

Breaking the Link Between Quality and Exclusivity



Decennial Year Celebrations

NATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION COUNCIL

Bangalore, India

5 November 2004

By

Sir John Daniel

President & CEO

Commonwealth of Learning

Your Excellency the President of India
Your Excellency the Governor of Karnataka
Honourable Chief Minister of Karnataka
Chairman of the University Grants Commission
Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my privilege to bring the greetings of the Commonwealth of Learning to this splendid gathering at which we celebrate the stellar achievements of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council over a decade of its existence.

Since I am the only speaker from outside India may I also presume to bring the greetings of the whole international community and particularly of UNESCO, which began its close interest in matters of assessment and accreditation of higher education during my recent assignment as its Assistant Director-General for Education?

The fundamental challenge that faces education in this 21st century is to widen access, to raise quality and to contain costs - and to do all these things at the same time. India is the world's key laboratory - perhaps I should the crucible - in which to find ways of achieving these seemingly incompatible goals.

Throughout educational history the vectors of access, quality and cost have been seen as an iron triangle or a zero-sum game. The beliefs were that you cannot have greater access without losing quality; you cannot reduce costs without harming quality; you cannot raise quality without limiting access. These

beliefs established an insidious link between quality and exclusivity, creating the assumption that you cannot have quality education without excluding many people from it.

It is the genius of India to have cut this insidious link and to have broken open the iron triangle. The creation of your national and state open universities has shown that access can be compatible with good quality and lower costs. This is the revolution that India has created in education. But India has gone further. Through the work of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council it has woven together your whole vast and diverse national higher education system into a great tapestry united by a concern for quality. Having been a vice-chancellor in the UK in the 1990s when quality assessment was introduced in that country I marvel at the scale on which India, through the NAAC, has achieved success in this vital endeavour.

The Commonwealth of Learning is proud to be associated with a small but important aspect of your endeavour, namely the quality assurance of programmes for training teachers. As with other exemplary aspects of Indian educational practice, the Commonwealth of Learning is helping other countries build on India's success. Since the world will need to recruit and train between ten and thirty million new teachers in the next ten years, anything that can improve the quality of teacher education will have huge beneficial consequences for global development.

I congratulate the architects and artisans of NAAC on this auspicious occasion and I wish you well in your vital work.