



# EQUITY AND DIVERSITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN AQAR-BASED INSTITUTIONAL STUDY OF DRBCCC HINDU COLLEGE

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## Abstract

*Diversity and equity are core values of quality assurance in post-secondary education institutions (HEIs), which provide equal treatment to all stakeholders in terms of access, equal participation, and opportunities. Under Criterion VII -Institutional Values and Best Practices in the Indian accreditation system, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 indicates the importance of these values, underscoring them as the key drivers of educational change. The article is a case AQAR-based institutional study of DRBCCC Hindu College, which proposes the application of equity- and diversity-oriented initiatives as an internal mechanism of Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC). The study adopts a longitudinal and descriptive research design based on secondary data based on four successive Annual Quality Assurance Reports (AQARs) that were published by 2020 through 2023. This analysis focuses on gender equity programmes, inclusive student support systems, promoting diversity activities, and policy addressing disadvantageous groups in institutions. The results indicate an incremental institutional change that has been away of awareness-based interventions to organized and long-term equity and diversity practices. The paper illustrates the possibility of converting AQAR documentation into empirical evidence and provides a model that can be replicated by HEIs in an attempt to enhance NAAC Criterion VII compliance and inclusion culture of quality.*

**Keywords:** *Equity, Diversity, AQAR, NAAC Criterion VII, IQAC, Inclusive Higher Education*

## Introduction

The quest to realize quality in higher education has not only increased to academic excellence but also to ethical, social, and inclusive aspects of institutional operation. Equity and diversity have become the important factors of institutional maturity, indicating how an institution is concerned about fairness, social justice, and respect to diversity. These dimensions are becoming key dimensions of sustainable educational development to accreditation agencies throughout the world.

In India, NAAC incorporates equity and diversity under Criterion VII where emphasis is given to gender equity, inclusiveness, support of disadvantaged parties, and responsiveness of the institution to diversity (Guidelines of IQAC and Submission of AQAR by Affiliated/Constituent Colleges Guidelines for the Creation of the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) and Submission of Annual Quality Assurance Report (AQAR) by Accredited Institutions, n.d.). In addition to this framework, NEP 2020 highlights the necessity of inclusive

education systems that will combat socio-economic, gender, regional, and cultural differences (National Education Policy 2020 Ministry of Human Resource Development Government of India, n.d.). It is in this context that the current article discusses how DRBCCC Hindu College has put in place equity and diversity using the initiatives of IQAC which are recorded in its AQARs in a span of four years.

### **Equity and Diversity in Higher Education (NAAC / IQAC Context)**

- Inclusive admission policies
- Gender equity and equal opportunity cells
- Anti-discrimination and grievance redressal mechanisms
- Curriculum incorporating multicultural and inclusive perspectives
- Capacity-building programmes and sensitization workshops

The concept of equity and diversity relate to one another as the pillars of inclusive development. Diversity unites differences whereas equity makes sure that the differences are not turned into a disadvantage. Academic excellence, social responsibility and institutional credibility in institutions of higher learning are enhanced with the incorporation of equity and diversity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Equity and Social Justice Theory**

Social justice theory, especially (Rawls, 1971) definition of fairness and equal opportunity, is also the basis of equity in education. Equity focuses on differentiated support systems that are used to counterbalance structural inequalities in order to enable all learners to attain similar education results.

#### **Diversity and Inclusive Education**

Diversity in higher education is the process of recognizing and accommodating diverse social, cultural, gender, and economic differences in the institutional ecosystem. The theory of inclusive education, supported by UNESCO, focuses on eliminating structural obstacles to inclusion and the establishment of positive learning conditions that do not discriminate against diversity.

#### **Quality Culture and Institutional Values**

According to quality culture theory, quality development becomes sustainable as long as institutional processes are anchored on shared values. Equity and diversity are cultural aspects of quality, which govern policies and practices, as well as stakeholder engagement in institutions.

## Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

- Examine equity- and diversity-oriented initiatives implemented at DRBCCC Hindu College.
- Analyze AQAR data (2020–21 to 2023–24) related to NAAC Criterion VII.
- Interpret the role of IQAC in promoting inclusive institutional practices.
- Identify future directions for strengthening equity and diversity in higher education.

## Methodology

The ultimate study design is descriptive and longitudinal research design using secondary data. The data were gathered based on AQARs provided to DRBCCC Hindu College during four academic years (202021- 202324). Indicators that were found to be relevant in terms of gender equity, diversity promotion, inclusive support mechanisms, and institutional values were extracted, tabulated, and interpreted. The study is narrowed to the NAAC Criterion VII of equity and diversity aspects.

## Measures taken by DRBCCC Hindu College in terms of Equity and Diversity Implementation in the Institution

### Student Admission Based on Equity and Diversity

Equity and diversity in the admission, admission of students to an institution of higher learning is a core concept of inclusive higher education. It provides equal opportunities to education and acknowledges the various socio-economic, cultural, gender, and academic backgrounds of the learners. At the institutional scale, equity and diversity-based admission systems are expected to minimize educational inequity, enhance social justice, and establish a pluralistic educational environment.

## Policy Framework

The admission process is guided by:

- Government of India and State Government reservation policies
- UGC and affiliating university norms

Year	CATEGORY				Total Admitted	Sanctioned Strength
	SC	ST	OBC	Gen		
2020-2021	302	18	838	520	1678	1813
2021-2022	309	18	857	531	1715	1840
2022-2023	317	18	884	548	1706	1869
2023-2024	303	18	842	522	1685	1866
2024-2025	483	11	934	109	1537	1865

The data on the enrollment by category indicate the great attention to equality, diversity, and inclusive access to higher education in the institution. A significant percentage of the student body during the five years of academics is associated with socially and educationally

disadvantaged groups, especially, Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC), which implies that the policies of reservation and inclusive admission have been successfully applied.

The willingness of OBC to enrol large number of students over the years shows its part in accommodating students belonging to historically underrepresented groups. The fact that SC and ST students do not fluctuate also evidences compliance with the norms in the statutory framework and the efforts made by the institution to include the marginalized communities. Although the general category balance of students differs according to the different years, the general pattern highlights the various social makeup of the student body.

The responsiveness to changes in demographics and policy aspects can also be observed by the data as in the change in total enrollment over years. The institution was always extremely strict in using the quota system and separate that the college always accepted over 80 percent of students under quota status in case of the minority status as well. All in all, the categorical distribution is indicative of DRBCCC Hindu College, inclusive academic culture where diversity is entrenched in the practices of institutions.

### Scholarship Support for Students

Scholarship support is an essential tool of enhancing equity, access, and inclusion in higher learning. Due to the culture of leadership in respecting the socio-economic differences in students, the institution supports and offers different kinds of government, institutional and private scholarships so that cost cannot be a barrier to academic study and advancement of students.

The scholarship scheme aims to:

- Ensure **equitable access** to higher education for economically and socially disadvantaged students
- Reduce dropout rates due to financial hardship
- Support **meritorious students** and encourage academic excellence
- Promote **social inclusion and diversity** in student enrolment

Year	Government Scholarship				Non Government Scholarship	
	SC/ST	Amount	BC/MBC	Amount	No.of. Students	Amount
2020-2021	694	32,16,048	478	6,19,298	-	-
2021-2022	694	32,16,048	478	6,19,298	62	8,07,979
2022-2023	329	14,35,360	398	5,12,179	116	12,96,158
2023-2024	448	20,12,643	240	2,95,090	75	19,79,477
2024-2025	802	39,85,931	347	6,89,150	76	14,10,762

The annual scholarship statistics reveal that the institution has had a long history of ensuring equity and access to higher education to every learner by offering financial assistance measures. The most common type of help is provided to SC/ST and BC/MBC students in the form of government scholarships as it is possible to adhere to the social justice policy and take care of the historically disadvantaged population. Although the amount of beneficiaries did not change

significantly over the years 2020-21 and 2021-22, there is a distinct fluctuation in 2023 and later years, which might be attributed to the responsiveness to the evolving demographics and patterns of student eligibility.

