

RECENT REFORM AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CARIBBEAN

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My assignment is to provide some lead off remarks for a discussion on reform initiatives and important development programmes undertaken in higher education in the Caribbean since the UNESCO's World Conference on Higher Education in 1998. The papers that we have been presented over these two days have provided a great deal of information about higher education in our region. In some instances, the information is new. In others, it is well known data. However, in all cases, the juxtaposition of the information and the manner in which it has been presented offer us an opportunity to adjust our prior conceptions and interpretations of some of the initiatives we have known.

In order to prepare my remarks, I went back to the Final Report of the World Conference on Higher Education and especially to the Declaration and the Framework for Priority Action. I also examined the Caribbean contribution to the documentation of the WCHE in 1998. It was gratifying to note that even before 1998, the English-speaking Caribbean had begun to adopt the positions that the Declaration and the Framework document were presenting as desirable for the future. The observation is not a boast. It is a reality that we must recognize if our appraisal of our progress is to be fair and if we are to determine what cause-and-effect relationship there might be between the WCHE and the reforms and initiatives in the English-speaking Caribbean. For the reason that I have proffered, I have interpreted the reform initiatives and important development programmes since 1998 to include some that were initiated before that date but which achieved notable maturity after that date.

My presentation suffers the limitation of being based primarily on data about The University of the West Indies and the other tertiary level institutions in the countries that contribute to the UWI. Where it is possible, I shall explicitly refer to other institutions where I have data on them. My remarks will be organized under the following six heads:

1. *Networking*
2. *Institutional collaboration*
3. *Expansion of the sector*
4. *Concern for quality assurance procedures*
5. *Expansion of the use of Information & Communications Technologies, and*
6. *Outreach.*

Networking

Both Dr. Howe and Dr. Holder have made reference to the Association of Caribbean Tertiary Institutions (ACTI) in their presentations. It was founded in 1988 on the initiative of the then Vice-Chancellor of UWI, Sir Alistair McIntyre and formally established in November 1990. At the time, 30 tertiary level institutions from 12 countries were signatories to the agreement but since then the list has grown to include 60 member institutions in 17 countries among its 82 members.

Association of Caribbean Higher Education Administrators (ACHEA)

In the post 1998 period, the most significant development in networking at the tertiary and higher education level has been the creation of the *Association of Caribbean Higher Education Administrators (ACHEA)*. ACHEA was established in July 2001 and it states as its goal the promotion of “the highest standard of professionalism and the continuing development of management capacity among those who have administrative and managerial responsibilities in higher education in the Caribbean”. The organization aims at enhancing the skills of its members through the provision of training and professional development programmes and by providing opportunities for networking among them. ACHEA shows strong potential for positively affecting the practice of administration in higher and tertiary education in the region. It has set realistic goals, has opened its

membership widely to administrators at all levels and with a variety of baseline skills and responsibilities. In its first year of operation, it convened an inaugural conference that featured high-quality pertinent presentations and it has conducted a number of professional development workshops. Whereas ACTI is primarily an association of institutions, ACHEA is an association of individuals, most of whom belong to the same institutions that comprise ACTI. The creation of ACHEA complements the existence of ACTI and offers to the Caribbean region a two-tiered networking structure that can contribute to a seamless tertiary system in the region.

Caribbean Universities Network (CUN)

The development of the *Caribbean Universities Network (CUN)* is intended to promote higher education in the Caribbean through regional collaboration and integration. The network has been created to maintain collaboration among a group of universities that participated in the Caribbean University Level Programme supported by the European Union within the framework of the Lomé IV Convention. Eligibility for membership includes any higher education institution in any Caribbean island, Belize, French Guyana, Guyana and Suriname. At present, the network involves nine universities – Anton de Kom University of Suriname, Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre & Maestra (DR), Universidad Católica de Santo Domingo, Universidad Nacional Pedro Henriquez Ureña (DR), Université Quisqueya (Haiti) the University of Belize, University of Guyana, University of Technology (Jamaica) and the University of the West Indies. I understand that the executive committee plans to invite four other universities to join the network – Université Antilles-Guyane, University of the Netherlands Antilles, Université d'Etat d'Haïti and the Northern Caribbean University. At its meeting in June of this year, CUN identified the standardization of credits in the Caribbean and the accreditation of emerging educational institutions as two of its areas of interest. While CUN lists both undergraduate and postgraduate levels of study as areas for collaboration, it seems evident that their focus is directed more at postgraduate study and research. The potential importance of the network is the fact that it cuts across language groups and across traditions of institutional governance. The Association of Caribbean Universities and

