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EQUAMBI

Enhancing Quality Assurance Management and
Benchmarking Strategies in Indian Universities

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White Paper
on
Internal Quality Assurance in Indian Universities

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Executive Summary

This White Paper concerns quality assurance (QA) in higher education institutions (HEIs) in India that has become a strategic key issue in recent years. A series of measures have been undertaken by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) to ensure proper implementation of QA guidelines and processes in the higher education system. This is manifested in the recently issued...

The Erasmus+ project entitled “Enhancing Quality Assurance Management & Benchmarking strategies in Indian Universities”, EQUAM-BI, comes as a response to this challenge. It aims mainly at developing a “Quality Assurance Model for Internal Quality Assurance Management in Higher Education Institutions in India” including a benchmark to help higher education institutions to place themselves that will be designed and piloted during the lifetime of the project. The model includes principles, priorities, guidelines, and procedures across the different context of quality assurance and stakeholders.

A number of activities have been already carried out by EQUAM-BI partners aimed at creating a QA management model for Indian universities based on evidence on the ground of the current policies and practices, through comparing QA systems in both India and Europe and then sharing good practices on IQA systems for benchmarking experiences in terms of variation and extent of applicability. A set of meetings and training sessions have been conducted and contributed to better understand the current QA situation in India. Outcomes of these activities have been discussed thoroughly and conclusions that are applicable for the Indian HEIs are currently being used for the development of an IQA Toolkit in the next phase of the EQUAM-BI project.

This White Paper constitutes the backbone of a proposed model for internal QA Management (QAM) in HEIs in India. One of the most important aspects of the proposed internal QA model should be its adaptability to the requirements of external accreditation and QA agencies, be it national or international. The management model naturally assumes support by an infrastructure in the form of a bureau or office with all its qualified academic and administrative staff in order to ensure its successful implementation. In addition, the engagement and involvement of all stakeholders in the HEI, including top management, faculty members, students, administrative staff and the local community, is an essential element to the successful design, application and implementation of the proposed model.





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The white paper also aspires to propose a policy statement to the higher education authorities in India to incorporate the rationale of the model in any future initiatives that should encourage HEIs to focus on adopting a strong and enhancement-led internal QAM system supported by the leadership of the HEIs, be it the further proposed Toolkit or any other similar model which should result in a systematic methodology for dealing with QA issues.



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1. Background

The challenge for all higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide is how best to meet both national and international standards whilst still retaining their uniqueness and personality. Whilst a number of HEIs in India enjoy good reputations for their quality, the policies conducted at the national and state/regional level represent both a challenge and an opportunity for all HEIs to publically demonstrate how good they are and how they are improving. In line with global trends, Indian HEIs will, from now on, be evaluated through a consistent set of criteria and procedures, resulting in judgments that could lead to ranking. In order to help HEIs prepare for the new external evaluations and also ensure a commitment to on-going quality improvement and enhancement, many universities have already begun developing their own Quality Assurance Management Units (QAMUs).

These QAMUs have similar roles to the valuable 'quality offices' developed within many European HEIs over the past decades, most recently stimulated by the very successful quality assurance action line within the Bologna Process. Indian QAMUs are at the 'hub' of the relationship between each university and their corresponding accreditation body, NAAC in the case of EQUAM-BI Project and are therefore crucial to the success of both national ambitions for (internationally) transparent QA outcomes and also for each HEI's efforts to enhance their own activities, and have their advances recognised. This approach can be summarised in NAAC's vision of making "quality the defining element of higher education in India".

European experience in the development of good practice is founded on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The three parts of the ESG identify the key aspects of: internal QA within and by HEIs themselves; the external evaluation of HEIs and the effectiveness of their internal QA; and also the external evaluation of the external QA agencies themselves. Such European experiences, and the development of good practices, could contribute strongly to establishing increasingly effective internal QA within Indian HEIs and the development of good working relationships between the NAAC and Indian HEIs and their QAMUs, to their mutual benefits.

NAAC has recently revised its methodology in July 2017 by means of a data based on benchmark driven accreditation. For this approach, NAAC is considering innovation and best practices as a crucial element to turn the accreditation procedure into a quality driver for the enhancement of the



Indian HEIs under its competences. The revised accreditation framework implies a true paradigm shift based in a set of new concepts introduced in its quality assurance process such as:

- Quality benchmarking
- Data Validation and Verification
- Student Satisfaction Survey
- Innovation Ecosystem
- Alumni Engagement
- institutional Values and Distinctiveness

These concepts are now in the process of stakeholders' consultation in order to create an adequate environment for their implementation.