The progressive addition and expansion of non-government scholarship support beginning in 2021-22 indicate the active efforts of the institution to diversify funding and continue financial support beyond statutory programs. The increase in non-government scholarship beneficiaries in 2022-23 suggests that the institutions have better networks and that the students are more aware. In general, the statistics will show an equal and developing academic ecosystem that enhances financial fairness, lessens the possibility of dropping out.

### **Role of Extension Activities in initiating Equity and Diversity**

The academic and social mission of DRBCCC Hindu College has been committed in being involved in the community, and hence, the existence of the extension activities is in line with its diversity, equity, and nation-building. The college seeks to distribute resources and knowledge on the campus to the society through well organized outreach programs to develop social needs in an inclusive manner as well as instilling in the students the sense of civic responsibility.

### **Objectives of Extension Activities**

The extension activities of the college aim to:

- Promote **equity, diversity, and social justice**
- Instill **discipline, leadership, and national values** among students
- Strengthen **college–community partnerships**
- Empower marginalized and underserved sections of society
- Provide **experiential and value-based learning** opportunities

### **Equity & Diversity–Based Extension Programmes conducted by DRBCCC Hindu College**

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Organising Cell / Committee</b>	<b>Programme(s) Conducted</b>	<b>No. of Programmes</b>	<b>No. of Beneficiaries</b>
2020–21	Gender Cell	Gender Sensitization Programme; International Women’s Day Celebration	2	400
2020–21	Academic Departments	Mentoring & Counselling for First-Generation Learners	1	160
2020–21	IQAC	Scholarships & Financial Aid Awareness Programme	1	250
2020–21	Sports Committee	Inclusive Sports Participation Initiative	1	140
2020–21	NSS	Nutrition & Health Awareness Programme	1	200
2020–21	IQAC	Orientation on Code of Conduct & Ethical Values	1	180

2021–22	Gender Cell	Gender Sensitization Workshop; Women Empowerment Programme; Legal Awareness on Women's Rights	3	580
2021–22	Career Guidance & Placement Cell	Career Guidance Programme for Rural Students	1	320
2021–22	Student Affairs	Scholarships & Financial Aid Support	1	300
2021–22	NSS	Digital Literacy Programme; Community Health Awareness Camp	2	530
2021–22	NSS	Anti-Corruption & Ethical Awareness Programme	1	160
2022–23	Gender Cell	Women Empowerment & Leadership Programme; POSH & Gender Equality Awareness Programme	2	390
2022–23	Academic Departments	Remedial Coaching Programme for Slow Learners	1	140
2022–23	NSS	Nutrition Awareness Programme	1	200
2022–23	Eco Club / NSS	Environmental Awareness & Tree Plantation Drive	1	260
2022–23	Grievance cell /IQAC	Grievance Redressal Awareness; Academic & Administrative Audit Awareness	2	270
2022–23	NCC	Road Safety Awareness Programme	1	220
2023–24	Gender Cell	Women Entrepreneurship Development Programme	1	200
2023–24	Career Guidance Cell	Career Guidance Programme for Women Students	1	280
2023–24	NSS	Literacy Programme for Underprivileged Children; Cleanliness & Sanitation Drive	2	510
2023–24	YRC	Awareness Programme on Rights of Differently-Abled	1	120
2023–24	Sports Committee	Inclusive Sports Activities	1	160
2023–24	IQAC	Institutional Ethics & Integrity Programme	1	180
2023–24	NCC	National Integration & Unity Awareness Programme	1	150
2023–24	Red Ribbon Club / NSS	AIDS Awareness Programme	1	190

