A proposal for establishing Teaching Learning Centre(s)
(Improving quality in the teaching-learning process @ BITS Pilani)

Contents

1. The proposal

Towards improving the quality of the teaching-learning experience, the QAA Team proposes that BITS Pilani establish Teaching and Learning Centre(s) (TLC) at each of the four campuses of BITS Pilani. This is but one element for improving the teaching-learning process. The TLC would be effective if the other elements -those that are mentioned in section 6 as well as in the section on preliminaries- are implemented in conjunction.

2. Rationale for a Teaching Learning Centre (TLC)

- All the eight QAA benchmarked universities have centres devoted to enhancing the teaching-learning experience, with varying degrees of sophistication; and so do Indian institutions like IIT, Madras (though it is not a QAA benchmarked university)
- It is therefore imperative that BITS Pilani has a nodal centre that encourages both research and implementation of innovative teaching-learning practices involving instructors, students, teaching-assistants and expert educators.
- The proposed centre need not merely imitate existing national or international centres rather it could aim at the extraordinary (as highlighted by our interlocutor, the Director of Centre of Development of Teaching-Learning, CDTL @ NUS – a BITS alumnus). Notwithstanding, we could start with tangible tasks.


3. Steering the teaching-learning centre

The proposed TLC will be run by a core team, which is currently being constituted. This team will comprise of approximately five established teachers from each of the four campuses, and it would drive the agenda and the working of the TLC. The core team, when constituted will run along with QAA till the completion of the latter's term. During this transition period, the core team will work with QAA in fine tuning its mandate and in institutionalizing the TLC. A satisfactory performance by the core team may allow its independent evolution.

4. **Aims & activity areas of the TLC**

    4.1. **Support professional development of faculty and technical support staff involved in teaching like lab demonstrators:** (Newly inducted faculty including lecturers, established faculty, research/teaching/professional assistants)

    4.2. **Encourage research and innovation in the teaching learning process**

    4.3. **Train instructors in technology enhanced learning**

    4.4. **Develop modes of recognizing and rewarding teaching excellence (innovative and effective)**

4.1. **Support Professional Development**

Training for faculty: TLC would organise workshops for orienting new faculty as well as need-based-workshops for tenured faculty. There could be several ways of conducting teaching workshops. One such plan that reworks the existing Intensive Teaching Workshop (ITW) is given below.
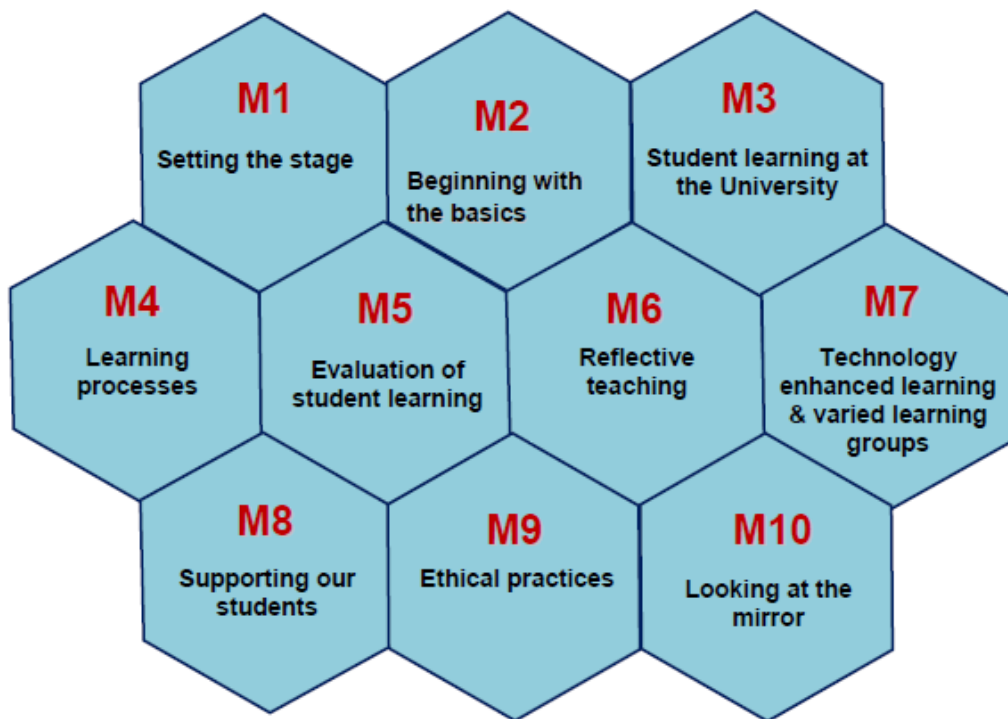