This new approach will need to be applied within the contexts of the different visions, missions and objectives of the individual HEIs, and how they manage their different approaches to the delivery of their programmes and research. The approach focuses on a set of 7 criteria related to 34 key indicators which constitute the "Quality Indicator Framework" (QIF) and the basis of the new accreditation process of NAAC. The model uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative metrics led by a peer judgement which favours in the process a benchmarking-led quality improvement process.

One of the most important variables considered by the HE system in India is to develop QA processes which protect institutional and regional diversity of universities. This is ensured by the model with the introduction of a QIF for special HEIs that allows the procedure to address different categories of institutions by designing separate methodology and benchmarks for particular profiles of institutions. This diversity includes specialised institutions in Law, Teacher Education, Sanskrit, Yoga, Distance Learning, etc.

Data gathering and management based on quantitative and qualitative metrics and processed by ICT means and the reinforcement of internal QA systems underpin the new approach established by NAAC which has been implemented in more than 1300 accreditation processes including 66 universities and 1301 colleges (NAAC 2019: 3).



EquAM-BI works closely with other Indian and European initiatives that work in support of higher education capacity building across various countries such as India and quality assurance schemes, each complementing the other to achieve the common goal of strengthening of Indian institutions. The project also encouraged institutions and agencies to improve information collection and analysis. It will be an important crossroad for the management of information and communication of information pertaining to benchmarking. This central role assists the project participants in updating instruments of benchmarking methodologies, such as surveys and publishes studies and reports on a periodic basis.

The project coordinated by the University of Barcelona with the Indian coordination of the NAAC, aims at coordinating efforts in developing an understanding of the concepts and introducing a culture of benchmarking in India as a mean of encouraging institutional reform and as a tool for measuring how effectively universities are governed. As it is highlighted by NAAC, it aims to set a cluster of quantitative and qualitative indicators as a means of identifying targets for achievement to benchmark progress that may lead to improvements in quality of education, research, innovation, and internationalization in Indian universities in general and comparing best practices with European Universities (NAAC 2019: 7).

2. Comparing the European and the Indian QA frameworks: ESG and NAAC's accreditation criteria

A comparative evaluation was made of the roles of the Part 1 “Standards for Internal Quality Assurance” of the ESG and the NAAC seven criteria for the assessment of HEI in India. In addition to providing a valuable insight into the extent to which the national, regional and international expectations compare, the exercise also aimed to provide input into the development of Guidelines for the further establishment of QAMUs within Indian universities, so that they might best align with national and international expectations. The anticipated benefits of the project are that such comparative alignments should assist in the greater mobility and employability of graduates.

The project has focused on current practices and also those planned for the immediate future in connection between the QA agencies involved in the project: NAAC and ANECA. This was intended to ensure that the outcomes will primarily be realistic and practical. Since the activities have,



however, also been set within an integrated framework they should additionally provide a theoretical but meaningful contribution to the further development of 'HE QA policy' at national, regional and institutional levels.

This project is designed to provide an exchange of knowledge, drawing on the experiences gained in Europe, about how individual institutions can most successfully demonstrate their strengths in ways related to their particular contexts. The project will develop and establish a Model encompassing principles, priorities, guidelines and procedures to support Indian HEIs and their QAMUs as they seek to establish internal quality assurance measures that are aligned to the national requirements and international expectations, paying particular attention to benchmarking as an incentive to promote enhancement from international practices without focusing on competition. A reciprocal learning process rather than a market-driven contest

By identifying the agreed principles and priorities for internal QA, Indian HEIs will share a 'common information-based tool' through which they can demonstrate their quality whilst retaining their unique contexts and contributions. Guidelines on how these principles and priorities will be manifested in the internal QA of each HEI, and a shared set of procedures that meet the needs and expectations of NAAC, will complete the proposed model. It is essential that the model is accompanied by training and capacity building to ensure that it is applied within and across independent and autonomous HEIs with outcomes that are comparable where appropriate and consistent where required.

This White Paper summarises the significant outcomes of the work to date and makes proposals for developments in policy and in practice, concerned with effective and efficient evaluation of higher education provision within national (Indian and European) and international contexts.

3. Evidence-Based Activities

A series of activities has been carried out in India and Europe to initially provide an overall summary of priorities, constraints and complexities.

3.1. Survey on Quality Assurance Management in the Indian Higher Education Institutions

From the viewpoint of updating the information concerning quality assurance management and expectations, the Indian partners, coordinated by the representatives of Symbiosis International



(Deemed University), designed, prepared and conducted a Questionnaire among a wide range of Indian HEIs representing all kind of profiles and types, which can be considered a major milestone in this project (Symbiosis, 2018).