2024-25	IQAC	Scholarships & Financial Aid Support Programme	1	320
2024-25	Academic Departments	Tailored Remedial Coaching Programme	1	160
2024-25	NSS	Advanced Digital Literacy Programme; Nutrition Meal Scheme Awareness Programme	2	450
2024-25	Gender Cell	Transgender Awareness Programme; BetiBachaoBetiPadhao Campaign	2	360
2024-25	NCC	Disaster Management & Safety Awareness Programme	1	250
2024-25	Swachh Bharat Committee / NSS	Swachh Bharat Cleanliness Drive	1	400
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>40</b>	<b>8,430</b>

The consolidated table gives an in-depth view of equity and diversity programs that were carried out by DRBCCC Hindu College within a span of five years, showing a systematic and committed institutional response to an inclusive education program and moral governance. Between 2020-21 and 2024-25, 40 programmes, which benefited 8,430 students and community members, were organized, which is indicative of continuity and growth in outreach and impact.

An analysis on the year basis indicates that the number of initiatives is constant throughout all academic years and rises the most in 2023-24, which is considered to be the sign of the institutional maturity and better coordination of all organizing units. The statistics also indicate a multi-cell participatory model as IQAC, Gender Cell, NSS, NCC, YRC, academic departments, and support units among students all tackle different aspects of equity, such as gender inclusive, economically supporting, digital, health, environmentally sustainable, and disability inclusion, and ethically mindful.

The increment of the beneficiary coverage is progressive, that is, it is the increased planning, expanded community participation, and efficient monitoring by IQAC. Other programmes like gender sensitization, scholarships and financial aid support, inclusive sports, nutrition and health awareness and rights of the differently-abled are all directly related to NAAC Criterion VII (Institutional Values and Best Practices).

### Diversity and Inclusive Student Support Initiatives

Initiative	Target Group
Mentoring & Counselling System	First-generation learners
Scholarships & Financial Aid Support	Economically disadvantaged students
Remedial Coaching Programmes	Slow learners
Career Guidance & Competitive Exam Training	Diverse student groups

This shows how the institution is systematic and need-driven in ensuring equity is promoted by generating student-specific support mechanisms. The institution targets the academic and socio-economic needs of first-generation learners, economically disadvantaged students, slow learners, and diverse student groups to provide conducive participation by including all students and enhancing the learning outcomes. Mentoring and counselling system aims at aiding academic adaptation and emotional support of first-generation learners, and financial aid and scholarships serve as barriers in education due to economic status. Remedial coaching programmes help slow learners to close learning gaps and improve their academic performance and career guidance with competitive examination training helps diverse group of students to access higher educational and employment opportunities. Together, these programs indicate a learner-focused equity model in line with NAAC Criterion VII.

### **Facilities and Support Systems for Differently-Abled Students**

DRBCCC Hindu College will ensure equity and inclusivity through providing a level of access to education and facilities of the campus to the differently-abled students. The institution also abides by the government requirements and NAAC policy on the required reservation (quota) policy when admitting students with disabilities. In addition to compliance, the college will be using a holistic and student-focused approach in order to protect the academic and personal well-being of the differently-abled learners.

All the academic blocks are fitted with ramps that enable easy movement around the campus in order to make them physically accessible to everyone. Unfriendly toilets are designed differently to accommodate the disabled to be comfortable, dignified and independent. The institution also offers wheelchair services to facilitate movement in the institution so that the students can access the classes, administrative offices and other facilities without any hindrance.

Peer assistance also enhances student support. There are trained student volunteers who are also involved in aiding the differently-abled students in their day to day academic and co-curricular activities. Besides that, the volunteers of National Service Scheme (NSS) fill the role of scribes at the examinations of students eligible to get their exams, which means that every student is fairly evaluated and has an equal study opportunity.

