



EQUAM-BI Final Dissemination Conference

“India Europe Higher Education Benchmarking Experience and Strategies”

Date: 8th and 9th July 2021

Time: 1.30 pm to 6.30 pm IST (India) / 10:00 – 15:00 CEST (Europe)

**Venue: Virtual- hosted by National Assessment and Accreditation Council
(NAAC), Bengaluru India**

Co-ordinator from India



Co-ordinator from Europe



UNIVERSITAT DE
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Organized By

NATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION COUNCIL, INDIA
(An Autonomous Institution of the University Grants Commission)

And

Co-organized By

UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA (UB), BARCELONA, SPAIN

“India Europe higher education Benchmarking Experience and Strategies”- EQUAM-BAI Final conference

Prelude: This document is in two sections. The first section serves as a discussion paper that builds on the need for **Benchmarking Approach of EQUAM-BI as a Quality Enhancement Tool: Contribution towards reforming Indian Higher Education.**

The second section presents the upcoming **“Online EQUAM-BI Final Conference”** firming on the intent to present the overall project results and outcome, including the detailed report finalised as well as the impact of the project and the sustainability plans of each Indian institutions.

Section 1: Discussion paper

EQUAM-BI: CONCEPT OF BENCHMARKING PROCESS - BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Context of Benchmarking Approach

Driven by the rapid pace of globalization and the unprecedented growth of technology, the higher education system in the world is going through a transformative phase. Particularly from an Indian perspective the transformation has been even more exciting in terms of echoing the need for quality education. Some of the challenges in ensuring quality in higher education include growth in enrolment rate, call for inclusion and equity, diversity in the systems of higher education and their accountability, role of government and quality assurance agencies, academic integrity and availability of resources. Concerted efforts are being made by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and National Board of Accreditation (NBA) to address these challenges and improve the quality of higher education. Educational reforms brought out by the statutory bodies like UGC, AICTE, NCERT, BCI and others have contributed a great deal in improving quality of higher education. However, there is a need to step up the transformation process.

In this context, Benchmarking is a very powerful tool through which organizations can learn from the experiences and innovations of others. If organizations adopt collaborative benchmarking, they can replicate the processes, innovations and best practices of each other, resulting in mutual benefits.

With introduction of benchmarking approach, institutions identify the processes, innovations and best practices of each other and, with due respect to context, replicate the process and apply enhanced management decision-making which results in individual and mutual benefits. Benchmarking has resulted in quite a few crucial outcomes that ranged from discovering concepts and practices of collaborative benchmarking and selection of fit-for-purpose indicators for benchmarking to the fundamental realization that benchmarking is not always about matching the best in others but surpassing our own excellence continuously through quality improvements.

Role of Benchmarking in Indian HE System

Despite having the second largest higher education system in the world, India faces the challenges of low GER, poor infrastructure, high drop-out rate and unfavourable student-teacher ratio. The challenge is further accentuated by the fact that there is a considerable gap between the skills acquired by the graduates and the requirements of the industry, which might nullify the demographic dividend that she could otherwise reap. A large part of the responsibility of overcoming these challenges and generating not-only industry-ready global workforce, but also job-creating entrepreneurs, rests on the Indian higher education sector. Given that 20% of the world's working-age population is estimated to live in India by 2025, [2, PwC] the Indian higher education sector assumes greater significance even from an international perspective.

The concept of benchmarking in Indian higher education is less noticed and practiced compared to other developed countries such as Europe, United States, Australia etc. However, in India, the application of the benchmarking concept to higher education is still in its nascent stage and therefore not many examples exist that support the use of benchmarking as a mechanism for undertaking effective organisational change in Indian HE. Through the experiences and knowledge gained from the other developing countries few HEIs and agencies

have introduced benchmarking in their process and procedures recently. As benchmarking is highly suited to institutions of higher education then compared to other sectors because as the system, it involves many stakeholders and process and procedures varies from institution to institution. Hence it provides a way for the study which has many players from faculty, administrators, students etc and system that differs from system to system.

An efficient means of improving quality in the Indian higher education system would be peer learning through benchmarking of processes and best practices of other Institutions, particularly institutes of international repute. Creating benchmarks through best practices is not a new notion in higher education. The European benchmarking approaches have been developed since the mid-1990s in different ways. Normally these exercises adopt a mixture of quantitative, qualitative and process-oriented approaches.