Of the big sample of HEIs contacted, the questionnaire was responded by 29 institutions. The general data comprises of geographical distribution (state/province) of the sample, type (state, central, deemed etc.), nature (funding), and age since inception, highest-level degree offered, size of the students' body, size of the faculty body, and main orientation regarding teaching and research. (Symbiosis, 2018: 10).

1. The 29 HEI participated in the survey, represented 15 states in India (48% of the states to which the survey instrument was administered). Eight HEI (27.6%) are from the state of Karnataka, followed by Tamil Nadu with four HEIs (13.8%), Telangana with three HEIs (10.3%), Gujarat and Odisha with two HEIs (6.9%) each. All the 10 other states had only one HEI (3.4%) each participating in the survey.
2. Of the sample HEIs, the State Universities constitute the maximum representation with 13 HEIs (45%), closely followed by Deemed University with 12 HEIs (41%). There are three Central Universities constituting 10% of the sample and only one Institute of National Importance constituting 3% of the sample size.
3. Regarding the source of funding, 13 HEIs out of the 29 HEIs constituting 44.8% of the sample size funded by their respective State Governments, eight HEIs (27.6%) are private-funded (Corporate Houses, Trusts etc.), six HEIs (20.7%) are Central Government funded and only two HEIs (6.9%) are self-financed from the students' fees.
4. Regarding the age of the HEI, nine HEIs (31% of the sample size) are more than 50 years old, seven HEIs (24.1%) are aged 10-20 years, six HEI (20.7) are aged between 30-40 years, three HEIs (10.3%) are aged between 20-30 years and 2 HEIs (6.9%) each are in the age group of less than 10 years and between 40-50 years.
5. Based on the size of the student body in the HEIs, 17 HEIs (58.6%) out of the total 29 HEIs participated in this study have less than 10000 students. Seven HEIs (24.1%) have within the range 10000-20000 students; three HEIs (10.3%) have students within the range 20000-30000



and one HEI each (6.9%) have total size of student between the range 30000-40000 and more than 50000 respectively.

6. It is found that 27 HEIs constituting 93.1% of the total sample are research and teaching oriented. One HEI (3.4%) is predominantly research-oriented and one HEI (3.4%) is healthcare delivery oriented in addition to its research and teaching orientation.

Regarding the data about the organization of the QAM function in the HEIs in order to assess the quality culture of the organisation and the top management's commitment to this function, the Questionnaire concludes that:

1. 82.2% of the HEIs accept QAM as very important in their overall institutional policy.
2. Regarding the important drivers of QAM, the top three drivers are i) the need to comply to regulatory bodies ii) the need to track and monitor progress of the QAM activities iii) need to comply to external accreditation agencies is the third top driver for QAM in HEIs according to this research. Establishing systems and processes, stakeholders' expectations, imbibing QAM as a culture, leverage QAM to goal realization and QAM adopting and adaptation all rank in that sequential order.
3. The study finds that with respect to the age of QAM department in the HEIs, 34.5% have QAM departments that are 10-15 years old, 27.6% have QAM departments that are 15-20 years old in, 24.1% have QAM departments that are 5-10 years old and 10.3% have QAM departments that are less than 5 years old in and 3.4 has its QAM department, which is more than 20 years old.
4. Regarding availability of QAM policy statement at the HEI (central or at distributed levels), 89.7% have their institutional QAM Policy, and 86.2% stated that the QAM is clearly described in their institutional strategic plan or equivalent document. Interestingly, 48.3% had QAM policy statements defined at their own faculty/departments as well. 24.1% stated that their HEIs are still in the development phase of an institutional QAM policy statement.
5. Based on the availability of QAM handbook at the HEI (central or at distributed levels), only 48.3% have a QAM policy handbook at their institutional level and 48.3% do not have a handbook. 79.3% of the HEIs stated that the practical activities of the QAM were clearly



described in other institutional documents. 44.8% stated that they are developing the QAM handbook at their institutional level.

6. The analysis about the involvement of people and structures in QAM at the HEIs shows the following. 96.6% had their head of the institution involved in QAM. The availability of a dedicated person and QAM committee were found in 89.7% HEIs. Another 89.7% stated that a QA committee operates at their University level, 86.3% and 65.5% had a dedicated unit/cell with specialized QAM staff at the institution level as well at their faculty/departments level respectively. 82.8% a senate (academic council) involved in the QAM of the institution. 62% HEIs had QAM committees in operation at the faculty/department levels. 58.62% HEIs even had a vice rector or equivalent position involved in the institutional QAM operations. (20.7%) stated that there are no dedicated structures, units, committees or staff members for QAM.
7. The analysis about the focus of QAM on the various activities of the HEIs that is an overall high to very high positive response. This is evident from the fact that the response variable 'very much' and 'much' together are 90% or more in all the activities except in financial viability, wherein it is over 70%.