The detail of Content Areas and Expected Outcomes of the Modules of the ITW is given below:

	Module Name	Content Areas	Outcome	Potential Facilitator
M1	Setting the stage	Purpose of Intensive Teaching Workshop (ITW) About BITS Pilani: Past and present context of the institute & Looking ahead (Vision 2020) Ice-breaking by introducing another participant rather than oneself	Orient new faculty members	Coordinator of Teaching Learning Centre (TLC) Campus Director, BITS Pilani Each participant introduces another participant other than oneself after a 10 minute interaction
M2	Beginning with the basics	Role and expectations of an instructor/teacher; teacher-student relationships; and theories of teaching Discussion of Academic Regulations and Guidelines to Teachers	Explain the institutional and pedagogical procedures to new faculty entrants	An experienced/accomplished senior teacher plus a specialized resource person if required Associate Dean, Instruction Division
M3	Student learning at the University	Cognitive Taxonomies Bloom's taxonomy	Understand learning outcomes	Specialized resource person(s)
M4	Learning Processes	Active & Cooperative Learning	Design class sessions utilizing active & cooperative learning	Specialized resource person(s)
M5	Evaluation of Student Learning	Purpose of assessment Continuous and comprehensive evaluation of student learning	Recognize the link between learning outcomes and assessment	Specialized resource person(s)
M6	Reflective Teaching	Student assessment of teaching & learning	Learn how to receive and incorporate student feedback through a process of dwelling upon one's own teaching	Specialized resource person(s)
M7	Technology Enhanced Learning & Varied learning groups	Course or Learning Management Systems Flipped Classrooms Engaging students in multi-section courses Work Integrated Learning Programmes Using technology in conventional classrooms of differing sizes (large and small)	Employ traditional teaching tools as well as technology based teaching	Specialized resource person(s)

M8	Supporting our Students	University support systems for inclusive learning like Academic Counseling Board, Academic Counseling Cell, Gender sensitization programmes How to engage and empower students with varying challenges through a discussion of past cases	Recognize the need for supporting students with learning challenges	Specialized resource person(s) Experienced senior faculty
M9	Ethical practices in teaching and learning	Challenge of plagiarism Teachers as invigilators during exams	Update one's understanding of ethical practices and policies and learn how to handle with challenges	Specialized resource person(s)
M 10	Looking at the mirror	Video-recording of lecture presentations by new faculty members at the workshop in the presence of faculty peers as well as in the classroom with students	Assess oneself & receive the assessment by students and senior/peer faculty of one's lecture presentations at the workshop & in the classroom	Students, senior and peer faculty as well as oneself

o **Duration**: Three days for modules 1-9, while the final module could be spread across the semester as required.
o Invite the entire teaching community at BITS Pilani including tenured faculty and lecturers (besides new faculty) for participating in modules selected on the basis of need.
o Consider a revenue generating model by inviting external faculty members. Provide open as well as restricted access to resource materials of the ITW online.
o Award certificate of completion to participants of the workshop. (For example, for new faculty entrants all modules; for tenured faculty at BITS and external faculty on a need-to-know basis to be determined by the organizers)

Training for research scholars/teaching assistants: Teaching workshops for research scholars/teaching assistants are imperative if they are to emerge as effective instructors/tutors while simultaneously reducing the teaching load of tenured faculty. Consequently, QAA proposes the following model for a day long workshop addressed to research scholars and teaching assistants.
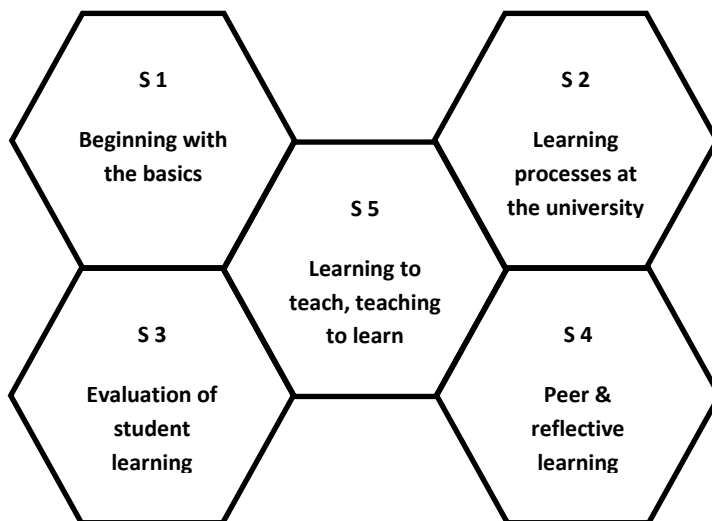
S 1 - Importance of tutoring, overview of rights and responsibilities, professional standards
S 2 - Active learning
S 3 - Assessments and evaluation practices, reflective teaching
S 4 - Peer-learning through observation other tutors, learning teaching methods through mentors, sharing ideas and experiences with other tutors and demonstrators
S 5 - Tutorial planning, structuring class sessions

