAR 2020-21 format, 70% of the assessment is based upon quantitative metric whereas only 30% is assessed by the Peer Team during the visit. The new AQAR format is SSR in miniature. This has put the onus on the online submissions with focus on documentation. However, with many HEIs facing a scarcity of manpower, limited infrastructure and lack of basic knowledge of ICT, this seems to be a mammoth task. Let us analyze the various factors influencing the accreditation process. But before that, let us know about the IQAC and the SSR/AQAR formats in short.

Internal Quality Assurance Cell:

Every HEI has an Internal Quality Assurance Cell according to the mandate of NAAC with the intention of maintaining the quality with its systems and initiatives in the College. The main work of IQAC is to develop systems for conscious, consistent, and catalytic improvement in the overall performance of the Institution. The composition of the IQAC is according to the number of streams and courses taught in the HEIs. The insistence of including members from society, alumni, student, and parents' representative with a member from Management, and a few senior and experienced teachers, is to ensure proper representation. Every stakeholder's contribution is solicited. The 4-point scale of measurement is distributed evenly between all aspects of the Teaching Learning process.

Structure of SSR Format:

Let us discuss the Annual Quality Assurance Report and Self Study Report to be submitted by the HEIs to NAAC for accreditation. There has been a paradigm shift in the AQAR and the SSR with the introduction of the revised accreditation framework by NAAC. 70% assessment of the quantitative metric is done online. And the rest of the 30%, the Peer Team visits the HEIs and assesses the infrastructure and the supporting documents of the Teaching Learning process. To put it in other words, NAAC has accepted the objective approach in the verification and validation process. The Data Verification process is also given to a third party for impartial and fast assessment. The Student Satisfaction Survey which carries the greatest weightage of 60 marks is done as soon as the SSR is submitted.

The SSR Format has Part A with Profile of the Institution, Extended Profile and Part B with seven Criteria. Each Criteria deals with a particular aspect of the TL process. The Curriculum Enrichment Criteria talks of the syllabus and the co-curricular activities planned by the institution with the CBCS / Elective pattern and the Feedback of the stakeholders on the curriculum designed for the students. The second Criterion carries the maximum weightage and deals with the Teaching – Learning process. The third Criterion deals with Research and Extension activities. The fourth Criterion concentrates upon the infrastructure and the financial transactions. The sixth is about governance and the seventh is quantitative dealing with gender sensitization, green practices, and best practices.

Challenges:

One of the major challenges in the revised accreditation framework is the submission of data of every event or activity conducted by the College. At times, it is also the easiest thing. It is enough for the College to produce data with geotagged photographs even if the event has not been conducted.

The appointment of a teacher as the IQAC Coordinator is the most crucial thing. Unfortunately, the choice is always done based on the English proficiency and ICT knowledge of the person. This is against the NAAC mandate of appointing the senior professor cadre people as the coordinators. By the time a teacher becomes a professor, he or she loses the will to look into the welfare of the college at large. They are also not techno-savvy. They concentrate more on their academic endeavor than the administrative domain. This increases the pressure on the English department faculty as the SSR is supposed to be in English. It was only on 2nd Aug 2021 that NAAC has introduced the Hindi version of the SSR. It will be miles till we have the SSR available in the vernacular languages. One of the mandates of NEP 2020 is the stress on the mother tongue at the primary level. And yet the HEIs are required to produce all data in English or Hindi only. For doing this, the required manpower and expertise of the administrative staff also poses as a challenge. In the absence of any help from the staff, the IQAC Coordinator has to do the technical job himself. This puts extra pressure on him / her and the time spent on doing the technical thing gets wasted.

Moreover, for affiliated colleges, the data asked in the first criterion seems extraneous. The CBCS and Elective courses are by default a part of the courses designed by the respective University. Some questions seem repetitive or overlapping and hence lose credibility or create confusion in the minds of the incharges. The Feedback in the first criterion deals with syllabus while the second criterion deals with overall satisfaction of the students. It means that either the students need to be given two separate forms to fill, or the same form should be divided into two parts: one dealing with curriculum and the other with the other aspects of the TL process. Sometimes it creates confusion amongst the students ending in lesser number of students responding to the email.

