National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)

For Prelims: National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), University Grants Commission (UGC), Paramarsh, All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), 2020-2021.

For Mains: Current Accreditation Criteria in India, Challenges Related to India's Higher Education System.

Why in News?

Recently, the **National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)** has been facing allegations of **irregularities in its functioning.**

What is NAAC?

- **About:**
    - Established in 1994, it is an autonomous body under the **University Grants Commission (UGC)** responsible for assessing the quality of **higher educational institutions in India.**
- **Functions of NAAC:**
    - Through a multi-layered assessment process, it **awards grades ranging from A++ to C** based on parameters such as **curriculum, faculty, infrastructure, research and financial well-being.**
- **Allegations:**
    - The former chairperson of NAAC's executive committee resigned after alleging that **malpractices were leading to questionable grades** being awarded to some institutions.
    - An inquiry commissioned found **irregularities in the IT system and allocation of assessors.**
        - The inquiry also highlighted that nearly **70% of experts from the pool of around 4,000 assessors** have not **received any opportunity to make site visits.**
    - As of **January 2023**, out of the 1,113 universities and 43,796 colleges in the **All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), 2020-2021**, only 418 universities and 9,062 colleges were NAAC-accredited.

What are the Current Accreditation Criteria in India?

- **Criteria:**
    - Currently, only institutes that are at least **6 years old or from where at least two batches of students have graduated** can apply for **accreditation**, which is valid for 5 years.
- **Accreditation Mandate:**
    - Accreditation by NAAC is **voluntary**, though many circulars have been issued by the UGC urging institutions to undergo assessment.
- **Efforts to Expedite Accreditation:**
    - The **UGC** launched a scheme named **'Paramarsh' in 2019** to mentor institutes aspiring to get accredited.

- NAAC explored the possibility of issuing **Provisional Accreditation for Colleges (PAC) to one-year-old institutes.**
- The **National Education Policy (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 Other Challenges in India's Higher Education System?

- **Limited Access:** Despite efforts to **increase access to higher education,** many students from **marginalised communities** still face barriers to entry, including financial constraints and **lack of educational opportunities.**
  - Especially, the number of students in the **Persons with Disabilities** category **dropped in 2020-21 to 79,035 from 92,831 in 2019-20.**
- **Gender Inequality:** Women continue to face **significant barriers to accessing higher education in India**, including social and cultural biases and a lack of support systems.
  - According to **All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), 2020-2021,** the female enrolment in higher education programmes was **49% of total enrolments in 2020-21.**
- **Employability Issues:** Despite having a large number of graduates, **many students in India struggle to find employment** due to a lack of practical skills and industry-relevant education.
  - Also, **India lags behind many other countries in terms of research output,** and there is a **lack of a research culture** in many higher education institutions.

Way Forward

- **Promote Digital Learning:** The use of **digital technology** can help make education more **accessible, cost-effective, and efficient.**
  - Institutions should invest in digital infrastructure and provide training to students and faculty to adapt to new technologies.
- **Increase Accreditation:** The accreditation process should be made more transparent and accessible to encourage more institutions to seek accreditation.
  - The government should also **ensure that the accreditation process is fair and free from** corruption.
- **Promote International Collaborations:** International collaborations can help **improve the quality of education and research in India.**
  - Institutions should partner with foreign institutions to **exchange knowledge, expertise, and resources.**

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. What is the aim of the programme 'Unnat Bharat Abhiyan'? (2017)

(a) Achieving 100% literacy by promoting collaboration between voluntary organisations and the government's education system and local communities.

(b) Connecting institutions of higher education with local communities to address development challenges through appropriate technologies.

(c) Strengthening India's scientific research institutions in order to make India a scientific and technological power.

(d) Developing human capital by allocating special funds for health care and education of rural and urban poor, and organising skill development programmes and vocational training for them.

Ans: (b)

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