Research Institutes (UNICA), which was founded as long ago as 1967, has a similar scope as we heard from Professor Alleyne. When I wrote my notes I intended to say that UNICA has remained essentially an administrative liaison rather than become a vibrant network. However, the information presented by Alleyne makes it clear that UNICA is in an up phase and has to be noted as another force that we can use. After all the presentations we have had, it seems clear that UNICA, CUN and ACTI have to talk to each other.

Institutional collaboration

Institutional collaboration has been a major area of activity in higher education in the Caribbean. At the material level, we can report major advances in the articulation of programmes among regional institutions, the consolidation of a system of franchising university programmes, work towards a common regional structure for associate degrees, experiments with the offer of joint degrees, as well as collaboration between institutions in the delivery of other degree programmes.

Articulation

The articulation relationship had its beginnings in a more restricted arrangement in which the University of the West Indies validated teachers' certificates granted by teachers' colleges in the region through its faculties of education. The holders of certificates that were validated in that arrangement were granted matriculation for entry to the university. As the teachers' colleges became amalgamated with other institutions to become national colleges and community colleges, the need for a bolder system of validation became apparent. In addition, the nature of many of the qualifications being offered by these colleges shifted in type and became associate degrees.

In 1996, the University of the West Indies established a special department to undertake the development of its relationships with national colleges, community colleges and other

tertiary level institutions in the countries that contribute to the university. The *Tertiary Level Institutions Unit (TLIU)*, as it is called, has a prime responsibility for streamlining access to the university by working towards the articulation of programmes in other tertiary level institutions with those of the UWI. The Unit organizes and leads the assessment of programmes in other TLIs with a view to determining what level of credit successful students should be offered towards their entry to the UWI or to specific levels of study within the university. The effect of their work has been to expand the list of qualifications that make students eligible for further study in higher education through the UWI.

Franchising of university programmes

A second major initiative of the TLIU of the UWI has been the development and operation of a system of franchising university programmes to other institutions. The system works as follows. The courses or programmes in question belong to the UWI – they have been developed and taught within the campus framework and have been examined in the normal manner in the university. When another tertiary level institutions wishes to offer that programme to its students, the TLIU leads an assessment of the *institution* in respect of its suitability on academic grounds to offer the programme. If the institution is recognized as suitable, an arrangement is made in which the institution pays to the UWI a modest administrative fee for the use of the syllabus and course materials, and for examining of the students. On completion of their programme, the students continue their studies in the UWI at the appropriate level as if they had pursued the entire programme within the university itself.

The franchise arrangement increases the number of students in higher education significantly. In fact, in the academic year 1998/99, the first year after WCHE, most of the increase in numbers of university students was in franchised programmes in such tertiary level institutions.

Common regional structure for associate degrees

Associate degrees have gained popularity in the Caribbean over recent years. They are favoured by many of the region's community colleges and national colleges as a qualification that opens the way to higher education. They provide an alternative pathway to the traditional sixth form. However, the status of the associate degrees has been variable. Some of them equate roughly to sixth form level education, others approximate to the first year of the three-year degree structure of the UWI and yet others have mixed elements that make them awkward to classify.

The Education Reform Unit of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States initiated a process of developing a common core for associate degrees as a means of stabilizing the quality of these qualifications. The Tertiary Level Institutions Unit of the UWI has taken a major role in advancing that initiative. If the process is consolidated and the standards are formulated to accommodate the associate degrees offered by institutions in Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana and the western Caribbean (including The Bahamas, Belize and Jamaica) the result could be a major breakthrough towards the creation of a seamless tertiary system in the region.

