

## ♦INTERVIEW♦

# Upbeat about India



Founded in 1916 by 17 top B-schools, AACSB International, the American global accrediting agency – the Gold Standard among accreditors – considers India and China as key growing markets for high quality B-schools. **Jerry Trapnell**, the agency's executive vice-president and chief accreditation officer, shares his views with **A. Thothathri Raman** at AACSB's Tampa Florida headquarters

**Yours is a nearly 100-year-old accrediting body. Do you think accreditation has made a difference to B-schools?**

Accreditation is a voluntary choice the schools make when once they are confident of their quality and sure of measuring up to the expectations of their peers. Peer review is the critical aspect of our accreditation process. AACSB's accreditation process is based on a mission-driven philosophy, with a focus on overall high quality and continuous improvement ensuring diversity of educational experience. Our accreditation criteria or standards have been revised as recently as January. Our membership represents almost 1,200 members in 77 countries. As of July 2010, as many as 596 member institutions from 37 countries hold AACSB accreditation. AACSB is also a meeting place for the best quality schools and is also an excellent forum for research and learning from the best campus practices. We conduct dozens of conferences seminars, Webinars and bridge programmes throughout the year in many parts of the world. Our knowledge network is one of the strongest. The 'My AACSB' section on our Website makes it easier for members to share their ideas.

**What are your pre-conditions for accreditation and what are your criteria?**

There are no pre-conditions and any institution fitting within our definition of a B-school can participate in our accreditation process. We expect the school to have a strong mission which explains its strategic intent and purpose of existence. Our accreditation process ensures that we are able to understand by applying our standards, the state of readiness of the school for accreditation.

**What are these standards?**

We adopt three broad approaches during the accreditation process, one of which is a set of strategic management standards that measure whether the school is focussing its resources and efforts towards its defined mission. The second relates to participants in the B-school process, namely the students and faculty, and whether there is a direct link between the school's mission, the characteristics of students served by the

educational programmes, the composition and qualifications of the faculty members providing the programmes, and the overall quality of the school. Finally, there should be a strong assurance of student learning, which should be central to any higher education activity. Under each of these broad approaches, different standards are applied. There are 20 standards in all, with one more for the doctoral programmes.

**Is this the reason why there are long delays in AACSB accreditation?**

There is a strong perception that AACSB accreditations take time to happen, anywhere between three and five years and sometimes more. First, this is not true and there are cases where accreditation has happened within one-and-a-half years and many more where accreditations have been done within three years. It is not about the years it takes to get an accreditation from us; it is about the robustness of the processes on the ground, the cultural diversity of the school, its adherence to the stated mission, the academic rigour, the demonstrated leadership among its peers, the intellectual capital and the best of all the students' own assurance of learning.

**What prospects do you see for AACSB in India?**

India is a large growing market for B-schools. We have been working with B-schools in this region. There are many schools that could meet the standards set by us. The policy regime is also conducive to our work in India. Size of a B-school or its brand equity is no criteria for us. There is intense engagement with Indian B-schools and active participation in common forums and conferences by our agency's senior team. We expect to start having AACSB-accredited schools in India soon.

**How is your Asian HQ in Singapore helping?**

It was a strategic move to locate in Asia as we feel China and India are the fastest growing B-school markets in the world. Our Singapore HQ, the first one outside the US, tracks developments and engages with the best schools. There is an increased representation of Indian B-schools in the conferences and workshops we conduct in the region. ♦