

Academic Audit and Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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Academic Audit and Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The role of higher education institutions is reflected in its learning outcomes. The learning outcomes contribute to develop quality professionals by enhancing competency in subject knowledge and intellectual capability, grooming professionalism and employability skills. Still further it contributes to emotional and social maturity, sound character, sharp business acumen, strong scientific temper and strategic thinking among the learners. This could be materialized only through imparting comprehensive, continually enhanced and global quality professional education supported by a sound quality management system. Quality policy contributes to institutionalizing the quality assurance processes. Commitment to providing quality teaching and learning through well designed and systematic curriculum delivery using multitude of learning experiences is at the core of this policy. A variety of quality assurance processes are institutionalized focusing around teacher quality, curriculum delivery and pedagogy, research and training, skill development of students, orientation programmes for overall personality development and broad range of activities which equip the students to face challenges and take up risks with courage. Academic Audit gives feed-back on its efficiency. The observations from the audit are utilised for institutional improvement.

Keywords: Academic audit, Quality assurance, Higher education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher education ought to be centres of excellence which impart quality education to students. Society at large looks up to these institutions to address their needs through creating a pool of human resources with increased employability, manning institutions, solving community based problems and maintaining harmony with outer environment. This is not achieved through a mere proliferation of institutions. It is here that quality becomes important. Quality is “that intangible but omnipresent element which distinguishes a product from another or one service from another”. Quality does not come in one go, but attained through a continuous pursuit for perfection. Higher education devoid of quality is at the cost of its meaning and purpose [1-15].

2. INSTITUTIONAL POLICY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Institutions of higher education strive to deliver comprehensive, continually enhanced and global quality professional education through an established quality management system complimented by the synergistic interaction of the stakeholders concerned. This is spelt out in the form of a policy and communicated at all levels, so that this policy contributes to institutionalizing the quality assurance processes in all the three areas namely academic, administrative and infrastructural. The following quality assurance processes are institutionalized.

(1) *Teacher Quality* : To enhance the quality of teaching, Faculty Development Programmes are organized regularly. Collaborative programmes with other institutions are also

organized to enhance teacher quality. Faculty members are encouraged to acquire additional qualification, research degrees and certification programmes that foster their skills.

(2) *Delivery of the Curriculum* : In order to ensure effective delivery of the curriculum, the faculty members prepare work dairy, lesson plan and course material for the subjects taught by them.

(3) *Strengthening of Research Activities* :In order to strengthen research activities, Research centres in priority areas are constituted. The faculty members are encouraged to write articles for publication in journals and present papers in National and International Conferences. This opens up the possibility for preparing and publishing research papers both in conceptual and empirical areas. The scope of such conferences are widened to include all disciplines offered by the institute under a common thematic umbrella.

(4) *Personality Development Programmes* : Student Development Programmes are important to equip the students to meet the challenges in their career. Value Addition programmes like certificate courses are offered to the students to bridge the gap between the university syllabus and industry requirements. Regular industrial visits and industry-academia interactions are organised so as to get practical exposure about the functioning of the organisation.

(5) *Orientation Programmes*: Apart from career building, programmes are conducted to develop right orientation and positive attitude.

(6) *Additional Academic Support in order to ensure Holistic Development*: Teaching management principles could be made interesting through examples from the great epics like Ramayana, Mahabharatha, Bhagavad Gita, Vedas, Upanishads etc. Spiritual lectures, celebration of regional festivals, discourses during observance of important days such as World Elderly day, Mothers day, Environment day etc. can be significant in serving as additional academic support.

(7) *Mental Maturity and Skill Development Courses* :Corporate Yoga and mind control

programme offered to the students could enhance the power of concentration, overcome stress, maintain good physical and mental health and ensure mental maturity.

(8) *Placement* :A broad range of vocational education, entrepreneurial training and employability skills to facilitate faster placement and better adjustment in the work situations could be undertaken.