4.2.   Encourage research and innovation in the teaching learning process
   o   Encourage pedagogical innovation in the form of creating engaged learning opportunities across a curriculum
   o   Disseminate effective teaching methods developed by faculty members at BITS, Pilani
   o   Develop, consolidate, and enhance research-based learning within the undergraduate curriculum in form of research projects

4.3.   Develop and support technology enhanced learning
   o   Implement new pedagogical technologies in the classroom
   o   Prepare digital learning projects and digital versions of modules
   o   Encourage the use of Education Development Studio

4.4.   Develop modes of recognizing and rewarding teaching excellence (innovative and effective): The TLC will develop a mechanism for rewarding the faculty members, who excel through effective and innovative teaching.

5.   Immediate tasks ahead of QAA
   i.   Constitute the core team for steering the TLC @ BITS Pilani

ii.   A visit to NUS by the QAA team for participating in a conference on education scheduled for December 2014

iii.   Invite expert educators as part of the Educator-in-Residence (Ed-in-Res) programme of QAA. Prof. LN Samavedam, Director CDTL @ NUS has accepted an invitation from QAA for visiting BITS Pilani, KK Birla Goa Campus on January 05, 2015. The consent of the senior leadership is required for proceeding further on this matter. Other foreign and national experts could be invited as part of the Ed-in-Res programme (starting with the benchmarked universities and preferably from ANU and Warwick).

6. Check list of tasks for improving the teaching-learning experience

The following tasks must be necessarily accomplished within a time-frame for enhancing the teaching-learning experience at BITS, Pilani. As these tasks are not part of the explicit statement of objectives of QAA, these may therefore be piloted by the core faculty team steering the TLC, with the permission of the senior leadership and under the initial guidance of the QAA till the end of the latter's current term expiring in the summer of 2015.

i.   An over-arching university ethics policy

ii.   Unambiguous set of institutional guidelines aimed at ensuring teaching excellence

iii.   Creation of an Academic Council/Board of Studies

iv.   Encourage students to have a pivotal role in assessing and assuring quality of the teaching-learning process and reward them for active participation in providing feedback. (Please consider whether it is possible to reward students with a higher priority number hitherto given arbitrarily at the time of registration in return for proactively providing feedback.)

0. Preliminaries instead of the coda

The abovementioned suggestions are based on the QAA team's study of the teaching-learning process at the eight benchmarked universities, which yielded the following:

➢ **Rethinking received assumptions:** One of the received assumptions has been that good research often leads to good teaching. Notwithstanding, even for the world's leading universities, research performance is no longer sufficient to maintain the reputation of the institution. If teaching reputation is vital and if excellence in teaching is a way of giving back to society, then faculty performance in teaching must be balanced with research.

➢ **Institutional policies/guidelines regarding teaching-learning**: Towards encouraging faculty members to excel in teaching, the institute must have an unambiguous teaching policy/set of guidelines. For example, all appointments and promotions as well as performance during the probation period must be based on evidence of high quality teaching by the faculty. High quality teaching must be rewarded -monetarily and through advancement in leadership positions- and in ways similar to rewards for quality research performance.

➢ **The definitional maze:** Quality teaching cannot be defined in any one way. It must necessarily be understood differently across contexts, institutions, and disciplines. Consequently, assessing and rewarding excellence in teaching is a challenge indeed. This challenge could be rationalized by incorporating the views of external stakeholders (including disciplinary specialists, expert educators as well sectors that absorb graduates such as representatives from industry) along with students, who are in the last instance, the principal stakeholders for ensuring quality teaching.