These accommodative infrastructural facilities and support services are a sign of the efforts by the institution to provide a barrier-free, understanding, and inclusive learning experience. The college makes sure that the accessibility procedures and the support systems to students are maintained and aligned with the NAAC Criterion VII.

### **Nutrition Meal Scheme at DRBCCC Hindu College**

DRBCCC Hindu College acknowledges nutrition as an important factor of student welfare, academic, and student retention, especially among economically and socially disadvantaged students. One of the supportive interventions that have been adopted in the institution is the Nutrition Meal Scheme which has been taken to ensure food security and bring about holistic development.

The Nutrition Meal Scheme is aimed at serving healthy meals to poor students, hence solving hunger, malnutrition as well as health-related absenteeism. The scheme helps students to maintain good attendance and active participation in the academic processes by making sure that they are served with balanced and hygienic meals. Particular consideration is provided to the students of low-income families, first-generation students, and those who dwell in the neighboring rural and semi-urban regions.

The scheme is implemented actively involving the college management, the administrative staff and student volunteers. Outside the contribution of the management, most of the college staff members and the alumnus contribute by forming endowment funds as their part in the novel scheme.

The system of nutrition meal began in the year 2005 with a minimum number of students making a contribution of the kind-hearted management of rs.8480 towards the scheme in the year 2019-2025 the amount is increased to 3,93,350. DRBCCC Hindu College proves its concern with an inclusive education and student-centric support systems through the Nutrition Meal Scheme. The program helps to eliminate socio-economic obstacles to education, and it supports the overall mission of the institution, which is to provide students with a fair and supportive educational experience, as per NAAC Criterion VII and national priorities in terms of student welfare.

### **Sports and Physical Education Activities at DRBCCC Hindu College**

DRBCCC Hindu College has given a lot of importance to sports and physical education as part of the holistic development of the student. The institution acknowledges that besides the physical fitness that is as a result of sports, student involvement in sports promotes discipline, teamwork, leadership, resilience, and mental health. The college encourages inclusive and participatory sports culture which helps to attract students of different backgrounds into sports.

The college has a good sports infrastructure and facilities, which allow a variety of indoor and outdoor games. Frequent inter-departmental and inter-collegiate sporting activities are held to promote mass participation and identification of talent. This encourages the students to compete at university level, district, and state level, thus making the university more presence and reputable in sports.

Equity and inclusiveness in participation in sports are brought out. The institution also supports equality of participation of women students by giving them specific coaching, practicing, and participating in women sports events.

Such activities will help build characters, cope with stress, and generally shape up personality of students. By systematizing and promoting sport activities, the DRBCCC Hindu College has created an active campus culture of academic achievement and physical health, thus serving as a way of expressing its policy of providing comprehensive education and embracing the principle of institutional inclusiveness.

### **Findings**

The analysis done using the AQAR shows that the DRBCCC Hindu College has even institutionalized equity and diversity practices by planning and monitoring IQAC in a

comprehensive manner. The gender equity efforts, a system of inclusive support, and diversity-sensitive intervention have helped to boost the participation, support of students, and the inclusive campus culture.

### **Discussion**

Their results correspond to the social justice and inclusive education theories showing the role of equity and diversity initiatives in improving the quality of institutions. The shift in the isolated activities to the sustained practices is the focus of NAAC on the value-based institutional maturity.

### **Future Directions**

To ensure further enhancing equity and diversity, the institution will increase the scope of leadership programmes offered to women, increase digital access by disadvantaged learners, and institutionalize diversity auditing.

### **Conclusion**

This paper demonstrates how equity and diversity may be successfully implemented in institutions of higher learning using quality assurance mechanisms that are AQAR based. The case of DRBCCC Hindu College emphasizes how IQAC plays a crucial role in instilling the values of inclusiveness in the institutional culture with some implications on the HEIs keen on enhancing compliance with NAAC Criterion VII and inclusive excellence.

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