Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions Reflects Quality

Accreditation is a type of quality assurance process under which academic programmes and student and staff related services offered by a higher education institution are evaluated by an external body known as accreditation body or accreditation agency which determines whether the higher education institution meets applicable standards. If the institution meets applicable standards, accredited status is granted to the institution by the accreditation body or agency.

The accreditation body assesses mainly the institution parameters like: Governance, Leadership and Management; Programme, Course and Subject/Module specifications- Curriculum; Teaching, Learning and Assessment; Research, Consultancy, Training; Student Support and Student Progression; Innovation and Best Practices; and Learning Resources and Infrastructure.

The parameters relating to minimum applicable standards for all the institutions would have been decided by a regulating body or a commission under the ministry of higher education or an international body.

The accreditation procedures and process vary with accreditation agencies and the accreditation process may take 6 to 18 months depending on the agency.

Accreditation process is carried out by the academicians chosen by the accreditation agency and they are drawn from various institutions of repute, who are well versed in accreditation processes.

Accreditation is the way through which Higher Education Institutions broadcast the quality of their educational processes to their stake holders including students, parents, recruiters, alumni, staff and management and governing body. Accreditation helps higher education institutions to market their programmes nationally and internationally.

In most countries around the world, the function of accreditation for higher education institutions is conducted by a government organization, such as ministry of education or department of higher education in human resources development ministry.

In India, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is an organization that assesses and accredits institutions of higher education. It is an autonomous body funded by University Grants Commission of Government of India headquartered in Bangalore. The National Board of Accreditation (NBA), India was initially established by AICTE (All India Council of Technical Education) undertakes periodic evaluations **of technical institutions and programmes** according to specified norms and standards as recommended by AICTE.

In the United States, the accreditation process is independent of government and performed by private membership associations (Marjorie Peace Lenn, 1992).

The U.S. Department of Education and the **Council for Higher Education Accreditation** (**CHEA**) -a non-governmental organization, both recognize reputed accrediting bodies for accreditation of institutions of higher education. They also provide guidelines as well as resources and relevant data regarding these accreditors. Neither the U.S. Department of Education nor the CHEA accredit individual institutions. All accreditations is done by professional accredited agencies recognised by U.S. Department of Education and the CHEA. The more visible specialized and professional accreditors include: **Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET)** – for applied science, computing, engineering, and technology

programs; American Bar Association – for law schools; American Dental Association Commission on Dental Accreditation – for dentistry schools; American Veterinary Medical Association – for veterinary schools; Association of American Medical Colleges – for medical schools; Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business – for business schools; National Architectural Accrediting Board – for architecture schools; National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration – for public policy schools [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higher_education_accreditation_in_the_United_States].

ABET is a non-profit and non-governmental accrediting agency for academic programs in the disciplines of applied science, computing, engineering, and engineering technology. ABET is a recognized accreditor in the United States (U.S.) by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. ABET accreditation provides assurance that a college or university program meets the quality standards established by the profession for which the program prepares its students. **ABET accredits postsecondary programs housed in degree-granting institutions which have been recognized by national or regional institutional accreditation agencies or national education authorities worldwide.**

In the UK, IET, the Institution of Engineering and Technology accredits Engineering and Technology programmes. IET is one of the world's leading professional societies for the engineering and technology community and IET accreditation, licensed by the Engineering Council, covers a broad spectrum of engineering and technology subjects. **It is recognised around the world as an indicator of quality through the Washington and Sydney accords, governed by the International Engineering Alliance (IEA)**. Departments with IET accredited programmes are eligible to apply for the EUR-ACE label, awarded by European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAEE) [http://www.theiet.org/academics/accreditation/].

The Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programs in **Germany or Accreditation Council (Akkreditierungsrat)** was created in a KMK resolution on October 15, 2004. The Accreditation Council certifies accreditation agencies and establishes guidelines and criteria for program and system accreditation. There are currently ten certified agencies.

- AHPGS – Accreditation Agency for Study Programs in Special Education, Care, Health Sciences and Social Work
- AKAST – Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Canonical Study Programs
- ACQUIN – Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute
- AQAS – Agency for Quality Assurance by Accreditation of Study Programs
- AQ Austria – Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria
- ASIIN – Accreditation Agency for Degree Programs in Engineering, Informatics/Computer Science, the Natural Sciences and Mathematics
- evalag – Evaluation Agency Baden-Württemberg
- FIBAA – Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation
- OAQ – Swiss Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- ZEvA – Central Evaluation- and Accreditation Agency

These agencies accredit programs of study for Bachelor and Master Degrees and quality management systems (system accreditation) from state or state recognized Higher Education institutions in Germany and abroad. AKAST only accredit programs of study.

Many accreditation bodies develop procedures and processes of accreditation based on international quality assurance accords. A few of such accords have been discussed below:-

The Washington Accord is an international accreditation agreement for **professional engineering academic degrees**, between the bodies responsible for accreditation in its signatory countries. Established in 1989, the signatories as of 2013 are Australia, Canada, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong China, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The agreement recognizes that there is substantial equivalence of programs accredited by those signatories. Graduates of accredited programs in any of the signatory countries are recognized by the other signatory countries as having met the academic requirements for entry to the practice of engineering. Recognition of accredited programs is not retroactive but prospective. It takes effect only from the date of admission of the country to signatory status.

The Washington Accord covers undergraduate engineering degrees under Outcome-based education (OBE) approach. Engineering technology and postgraduate programs are not covered by the accord, although some engineering technology programs are covered under the Sydney Accord and the Dublin Accord. Only qualifications awarded after the signatory country or region became part of the Washington Accord are recognized. The accord is not directly responsible for the licensing or registration of Professional Engineers and Chartered Engineers, but it does cover the academic requirements that are part of the licensing processes in signatory countries.

India is now a provisional member of the Washington Accord. One of the main criteria for any country to be part of the Accord is that its engineering degrees should be accredited. So far, IITs were lukewarm towards fulfilling this condition. **Many are of the opinion that the accreditation and ranking done by newspapers in India are questionable, another important question is whether institutions located in all possible geographical locations are capable to undergo accreditation process.**

The Sydney Accord is an agreement between the bodies responsible for accrediting engineering technologist qualification programs in each of the signatory countries. It recognizes the substantial equivalency of programs accredited by those bodies, and recommends that graduates of accredited programs in any of the signatory countries be recognized by the other countries as having met the academic requirements for entry to the practice of engineering technologist. The Sydney Accord was signed in 2001.

The Dublin Accord is an agreement for the international recognition of Engineering Technician qualifications.

The following quote summarises the quality assurance, the accreditation system provides;

"We are extremely proud of the laboratory's accreditation, especially the fact that the nine inspectors found zero deficiencies. Accreditation by CAP (College of American Pathologists – Illinois, US) means that our laboratory staff is recognized nationally for providing the highest standards of care for the patients and healthcare professionals we serve."
~ Wayne Foster

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