The analysis of data relating to the “administration of QAM at the HEIs” to ensure sustained efforts to collect and collate data and monitor compliance with statutory and accrediting bodies (mode of QAM data collection, mode of storage and retrieval of QAM data, data collection frequency, and data about the QAM initiatives of the HEIs), provides the following result:

1. The distribution of the sample data about the mode of collection of QAM data - 69% of the QAM data collection is partially automated and only 20.7% have fully automated data collection for QAM. 10.3% are collecting data manually.
2. QAM data storage and retrieval -The analysis finds that the QAM data of 72.4% are centrally stored and retrieved at the university level and only 21.6% stated that they have a decentralised storage and retrieval of QAM data at their faculty/department/institute levels.
3. Frequency of collection of QAM data - 34.5% stated that they collect data on an ad hoc basis (whenever needed - requirement/need-based), 31% stated they collect data on a monthly



basis; the rest of the sample collect data on quarterly, annual and half-yearly basis respectively.

4. QAM initiatives- the top three initiatives of QAM are regularly conducted IQAC meetings (stated by 93.1%), timely submission of AQAR to NAAC (stated by 93.1%) and participation in NIRF ranking (stated by 93.1%). Academic administrative audit and initiation of follow-up actions (stated by 82.8%) is the fourth most prevalent initiative of QAM in the HEIs. ISO certification and NBA activities are comparatively not so prevalent initiatives and found only with 34.4% and 55% HEIs respectively.

The Qualitative Analysis derived from the responses regarding the Quality Assurance Management as a function, focuses on the three broad areas – the objectives, the key drivers and the processes adopted.

The objectives of QAM

The purpose of establishing this department/unit ranged from ‘regulatory compliance’ on one end to ‘creating and sustaining a quality culture’ at the other. The first one being a reaction to the external environment and the second being an internal calling. Between these two extremes and tending towards either of the ends, were other reasons that justified the need for the QAM function. Some objectives were at the operational level tending towards compliance that include: collecting data, conducting regular meetings, undertaking audits for identifying deviations, initiating corrective actions and generating reports. In the middle of the spectrum, some of the objectives highlighted the need for continuous improvement in curricular, co-curricular and extra- curricular activities etc. Universities identified that “Action-oriented QAM plans” should permeate through all departments and processes to ensure standardization. The shift towards building a quality culture demands objectives of ensuring stakeholder satisfaction and setting benchmarks to ensure sustaining quality to international standards. For example, “Benchmarking quality in every domain of 'PEARL - Pedagogy, Extension, Administration, Research and Learning'” was an objective identified by one of the Universities. It is observed that while the Universities were at different stages of evolution in the quality spectrum, even those who have the urge to turn quality into a culture in the organisation are grappling with the process of achieving it.



Drivers of QAM

The respondents acknowledged that the Quality of higher education has a direct bearing on the graduates' intellectual competence to become valuable resources and contribute to nation-building in "Educational, Social, Technological, Environmental and Economic Magnificence" (ESTEEM). Some universities have also identified indicators and devised metrics to periodically review and benchmark their practices to stay relevant to the dynamic regional, national and international environments. One of the drivers of QAM that was highlighted is that it facilitates the realization of the vision and mission of the University. Some Universities have seen QAM initiatives as a means to promote good governance and create an environment of quality consciousness.

Process of collection and collation of data

The vast majority of the HEIs in the sample had partially automated the data collection primarily for assimilating information about the academic and research functioning of their departments, conduct feedbacks, and monitor project progress. E-portals, Google forms, e-Mails are some of the popular means of data collection. HEIs stated that they collected data on a periodical (monthly, quarterly, half-yearly and annually) as well as need-based (whenever required). The Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC), unit or department collects data periodically for reviewing the process quality against the set metrics. IQAC prepares an annual calendar and the same is shared through the MIS portal at some HEIs. Public relations officer and information officer facilitate timely collection of data.

Conclusion of the Questionnaire

The study brought out the current status of Quality Assurance Management processes and practices across the different types of HEIs in India and lent itself for comparison among them. The study was limited by the constraints posed with respect to the response rates and the quality of responses to some questions. While the study brings out that many HEIs have claimed to have the necessary QAM structures to provide an enabling environment, the effectiveness of such structures has not been investigated into as they were beyond the scope of this study.