European Union (EU) has been one of the pioneers in the process of benchmarking quality in higher education. Some of the notable quality assurance agencies from EU include the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHE), European Network of Quality Agencies (ENQA), and European Centre for Strategic Management of Universities (ESMU) which created a European Benchmarking programme. These quality assurance agencies have been instrumental in measuring and promoting good practices in university management using quantitative and qualitative indicators and standardizing the policies and procedures.

Introduction to Benchmark Driven, Data Based Assessment process of NAAC

NAAC with the vision of making ‘quality the defining element of higher education in India’ (NAAC, Vision) seeks to collaborate with the EU consortium with the intent and aspiration for cooperation among quality assurance networks and agencies to foster trust beyond borders in higher education quality, dissolve boundaries and develop strategies and resources for next generation quality assurance (APQN, Global Media Release).

NAAC has continuously strived to improve its methodology for assessment and accreditation, taking into cognisance changing trends in higher education, the

rapidly transforming global scenario, feedback from the stakeholders and lessons learnt from experiences. Currently, NAAC is in the process of a complete overhaul and reform of its processes through implementing benchmarking exercise as a part of its Revised Accreditation Framework (RAF).

Recently, NAAC has revised its methodology by executing data-based benchmark driven accreditation as a main aspect in its process. The rationale behind the revision is to bring in new innovations and best practices, introduction of benchmarking concept, in accreditation process to address the challenges in the Indian higher Education such as increase in number of HEIs, enrolment capacity, transformations and changing trends in global higher education market., etc has been a reason for initiation of revised accreditation process to maintain better quality education standards in the country.

The revised accreditation framework marks a paradigm shift which has introduced several concepts in quality assurance such as Quality benchmarking, Data Validation and Verification (DVV), Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS), Innovation Ecosystem, Alumni Engagement, Institutional Values and Distinctiveness in the accreditation process. These concepts and procedures have to be understood by the stakeholders. NAAC also needs to design a strategy to take the revised accreditation framework ahead by reaching out to the stakeholders, who are having apprehensions about new form of accreditation, which is data driven. (*J Patil et al, INQAAHE 2019*)

India – European Union (EU) Higher Education Benchmarking Project: EQUAM-BI

Since October 2017, NAAC has undertaken the India-Europe (EU) benchmarking project “**Enhancing Quality Assurance Management and Benchmarking Strategies in Indian Universities (EQUAM-BI)**” with consortium of 14 European and Indian Institutions including Universities and Quality Assurance Agencies funded by European Commission. The Project brings together European partner Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and quality agencies, with an already-proven successful track record in supporting QA/QE in different international contexts, with a series of (‘volunteering’)

Indian universities who are keen to be involved in addressing the country's identified needs for quality improvement in HE.

Consortium Composition

European Partners

1. Co-ordinator/Grant Holder/University of Barcelona – UB- Spain
2. National Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Spain– ANECA-Spain
3. KTH Royal Institute of Technology - KTH –Sweden
4. The Sapienza University of Rome - UNIROMA1–Italy
5. The University of Montpellier- UM-France
6. University of Nicosia - UN–Cyprus

Indian Partners

1. National Assessment and Accreditation Council – NAAC (Indian Co-ordinator)
2. Jadavpur University –JU
3. Symbiosis International University – SIU
4. Indian Institute of Technology Madras – IITM
5. University of Mysore - UOM
6. Shivaji University, Kolhapur – SUK
7. Asian Institute of Gaming and Animation- Edulink Private Limited – EDULINK
8. Mangalore University – MU

EQUAM-BI: in the Context of “Benchmarking”

Benchmarking, as viewed in the context of the project, is not a “race against others” but it is “tempered” learning. Its main goal is not to outdo other institutions in rankings but to better the prognosis of areas of deficit and improve upon the specific interventions that help institutions optimize their performance potential.

The project worked closely with other national and European initiatives that work in support of higher education capacity building across developing 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 a nodal point 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. The aimed 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. It is noted that the considerable amount of data collection and analysis through Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) of University/Institution is planned in this project.

EQUAM-BI Objectives:

The project ensures and assured the creation of HE community for improved regional cooperation between universities and governments of both India and EU.

1. Develop an understanding of the concepts and practices of benchmarking in order to accelerate reform of higher education in India,
2. Use benchmarking as a modern tool that contribute to improvements in governance and leadership management in Indian universities,
3. Improve the capacities of Indian universities to use and develop different tools that will allow them to benchmark and focus their quality management against relevant national and international expectations,
4. Build the capacity of partner universities for benchmarking,

5. Establish networks of academic leaders as a unique decision-makers' forum to promote the modernization of higher education management, support future leaders and encourage the professionalization of higher education management at all levels.
6. The creation of new frameworks for ensuring successful and sustainable partnerships between Indian and European HEIs and organisations, to enhance quality and promote the application of internationally recognised good practice.

