Irregularities in the functioning of NAAC

Why in news?

The chairperson of NAAC's executive committee, resigned after repeatedly demanding an independent inquiry into the functioning of the council.

What is the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)?

- The NAAC is an *autonomous body* set up in 1994 under the *University Grants Commission (UGC).*
- **Functions –** NAAC is entrusted with assessing the quality of India's higher educational institutions.
- Following a multi-layered assessment process, it awards grades to colleges and universities.
- Its parameters include curriculum, faculty, infrastructure, research and financial well-being.
- The ratings of institutions range from A++ to C and if an institution is graded D, it means it is not accredited.

How is the accreditation process carried out?

- The first step involves an institute approaching the NAAC for assessment.
- Once the NAAC sets the process in motion, the applicant has to submit a self-study report (SSR) containing information related to quantitative and qualitative metrics.
- **Peer review –** The data is then validated by expert teams of the NAAC, followed by spot visits by peer teams comprising assessors drawn from universities across India.

Is a NAAC accreditation mandatory?

- **Voluntary –** While the UGC has over the years issued many circulars directing institutes to mandatorily undergo NAAC's assessment, the process still remains largely voluntary.
- **NEP –** The National Education Policy (NEP) (2020) has set an ambitious target of getting all higher educational institutes to obtain the highest level of accreditation over the next 15 years.

What are the allegations on the NAAC?

- **Malpractices –** People with vested interests are indulging in malpractices, leading to the awarding of questionable grades to some institutions.
- **Input based –** The major problem with the ratings is the current approach of

assessment is input-based, i.e., the NAAC relies heavily on self-assessment reports of applicant institutions.

- **Influence on the reviews –** The data is then validated by NAAC expert teams, followed by peer team visits to the institutions.
- It is alleged that the education institutions influence the peer review teams.

Why are so few institutes accredited?

- **Poor grades –** The fear of obtaining poor grades holds institutes back from applying.
- **Paramarsh –** In 2019, the UGC had launched a scheme named 'Paramarsh' to address the issue.
- Under the scheme, some of the best performing institutes were identified to serve as *mentors to at least 5 institutes* aspiring to get accredited.
- **Provisional Accreditation for Colleges (PAC) –** NAAC explored the possibility of issuing PAC, under which 1 year old institutes could apply for accreditation with validity of 2 years.
- **Difficult criteria –** Currently, only institutes that are *at least 6 years old*, or from where *at least 2 batches of students have graduated*, can apply and the accreditation is valid for 5 years.

References

1. The Indian Express │Claims of irregularities in the functioning of NAAC
2. The Indian Express │The controversy over NAAC's system for assessing higher education

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