As a summary of conclusions the study:

- acknowledges the role of regulation and accreditation agencies towards establishing standards for quality enhancement in HEIs



- reiterates the need for establishing QAM structures that promote a quality culture across HEIs
- reinforces the earlier studies that underpin the significance of quality assurance as a driver of sustained growth.

The Questionnaire provided sound information to draw a set of **top priorities about QAM among the Indian Universities** that can be summarised as follows:

- The need to comply with regulatory bodies has been one among the top priorities of all HEIs involved in the Questionnaire
- The need to monitor and review the progress against the pre-set standards published by the national QA body
- The need to establish systems and processes for excellence for HEIs
- The need to meet stakeholders' expectations of the HEIs
- The need to focus on QAM as a tool to realise the mission of the HEI
- The need to adopt and adapt to the HEI QAM conventions to the various profiles of the Indian HEIs
- The need to comply with external accreditation agencies
- The need to consider QAM as a culture trigger towards growth and sustainability of the HEI

The above priorities show that, irrespective of the type of HEIs, there is a clear indication that regulatory bodies and accreditation agencies have a significant role in driving the QAM activities. Monitoring and reviewing the QAM activities against pre-set standards is another critical driver in all the different types of HEIs. HEIs believe that QAM can be an enabler for establishing systems and processes towards their pursuit of excellence and for that purpose benchmarking can be an excellent opportunity for QA enhancement-led institutional policies. The need to bring about a quality culture through QAM has been one of the highs in their priority.

All Partners had noted the difficulty of engaging more than a committed minority of academics to *explicit* IQA, even though most academics would consider that they are committed to 'quality' at least in an implicit manner. They claim to have sought greater engagement of 'teaching academics' in IQA – largely without great success. Yet few direct efforts appear to have been made to consider the potential barriers behind the current problems.



3.2. Consortium meetings to discuss the conclusions of the Survey

The meeting held at Pune hosted by Symbiosis International (Deemed University) and the meeting at Chennai (hosted by the Indian Institute of Technology Madras) in 2019 were for the European and Indian partners to consider the extents to which their current and active QA procedures meet the expectations of Part 1 ESGs and selected criteria of NAAC criteria. As the full NAAC criteria cover much more than the Part 1 ESG, it was thought that a comparison of the (approximately) equivalent standards, criteria and guidelines would prove a reasonable basis.

Round tables and plenary discussions in the meeting at Pune, allowed the participants to make a self-analysis judgement without the full requirement of providing the evidence that this was based upon. The partner universities were then asked to think about the sorts of evidence they might be able to provide to support the self-analyses. This exercise indicated that all the university partners currently felt that they were able to unambiguously demonstrate that they would be able to meet (all of) either 'their own' or 'the other' expectations, although the reasons behind the outcomes of the self-evaluations varied extensively.

The perspective of the Indian HEIs was complemented by the two **Training sessions on "Data Management for Quality Assurance" and "Quality Assurance Management for HEI governance"** organised respectively by the KTH Institute at, Stockholm (Sweden) and the University of Valencia (Spain) with the collaboration of the Spanish national QA agency ANECA.

Both training sessions further illustrated the diversity of QA approaches applied to, and taken by, European universities, and also the different contexts and priorities found within Indian universities. The diversity of European approaches indicated what is, in action, a European approach based essentially on 'interpretation of principles and guidelines'. In focusing on Part 1 of the ESG, the institutional IQA systems described are focused primarily on 'teaching and learning' and, to some extent, on 'the student experience'. An important shift in emphasis from 'input measures' to 'outputs', and particularly the inclusion of 'learning outcomes', marks a significant change in European HE QA policy and practice. In addition to the more obvious notions of interactions between external and internal layers (national and regional political agendas, their impacts on QA expectations and actions), it became apparent that the ways in which an institution's mission, vision, context and, importantly, leadership influence the priorities in dealing with changing QA



requirements and expectations. This exercise also considered the current and potential roles of ‘quality bureaus/offices/etc.’ within institutions, and the ways in which their supervision, management and roles vary.

The outcomes of two meetings led to a recognition of the complex (and different) interactions between the various parties/actors involved in QA of higher education, and also a recognition of the need to focus on the involvement (or lack of) of academic staff within the formal / explicit demonstration of IQA. The latter exposes the extent to which there may be ‘tensions’ between the ways in which the ESG and NAAC standards are presented and the wish to see greater and more enthusiastic engagement by teaching academics in formal IQA processes.