How Important EQUAM-BI Benchmarking Project for Indian Higher education?

India being among largest sender countries of internationally mobile students and also one of the major receiving countries of students especially from South Asia, quality assurance of higher education and internationalisation is an important concern for the developing countries like India to improve the standards of quality in similar standards of Western countries to match the quality standards and reach the cross-border students and faculties. Keeping this track to improve the quality standards many well-known Indian institutes are trying to bring the quality standards to match with the world class universities across the globe.

Based on a comparative exploration of current activities and planned objectives, against international best practice, this Project has provided a 'benchmarking toolkit' and a programme of capacity building / dissemination with a guidance for Indian universities from the European partners on how best to improve / enhance their governance and management of 'quality'. The European partners have trained and mentored the Indian partners for implementing their process for quality improvement in their HEIs.

EQUAM-BI Benchmarking Toolkit:

The Project does not aim at a 'one-off' ranking exercise through comparison of data sets between Indian and European HEIs but will explore in depth the importance of (differing) 'contexts' relevant to Indian HE and develop a 'benchmarking toolkit' (including parameters, procedures and supporting guidelines) to provide better support for consistent, evidence-based decision making in the governance and management of its quality.

A benchmarking toolkit has been developed in order to contribute to improvements in governance and leadership management, to accelerate institutional reform and to support policy makers and university leaders in taking strategic decisions, monitor progress, and use data to develop policies that encourage the use of good governance practices.

The EQUAMBI project stands its role in designing the toolkit to suit the Indian context considering the European assessment standards and NAAC accreditation criteria. The tool has been designed considering the two accreditation systems, NAAC from India and ANECA from Spain. The accreditation systems were carefully studied for identification of areas for improvement in Indian Higher Education, findings and outcomes of surveys (Quality Assurance Management and Data Management) which is conducted by Symbiosis International University (SIU), India to capture the quality scenario of Indian HE and European HE system etc.

The purpose of the toolkit is to clearly articulated the outcome of the EQUAMBI project i.e., to provide some kind of utility to all the universities in the country which will add value to the institutional process and procedures and also beneficial to non-partners Institutions. Through the toolkit NAAC can facilitate the toolkit across the country which is exactly beyond NAAC process of accreditation. As a result of this, the designed toolkit supports the universities in defining and implementing their internal quality assurance system closely linked to its mission, vision and within the framework of institutional governance in the university structure.

The designed toolkit functions as a self-assessment document for the quality improvement purpose which is available in the partner institutions, which is complimentary to NAAC assessment parameters and serve as a self-assessment instruments in the later stage which will be shared with the non-partners across the country. The toolkit is a solid contribution to the nation and outcome of the EQUAMBI partners vies of the various discussions, survey outcomes, expressions of the partners, combination of European and Indian accreditation standards etc. for quality improvement which universities can tweak and adopt for the benefit and their requirements to match with the European context.

Finally, the toolkit designed aligns with original NAAC criteria to match the Indian context.

It is observed that, most of the institutions have expressed their areas for quality improvement. The areas for implementation differ from institution while many of them have showed their interest towards establishment of quality management unit, which is a pre-requisite data depository unit in every institution. Besides many institutions have expressed their willingness to establish a research unit, international students cell, etc.,

Each university is reflecting on its own areas for quality enhancement using the toolkit. The partners have attempted to identify the tracking trends in practical ways on toolkit, benchmarking exercises, detailed level issues identification, to identify the toolkit, general policies and procedures. The toolkit defines the main objectives, identify the gaps in the toolkit which are overlapping with NAAC criteria.

Outcome of the Project:

The exercise of collaborative benchmarking would involve reviewing the existing parameters for their appropriate and sustained adoption. This would entail long-lasting investments in capacity building in India towards maximizing returns on academic partnerships with European institutions in strategic areas. This proposed partnership between Indian and European Institutes of Higher Education would involve and facilitate the following outcomes:

1. Partnering with leading EU institutions and organizations to nurture a sustainable benchmarking culture
2. Creating capacity for improving quality of teaching-learning, research and innovation, academic leadership
3. Collection of relevant data to enable the study and updating of benchmarking methodologies
4. Creating frameworks for ensuring successful and sustainable partnerships with institutions of higher education in Europe to promote internationalization.