For submitting the reports in the online mode, the College needs to have electronically retrievable Management Information System. The shift from the traditional management system to a new and technically viable system needs major shifts in the attitude and in the grants allocation. A dedicated employee or technical person needs to be given the task. When the time of filling the SSR comes, it is essential to recruit two or three technically sound people. The Colleges which have financial backing and vision manage this process smoothly. But in maximum cases, the teachers who are supposed to concentrate on innovations in teaching and meaningful research are taxed.

The list of skills required in each teacher is a long one. They need to prepare the reports, geotagged photos, lists of participants and colorful brochures, timetable, schedule of the events and newspaper clippings. The signed documents need to be scanned and made into pdfs which eventually are merged, size reduced and then uploaded. The teachers also conduct the Add On courses and keep the complete data in retrievable format. They also need to plan and execute experiential and participative learning modules and keep the data. The onus is on data reproduction. This becomes easy when the department has a good team. Otherwise, the process becomes lopsided and tedious. Mentoring is also another imperative area that involves a lot of data storage and documents management apart from the actual mentoring. In case the teacher strength is less in an institute, the resultant matrix yields less marks in NAAC accreditation. Most of the ERPs in the market are only focused on admission, account and academic results. The fifth criterion details

For all practical purposes, the college website needs to be updated continuously as that is the interface between NAAC and the College. It definitely needs a dedicated team of experts to manage a dynamic website. The alternative is outsourcing the maintenance of the website to a professional. But how many institutes can afford it or have the vision to give importance to professional handling? The resultant discontent among the teaching fraternity is quite visible when one interacts with them.

The other issue is infrastructure augmentation. The estimated budget, the sanctioned amount, on one side, and the highhandedness of the elite stakeholders many a times restricts the augmentation process. It all depends upon the convincing power of a few for which the majority suffer.

Way out:

The above-mentioned challenges are only a few that HEIs face while submitting SSR. Let us enlist some action points as an antidote to these challenges. The major work of taking up leadership position and dedicatedly working as the Coordinator to put the system in place must be done by the senior members of the teaching fraternity. A policy stating the same should be adopted by the Institution. Their experience and expertise can make the accreditation work much easier and effective. If the IQAC team, in case of more number of teachers available in the College, is reshuffled, newer avenues open up. They can be given different criteria every year so that they will know about the nuances of the other criteria too. This way a link can be established between the various criteria, and the incharges would know the importance of conducting those activities.

The responsibility though starts at the top. The leadership position should be given to someone with vision and experience to deal with performance issues of the employees. They should be aware of and should be actively involved in the process of online submission. This way the difficulties faced by the Coordinator will be understood by them and a time bound solution will also be generated. A technical team comprising of final year students or PG students should be deployed with the Coordinator to segregate the collected data and upload on website. They can be paid volunteers and can further the Earn while you learn scheme.

The most important point that is not measured by NAAC is the real popularity of the teacher. Neither can it be documented, nor can it be reproduced in the students' interaction during the Peer Team Visit. The personality of the teacher is the most motivating factor for the students. There are no marks for the popularity of the teacher. Neither it is measured in the mentor – mentee point. Nobody can deny this that what we remember the most of our college days, is the time spent with friends and our teachers. These two assets are worth remembering. Unfortunately, they are not assessed, and no weightage is given to it. The result is that since the inception of the semester pattern and the revised NAAC framework, the teachers are busy with reproducing data of the activities rather than being with their students. The absence of the teacher from the teaching learning process is becoming detrimental to the health of the students. Furthermore, in the ERP, the financial and the human resource mapping facility is not present in every institute. It should be made a mandatory thing for institutes with multiple faculties as collecting authentic data is the most difficult thing.

The college website updation should be done on a regular basis by the technical team. They should be given readymade data and should be given unsupervised access to the website. An IQAC member must be part of the technical team to facilitate the process though.

NAAC has laid emphasis on Feedback. It seeks feedback from the stakeholders in case they want to introduce any new mandate. From time to time, NAAC has revised the framework with the help of its advisors. A lot of efforts have gone into making the present format of accreditation. It would be beneficial and effective if HEIs also respond well to the call of quality enhancement which the need of the hour.

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