Both training sessions gave the opportunity to the representatives of the Indian HEIs to comment, discuss and draw conclusions on the two topics of the sessions: data gathering and management and good practices of the Internal QA systems and to debate on rankings as a proxy QA tool. The meeting in Valencia also gave the opportunity to reflect and debate on the legal perspectives and requirements on data management and data protection with a lawyer of an international law firm with a broad experience with the new and much more restrictive European Union data protection legislation.

The general principles that underpin all aspects of IQA in higher education are that QA should be an integral part of the internal management of the institution and recognise the central importance of institutional autonomy, and that the HEIs primary responsibility for the quality of education it provides. In addition, these principles should be relevant, valid and proportionate to its specific aims and the risks and aligned with the legal, pedagogical and social contexts in which the HEI operates. These principles should lead to reports that are easily accessible and comprehensible to the general public.

The purposes and scope of the Guidelines must be matched to the QA requirements and expectations placed on Indian HEIs, and in particular those of the QABs. The Guidelines must also be related to the various EQA procedures that Indian HEIs must and opt to fulfil. The Guidelines thus need to cover the principles for



- The establishment, maintenance and monitoring of IQA arrangements within an HEI concerning the roles and responsibilities of the institution as a whole and for the programmes an institution offers or programme proposals submitted from an HEI for external evaluation / accreditation.
- The monitoring and coordination of IQA activities that are required as evidence for period external evaluation of the institution as a whole.
- The analysis of IQA outcomes to support improvement and enhancement.

It is clear, not only from the EQuAM European agencies, that the external evaluation of higher education is in a constant state of change. Such changes may involve the organisations themselves, their governance/management, the procedures they undertake and the standards and criteria that are applied within those procedures. Despite the multiple and different contexts, and in particular the current financial crises in many countries, the QA of HE remains a ‘success story’ at a European level. This is because countries are, through their national and/or regional agencies, seeking to apply the ESG in ways in which the underlying principles are matched to local contexts.

In terms of inputs into the EQuAM development of Guidelines for QA in Indian HEIs the key messages may include:

- despite the success of the Bologna process there is no single (simple or complex) QA model that is applied across Europe / the EHEA
- the development of QA systems takes time – during which the context in which the QA is being applied will almost certainly be changing and the expectations of the outcomes of the QA will be changing
- to be rigorous, yet retain the ability to adapt to changing contexts and expectations, a QA system must be based on principles and standards agreed with the key stakeholders – procedures and criteria can and will change.

4. Conclusions and Policy Developments

The project has identified and focussed attention on the similarities in the underlying principles between the ESG and NAAC Criteria, and the difficulties of ensuring more widespread engagement by the majority of academic staff with the increasing needs for explicit and transparent IQA within universities. It is apparent the wider range of NAAC Criteria roles and the overt emphasis placed on



institutional/management responsibilities as opposed to academic responsibilities. The widely different missions and resources of the universities and their different stages of development have been shown to have impacts on their IQA systems. What has become increasingly apparent is that the rather more complex but perhaps more stable context in which European universities operate their IQA can be contrasted with the current experiences of the Indian partners which are in process of not only developing their IQA activities but also having to meet changing contexts and demands/priorities at the same time.

On universities as organisations: a summary analysis of the different ways in which the ESG and NAAC Criteria are presented gives a 'stark' comparison, both of the differences between the ESG and the NAAC Criteria and, perhaps, an underlying reason why neither may be an inducement to encourage academics to be more engaged in 'explicit and transparent' IQA. Clearly there are different legal, historical, cultural and other contextual differences but it is noticeable that whilst all participant groups seek greater engagement of 'teaching academics' in IQA, few direct efforts appear to have been made to consider the potential barriers behind the current problems.

It is very clear that the explicit impact on IQA within European universities varies markedly. Within the overall 'political' context of the Bologna Process, the expectations, requirements and practical implementation by national and regional QA agencies vary hugely. Similarly there are enormous variations in the extents to which and ways in which individual universities organise their IQA. Yet many if not most of the expectations of ESGs are addressed to a greater or lesser extent. It is also notable that these are addressed in constantly changing/evolving contexts, including within a period for many of acute financial crisis.

On universities and their staff: To seek some basis for the (low) extent of 'engagement', an analysis of roles and responsibilities was undertaken. It showed that for the 7 NAAC Criteria, 4 were regarded as 'Institutional Responsibility' and 3 'Shared Responsibility between institutions and academics' with nothing left to the sole responsibility of the academics. Of the 10 Standards of Part 1 ESG eight were regarded as 'Institutional Responsibility', one Shared Responsibility (Student-centred Learning and Assessment) and only one as academic responsibility (Design and Approval of Programmes).