(9) *Preparedness for challenges* :The students are encouraged to define their own training and development needs and based on the needs of students and the corporate, the institute imparts employability skills. As the business world is filled with challenges and risks, the purpose of education is to prepare the students to face these challenges and take up the risk with courage.

(10) *IQAC* : Internal Quality Assurance Cell is a permanent and effective mechanism to address all aspects of quality on a day-to-day basis. It is drawn from representative of teaching, administration and management as well as external members who are conversant and competent with the activity of the institution. Through periodic meetings the IQAC air their views and corrective measures. The IQAC is founded on the premise that quality is perfection and perfection can be achieved slowly but steadily.

The administrative system support the institution in the development and enhancement of the quality of education. The different committees set up by the institution always respond to the administrative needs. The Advisory Board and the Governing Council body are set up with the members of management and academia. The various course co-ordinators facilitate internal administration of their departments and link it with the overall administration of the institute supervised by the head of the institute. Infrastructure supports the requirements of the quality policy conducive to the academic and administrative processes.

3. QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK:

The institution has an integrated framework for Quality assurance of the academic and administrative activities. The integration of

academic and administrative activities can be witnessed at three levels.

Strategic Level: Staff members (both teaching and non-teaching staff) are involved in framing the policies and procedures, guidelines, rules and regulations and effectively implementing the same to ensure smooth and systematic functioning of the institute. Staff members are also involved in framing the procedures for admission of students for the course and examinations [Internal & University] to be conducted by the institute.

Functional Level: All the Teaching Staff participate in sharing the knowledge by discussing on the latest trends in their respective area of specialization. The co-ordinators and the members of different departments meet together and plan the programmes to be conducted. Office staff are also involved in preparation of annual budget of the institute, taking into consideration the approved fee structure. They correspond with regulatory bodies to fulfill the requirements for smooth functioning of the institute's activities.

Operational level: All the staff members are involved in implementing the policies, procedures, and framework designed by the top management in order to maintain and achieve the quality standards.

Training to its staff is essential for effective implementation of the Quality assurance procedures. Faculty Development Programmes, Lectures and workshops give more thrust on pedagogy. As a result, the innovations across the field are practiced in the teaching methodology. Many industry experts and senior academicians from other institutions interact with the faculty members. This results in enhancement of the performance. Attending outreach programmes by faculty members also enriches them in bench marking services of the institution. The administrative staff remain service conscious in dealing with student matters.

The training in office management software has improves efficiency and time saving. The lower staff are maintaining efficiency in the upkeep of the infrastructure. The Head of the institute

interacts with faculty members through faculty meetings and shares his ideas and explains how quality initiatives of the institute have to be implemented.

4. AUDIT OUTCOME FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN INSTITUTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Regular Academic Audit gives feed-back about each faculty member in the form of self appraisal and appraisal from head of the institution to know their teaching and learning performance. The details of the subjects handled, percentage of pass and students' performance in the tests and examinations, participation in faculty development programme, participation in the external conferences and seminars, books or papers published and programmes organized in the college. The observations from the audit are passed on to the head of the institute for institutional improvement.

The following are some of the improvements in institutional activities initiated due to the outcomes of academic audit.

Table 1 : The improvements in institutional activities initiated due to the outcomes of academic audit.

Sl. No	Audit outcome	Improvements in institutional activities
1	Need for increase in Admission	1. Information dissemination 2. Website up-dating 3. Value addition 4. Employability relevance for courses 5. Concessional fee for female students
2	Need of improvements in Result	1. Counseling 2. Tutorials 3. More assignments 4. Close supervision of weak students
3	Need of enhancement in Faculty performance	1. Motivation 2. Organizing more FDP's 3. Retaining experienced faculty

4	Need of improvement in Research publication	1. Opportunities such as projects and consultancies 2. Activation of Research centres 3. Organizing workshop on Research methodology 4. Papers in conferences
5	Need for further strengthening Co-curricular activities	1. Introduction of certificate programmes 2. Compulsory projects 3. More programmes and events.
6	Need of improving the Placement	1. Exclusive placement cell 2. Soft skill training 3. More collaborations with industries 4. Conduct of Job Fests.

5. INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM FOR ENSURING QUALITY SERVICE

The institution has structured mechanisms to continuously review the teaching learning process as given below :

Table 2 : The structured mechanisms to continuously review the teaching learning process.

Sl. No.	Mechanisms	Structure, methodologies of operation	Outcome
1	Teachers Diary	Date wise, time wise, classes according to the time table is recorded in teachers diary. This gives a clear picture that the classes are conducted systematically	Faculty realize importance of adhering to the schedules.
2	Attendance Register	The number of classes taken versus the number of working days gives a direct measure of	Faculty realize the importance of the classes.

		teaching input.	
3	Student Feedback	Appraisal forms are distributed to the students on the last working day of the semester. This is confidently collected and passed on to the head of the institute for review.	Faculty identify need for improvement.
4	Performance appraisal	Performance self appraisal is done by the faculty. Against each of the appraisal items, the head of the institute marks his assessment in the form of grade point.	Faculty identify weakness
5	Result analysis	Result analysis is done for finding out the percentage of marks scored by the students in each of the subjects. This together is treated as a measure of the concerned faculties teaching efficiency.	Faculty realize need for improvement.
6	Management meetings with the faculty	Meetings with faculty are conducted by Management representatives and Head of the institute.	Faculty develops increased accountability.

		Poor performance like low pass percentage and poor marks are sort explanation.	
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6. STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

The institute organises interactive meetings with all its stakeholders in order to communicate its quality assurance policies, mechanisms and outcomes. The following are the stakeholders of the institute.

◆ **Management** : Management representatives interact with the faculty through meetings. These meetings are aimed towards reaffirming the quality conducive of the institution and its compliances.

◆ **Parents** : Parent-Teacher Meetings are conducted to inform them the initiatives taken by the institution to attain quality resulting in progress of their wards.

◆ **Students** : The institute conducts Orientation Programme at the beginning of every semester to make the students understand the quality concerns and to reinforce the culture of excellence in all aspects.

◆ **Alumni** : In meetings with alumni quality concerns and their improvements are discussed.

◆ **Industry** : Suggestions on revision of curriculum to include newer areas of knowledge and skill development as per industry requirement are incorporated to convince the employers of the commitment of the institution towards quality.

◆ **University** : The local inspection committee which comes to inspect the quality standards maintained by the institute are convinced to obtain renewal of affiliation.

◆ **Community** : Propaganda materials which are part of admission campaign, information posted in the website, notifications of rank holders and pass percentage in various courses in news papers and social service activities convey the quality policy, mechanisms and outcomes to the community.

7. ALUMNI AND CONTRIBUTION TO QUALITY

The alumni effectively contribute to the enrichment and enhancement of the quality of education by associating and involving in fostering professional, academic and social links with the institution. The alumni as a stakeholder are significant during different stages of Quality decisions. They are instrumental in gaining valuable insights about various industries, employers and society. They assist in identifying the skills required by the students to obtain specific positions in the companies. They regularly provide feedback to the faculty members through which the institution up-dates academic programmes and value added programmes most relevant to the current requirements. With the registration of the alumni association, networking becomes more effective and permanent.

8. CONCLUSION

Commitment to providing quality teaching and learning through well designed and systematic curriculum delivery using multitude of learning experiences is at the core of quality assurance policy. Quality policy contributes to institutionalizing the quality assurance processes. A variety of quality assurance processes are institutionalized focusing around teacher quality, curriculum delivery and pedagogy, research and training, skill development of students, orientation programmes for overall personality development and broad range of activities which equip the students to face challenges and take up risks with courage. The triad of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that expand their horizons of knowledge and contribute to development of mind is necessary for overall development of the students. In the ever increasing world of competition, educational institutions can survive only if quality is added in all walks of their service [16-30].

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