

CHAPTER – 12

*ESTABLISHMENT of the NATIONAL COUNCIL for ACCREDITATION and QUALITY ASSURANCE (NCAQA)***Background**

Historically, the role of the state in Education and Higher Education in particular, has been all pervasive in Pakistan. Right from its inception, Education has been considered one of the main responsibilities of the government. Therefore, it had the monopoly in policy, planning, curricula, administration and delivery of services. This monopolistic strand continued. However, the Private Sector also expanded considerably at the school and college level until 1972, when all private educational institutions were taken over by the government in the wake of the Nationalization process.

The National Policy of 1979⁽¹⁾ reviewed the consequences of Nationalization and allowed the private sector to establish educational institutions. The Aga Khan University was the first Private Sector University to be established in 1983, followed by the Lahore University of Management Sciences in 1985. Since the 1990s, the government is pursuing a liberal policy in Private Higher Education. ⁽²⁾ At present, 22 universities/degree awarding institutions have received charters and are providing professional education in engineering, medicine and other related technical and general fields.

The following factors have combined in Pakistan to create a big marketing demand for Higher Education:

- a) A rapidly growing population estimated to be rising at almost 2.5% per annum. The result is that today Pakistan has over 20 million youth in the age-group 17-23 years. This has put great pressure of numbers seeking admission in educational institutions of higher learning.
- b) The acknowledged inability of the government to invest heavily in the Higher Education sector. This inability will continue to grow.
- c) Encouraging response by the Private Sector to fill in the gap, resulting in the opening of a large number of tertiary level educational institutions. These institutions have varying standards, and in some cases the management lacks the ability for sustained functioning of the institution.
- d) A rapidly rising middle class with aspirations of social mobility. They are prepared to sacrifice other needs to equip their children with degree level of education.
- e) Globalization encouraging trans-border movements of large numbers who are adequately equipped, educationally.

The above situation has made it imperative that the state should set-up some institutions for quality assurance and accreditation of institutions in the country. In a way it could even be viewed as a step for consumer protection, so that some unscrupulous operators do not mislead or defraud the unsuspecting student and parent. Some institutions are also operating under claims of being centres or campuses of overseas universities. In the University Grants Commission, many examples have appeared of universities which are not accredited in the country of origin, and perhaps exist only on paper.

EFFORTS at SETTING UP an ACCREDITATION AGENCY

In order to exercise effective control over Institutions established in the Private Sector, to implement the liberal policy of granting the degree awarding status to major institutions of Higher Education, and to tackle the menace of 'degree mills' the need for a regulatory body was urgently felt. Accordingly, the National Education Policy 1992⁽²⁾ provided under section 9.3.27 that "*a National Council of Academic Award and Accreditation (NCAAA) will be established to regulate academic affairs of such institutions in private and public sector, which will be given degree awarding status. The institutions so established will be placed under the National Council of Academic Awards and Accreditation for regulating academic programmes and award of degrees.*"

The establishment of a Regulatory Body for Institutions of Higher Education has been pursued by the UGC since 1993, with the government. However, despite their best efforts, they have not been able to constitute the body, mainly because of various objections raised by the Ministry of Law, from time to time. In order to meet these objections, the UGC has revised its drafts on a number of occasions, but each time different objections have been raised.

The latest draft submitted by the University Grants Commission envisages the following functions for the National Council for Accreditation and Quality Assurance: (3)

- i. to lay down the standards of education to ensure that the institutions, including those imparting IT education, have physical, human and financial resources to run the institution;
- ii. to lay down the conditions for accreditation of universities and institutions of Higher Learning, including those imparting IT education, with the objective of ensuring the maintenance of national academic standards;
- iii. to grant accreditation to institutions of higher education in the public and private sectors, including those imparting IT education, which conform with national standards. Institutions granted such accreditation shall have the powers to grant, certificates, diplomas and degrees up to the Bachelor level (B.A, B.Sc., BCS, etc);
- iv. to withdraw accreditation, if found that the institutions are unable to satisfactorily demonstrate their ability and commitment to achieve and maintain national academic standards;
- v. to validate the curricula and syllabi of the universities or institutions of higher education granted accreditation and supervise the academic programmes and development of various institutions of higher learning, and to ensure that the internal procedures for review and up-gradation of curricula remain effective after accreditation has been granted;
- vi. to carry out inspection of institutions seeking accreditation and validation, with the objective of ensuring that they meet the national standards of education;

- vii. to monitor academic performance, internal procedures for course development, quality control, standards of education and staff development programmes, and conduct periodic academic audit of institutions that have been granted accreditation, to ensure their continuous efficient performance and adherence to national academic standards;
- viii. to advise in the development of the syllabi and to formulate recommendations and guidelines for improving the standards and quality of teaching, education, research and system of examination, to maintain uniform standards;
- ix. to advise the government to take any such action, including closure of an institution, if standards are not maintained and laws are violated;
- x. to lay down the conditions, frame rules and guidelines for opening campuses/ outposts/affiliation/twinning/franchising and collaboration arrangements between foreign universities and Pakistani universities, so as to ensure that they maintain national standards, abide by the laws on Islamic Education and other compulsory requirements of the national curriculum;
- xi. to cause visitation of the institution to be made in such manner as may be prescribed by the Council;
- xii. to ask for such reports, returns and other information from the institutions as the Council may require;
- xiii. to perform all other auxiliary functions as may be considered appropriate, incidental and conducive to the fulfillment of the above functions.

The latest draft has been returned with the following comments:

- a) The functions of the proposed National Council for Accreditation seem to be overlapping the functions of some of the other organizations like the Pakistan Medical & Dental Council, the Pakistan Engineering Council, etc. They should be consulted.
- b) The draft law envisages that the receipt from fees received by the Council will be credited to the fund of the Council. It should be clarified in the draft if the proposed council is a body corporate or otherwise. Funds will have to be credited in the government account

The above replies have been received after many months of efforts at the highest level. Thus the matter is back to square one from where the journey started in 1993.

The matter is not only important but has considerable urgency, as unrecognized non-accredited institutions continue to open almost daily. Students and parents are bewildered, and there have been cases of persons having been defrauded. The government will be well advised to take serious note of this issue.

References

1. Government of Pakistan. National Education Policy 1979, Ministry of Education, Islamabad. 1979.
2. Government of Pakistan. Education Policy 1992. Ministry of Education, Islamabad. 1992.
3. University Grants Commission. Draft of Ordinance for the Establishment of the National Council for Quality Control and Accreditation. University Grants Commission, Islamabad. 2001.