Utilizing the evidence base constructed through many activities, the HE policy and practical development in India concerning the QA have to give special attention to the following themes:

4.1. Academic Quality Assurance Criteria

Based on the thorough discussions and analyses of the ESG Part 1 “Standards for Internal Quality Assurance” and NAAC criteria, we can conclude that there are significant similarities between the 7 NAAC Criteria and 10 Part 1 ESGs. Several NAAC criteria may be embedded in more than one ESG, and vice versa. However, NAAC Criterion # 3 (Research, Innovation and Extension) and NAAC Criterion # 7 (Institutional Values and Best Practices) do not have a clear comparable counterpart in the ESG. Furthermore, ESG # 8 (Public Information) does not have a clear comparable NAAC Criterion.

Finally, ESG # 1 (Policy for Quality Assurance) does not have a direct correspondence on NAAC Criteria, it is embedded in Criterion # 6 (Governance, Leadership and Management), which also include indirectly ESG # 7 (Information Management) and 10 (Cyclical External Quality Assurance). The correspondence between both frameworks could be summarised as follows:

Correspondence between NAAC Criteria and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)										
	ESG									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
NAAC						X			X	
1		X								
2			X	X	X	X				
3										
4						X				
5			X			X				



6	X				X		X			X
7										

With partial compliance in all partner universities (Indian and European) with NAAC and ESG, it is recommended to make "Centre of Attention" on the following notions:

o Clarification/Modification:

- ESG # 1 (Policy and procedures for QA)
- NAAC Criterion # 4 (Infrastructure and Learning Progression)

o Enhancement:

- ESG # 7 (Information Management)
- ESG # 10 (Cyclical External Quality Assurance)
- NAAC #6 (Governance, Leadership and Management)

o Importance and Priority:

- ESG # 8 (Public information)
- NAAC Criterion # 3 (Financial Resources)
- NAAC Criterion # 7 (Institutional Values and Best Practices)

In summary, the ESG and NAAC criteria identified as less related should be subject to a process of clarification to ensure that all parameters from both QA frameworks match accordingly.

4.2. Concept of QA

The concept of QA is embedded in most universities' regulations. However, in order to renovate/reinvigorate this concept, those Indian HEIs which have not yet started, should develop and implement proper IQA systems with clear documentation of QA concepts and usage of QA terminology. The institution has to design measurable QA criteria to suit its own objectives, mission and vision.

4.3. QA Model

The implementation of IQA system can be modelled as top down or bottom up approaches where ideas and processes flow primarily in one direction. This one-way flow does not guarantee that delivery is smooth and the momentum of initiative keeps its birth strength. Most probably, such



models will not end up with their initially anticipated outcomes. However, an optimal model for the Indian universities, combining both directions in all QA activities (ideas, procedures, ...) is identified as a fundamental key for a successful IQA system, with the QAB being the core of this system and also the hub of the relationship between the HEI and the national QA agency. Such a bi/multidirectional flow system is crucial to the success of both the national ambitions for international transparent QA outcomes, and also for HEI's efforts to enhance their own activities, and have their advances recognised.

4.4. QAM Units

According to the optimal model above, QAMUs are the hub of any IQA system that should be adopted in Indian HEIs. In order for QAMUs to accomplish the tasks expected of them they must receive adequate support, from top management in their university, from advisory boards (local, national, and international experience). They should operate within well-defined regulations and with a sufficient number of qualified academic and administrative staff being employed.

4.5. Engagement

In order to have a successful IQA system, all stakeholders should be involved in IQA activities according to their roles in HEIs. It is essential for top administration to demonstrate actively support and engagement with all QA activities from planning to implementation. Spreading QA culture among all of an HEI's stakeholders is the greatest task of QAMUs and its staff. Faculty members and administrative staff should be encouraged to be more enthusiastic about, and where necessary directed in, implementing QA principles in their daily work.