Expected Impact and Policy Initiatives of EQUAM-BI Benchmarking tool under the purview of Indian Higher Education System

- The benchmarking approach will function as a tool to enhance the performance of developing Indian higher education system. It will provide governments with evidence and data to strengthen policy making, and it addresses the strong demand for the comparative assessment of higher education systems within the country.
- The benchmarking project will identify the data gaps and drive out the better data collection methods with experiences gained from European partners with international comparable standards to create a common method regarding the higher education system performance. and it can be basis for creation of a platform of online Data information portal of national data and institutions can update the performance of management systems.
- Through with each repeated benchmarking exercise builds evidence based valuable framework development for policy initiatives to stimulate the higher education systems.
- The project draws an adaptable approach to suit the emerging HE policies and strategies which may be link with inter-governmental organisations. (*OECD, 2017*)
- The benchmarking approach supports the evidence-based decision-making policies in institutional governance and Quality Management aspects with reference to research, innovations and internationalisation strategies.
- Through learn and share of best practices and experiences, the partner agencies enhance their capacities.
- The project maps the various benchmarking strategies followed and practiced with partner and other groups.
- The project provides an opportunity to update benchmarking strategies for Indian Universities to align with the ongoing European Union policy initiatives related to the Quality Management aspects and benchmarking strategies.
- The benchmarking project raises the standards of higher education importance for the developing Indian economy and society.

Conclusion:

This project has not only added value to the expertise of the NAAC, but has also helped substantially in providing insights for review and refinement of assessment and accreditation tools.

Given that NAAC has already implemented a framework of accreditation based on data driven benchmarking, the outcomes of EQUAM-BI project can be very useful in multiple ways. It will not only help fine-tuning the benchmarking tool of NAAC, but also play very important role in spreading and replicating the tools and practices to internalise a quality culture among a large number of diverse types of Universities and Colleges in India. This ensures the sustainability of work done through the project for a long time through institutionalised structures both at national and institutional levels.

Section 2: EQUAM-BI Final Conference

The EQUAM-BI Final Conference:

The EQUAM-BI Final Conference through online mode is scheduled on 7th and 8th July 2021 at the NAAC, Bengaluru to present the overall project results and outcome. It will present the detailed report finalised as well as the impact of the project and the sustainability plans of each Indian institutions & creating HE community for improved regional cooperation between universities and governments of both India and EU.

Agenda

The Conference is expected to facilitate:

- *Sharing information and resources in higher education quality assurance*
- *Exchange and promotion of good practices & methodizing processes to improve performance*
- *Sharing and creating value through power of alliance*
- *Serving global student community by facilitating student mobility*
- *Developing strategies for creating global resources in quality assurance*
- *Sharing structured data on comparative institutional strengths and weaknesses*
- *Enhance the quality and performance improvement in Indian higher education system*

- *Builds evidence based valuable framework*
- *Development for policy initiatives in Higher Education Sector*
- *Fostering a sustainable benchmarking culture in Indian Higher Education Quality Assurance*
- *Internationalization & Systemization in the Indian higher education system*
- *Contribution towards Research & innovation*
- *Connecting initiatives and interest in QA at national and international level.*

Expected Outcomes

- ❖ *Exploring the formalization of an International Benchmarking Approach / Standards / Protocol / Charter on Indian Higher Education Quality Assurance.*
- ❖ *Agreement or statement of intent among Indian and European Partner Institutions of quality higher education to work together for common cause and explore untapped potential of networking among Indian and Global Higher Education Scenario.*
- ❖ *Engage Indian HEIs in collaborative benchmarking and capacity building through Global HE collaborations.*
- ❖ *Awaken the interest of Indian Higher Education Institutions in the implementation of the QA tools and procedures promoted by the project.*
- ❖ *Promote alliances between Indian project partners who have implemented EQUAMBI methodologies and tools with other Indian HEI's interested in their application, with the aim of mentoring their implementation and promoting joint work in QA.*
- ❖ *Articulate NAAC's role as a promoter of QA benchmarking in Indian Universities and Higher Education Institutions.*

Acknowledgement

Many of the views expressed in this document are reflections of the collective work of Project Team of the NAAC, Partner Institutions of Indian and Europe supported for development of this Benchmarking approach towards quality enhancement process. Their contribution is gratefully acknowledged.

This conference document has been jointly prepared by Dr. Jagannath Patil, Mr. Jaume Fortuny, Dr. Nicolas Patrici, Dr. Wahidul Hasan, Mr. Umesh Kumar. R and valuable inputs from various colleagues of Indian and European Partners Institution.

THE EQUAM-BI CONSORTIUM



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