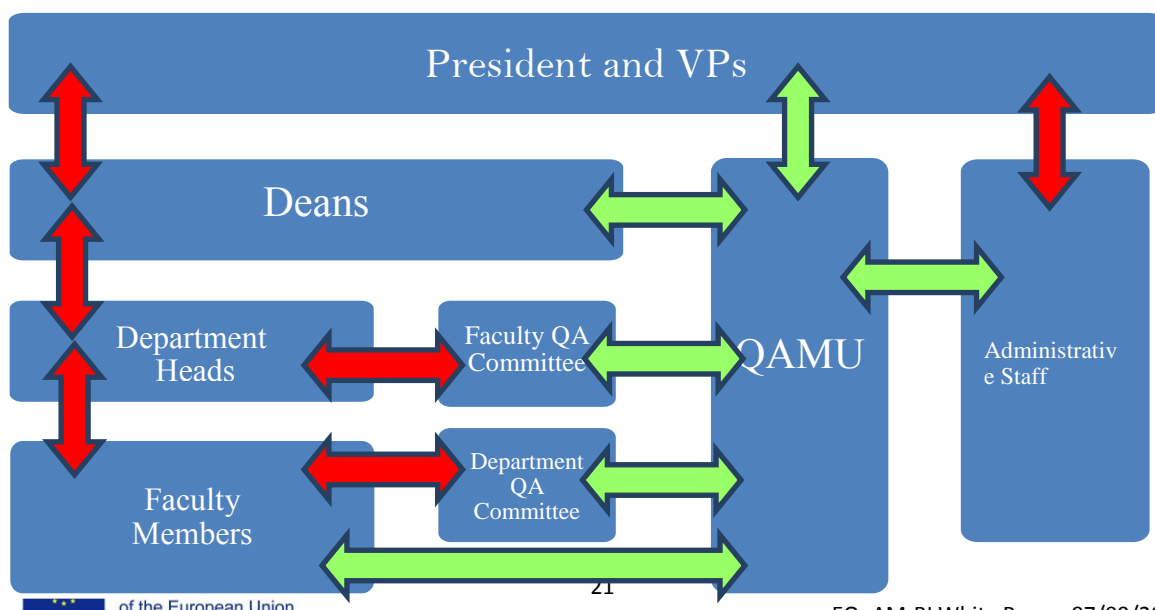




Figure: Optimal model for IQA with QAMU being its core (Green arrows: activities related directly to QAB, Red arrows: activities where QAB has implicit engagement).

5. Policy Proposal for the enhancement of quality assurance in Indian HEIs – Summary statement

The EQuAM-BI project analyses have clearly demonstrated that, with coordinated political, academic and managerial/administrative support, significant and demonstrable advances can be coordinated in the quality assurance of higher education, irrespective of diverse contexts and cultures at institutional, national and regional levels, and at a time of acute financial crisis.

Utilizing the evidence base constructed through its many activities, the EQuAM-BI project concludes that HE policy and practical development in India concerning the QA should give special attention to the following themes:

- A shared concept of QA - to promote a clear and shared understanding of responsibilities and expectations
- A comparison of Accreditation Criteria - to align with international expectations and promote and prioritise achievements and outcomes (over or in addition to input measures and processes)
- The development of a QA Model - that clearly identifies the necessary flows of information for effective and efficient management, and is adaptable to the different contexts and priorities of different HEIs
- The roles and responsibilities of QAMUs – including the identification of where authority for ensuring QA activities resides (and when it may be delegated)
- Enhancing the engagement of all stakeholders in higher education - concerning their expectations about quality and how it can be improved.

These points shared and submitted to the partners on April 2019 (after the meeting in Pune and immediately before the meeting held in Chennai), underpin a crucial understanding on QA Management for HE, which impacts both internal and external QA: IQA management has to be part of the strategic plan and decision making process in a university. That is the EQuAM model all about.



Internal QA management linked to the institutional strategy embedded not only in the institutional processes but also in the teaching and learning, research, innovation and internationalisation policies.

This statement obviously impacts on its external QA counterpart as follows: any enhancement reform or exercise towards a more efficient external QA paradigm will necessary rest on a collaborative and risk-based approach at the institutional level where the university will take care of its internal QA arrangements, regardless the national/regional/discipline-oriented requirements and expectations measured against a shared QA benchmark.

This model should refer to a particular “QA architecture” deployed on three levels:

- Top level management
- Structure behind IQA: department, unit, office, bureau, etc.
- Procedure based on ANECA’s AUDIT for the evaluation of IQAS and adapted for the EQuAM-BI project through the Toolkit for the Indian universities involved.

At this moment of the evolution of QA in higher education practices worldwide, it’s time for the external QA bodies to give back part to universities of the responsibilities of their internal QA management deeply intertwined with their missions, visions and strategic planning, in order to reorient the efforts of the accreditation agencies and their external QA tools towards the areas of the institutions needing a more particular scrutiny for improvement fostering and strengthening a quality culture within the university.

This approach allowing the agencies to pay a different attention to each particular university sends a very clear message of an external QA mechanism institutional-targeted with added value, far from the previous paradigm of a “one size fits all” external QA threshold or minimum compliance standard. Finally, this approach stems with the current debate on internal versus external QA practices which is taking part at a global level as the latest agendas of the international QA networks in Europe, Asia-Pacific and Africa show.

6. References

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