Coping with the new numbers

The processes of articulation and franchising do however raise a number of problems for the UWI itself. When students in another tertiary level institution complete a programme that leads them to the second or third year of a university programme, their entry at the second or third year swells the class size of the receiving departments and faculties in ways that may not have been anticipated in the planning of the faculty. The cohort is increased over and above the through flow from the faculty's first year students. In some instances, physical space is insufficient and in others the provision of tutors is overstretched. The problem is not insuperable, but it demands more careful projection of the impact of the success of the systems and invites consideration of franchising of entire degree programmes very much like the offer of the LLB by the College of the Bahamas.

Unfortunately, franchising all three years of a degree sometimes exposes a shortage of academics to take particular programmes through to the more advanced levels outside the framework of the university itself.

Improving institutional status

The status of the institutions participating in the franchise agreements will shortly be enhanced by a formal policy decision of the University to include the name of the other institution on the certificates issued to successful students.

Joint degrees

The University of the West Indies and the University of Technology (Jamaica) have been offering a joint degree in hospitality and tourism management. The first graduates from that programme should conclude their study in 2003. Each university takes responsibility for a different aspect of the programme and a single award bearing the seals of both institutions is offered to the successful student. It is a variety of consortium relationship but one that is much more intimate than the kind of arrangement that linked the University of Guyana, the University of Suriname and the University of the West Indies in the now defunct Consortium Graduate School for the Social Sciences.

The development of the joint degree was a long travail, less in respect of the negotiation of the academic content and skill requirements of the degree than in respect of the legal issues and administrative issues that it raised. The experience will have to be carefully evaluated before either institution engages in a similar exercise.

Strong collaboration in the offer of degrees

A less close marriage at the institutional level is the relationship between the College of the Bahamas and the University of the West Indies in the offer of a bachelor's degree in law (LLB). We record the fact that the entire programme leading to the LLB degree of the UWI is offered at the College of the Bahamas. In 2002, the programme had about 80 students. The arrangement is somewhat different from the standard franchise arrangement and it is not a joint degree in the sense of the UWI/UTECH degree in tourism and hospitality management. It is worth mentioning here that students in medicine can complete the last two years of the UWI medical degree programme in the Bahamas. The development dates back to just before the review period but it has been consolidated since 1998.

Expansion of the sector

New indigenous universities

Since the WCHE in 1998, two new universities have been created in the English speaking Caribbean – the University of Belize (UB) in the year 2000 and the Northern Caribbean University in 2001. The University of Belize succeeded the University College of Belize (UCB) which had been created in 1986 and was itself the replacement tertiary level institution of the Belize College of Arts, Sciences and Technology (BELCAST) that was founded in 1977. BELCAST itself was created as a rationalization of two existing colleges, the Belize Technical College and the Belize Teachers' College, together with the Sixth Form of St. Johns' College, a long-standing Jesuit institution. When the UCB was created it was affiliated to Ferris State University (FSU) of Michigan, USA. The relationship did not succeed and the restructuring of the UCB resulted in the establishment of the UB. UB now includes the University College of Belize, the Belize Technical College, the Bliss School of Nursing and the Belize College of Agriculture.

Northern Caribbean University (2001) was formerly West Indies College, a Seventh Day Adventist institution founded in 1919. It is owned and operated by the West Indies Union

Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, which has its headquarters in Mandeville, Jamaica. It is a private, co-educational liberal arts institution, offering a number of professional, pre-professional and vocational programmes with an enrolment of more than 3000 students.

New national colleges

Since 1998, two other Caribbean states have created national colleges by amalgamating their technical institutes, their teachers' colleges, their nursing colleges and the sixth forms of their secondary schools. By this procedure, Dominica and St. Vincent have now joined the list of countries in the Eastern Caribbean with national colleges. Montserrat has recently had a study conducted to determine how it can undertake a parallel development.

Barbados has recently made the decision to fuse the Barbados Community College, Erdiston Teachers' College and the Samuel Jackson Prescod Polytechnic to create the University College of Barbados which will become a degree granting institution.

In Trinidad & Tobago, two new colleges were created in the year 2000. They are the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad & Tobago (COSTAATT) and the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology (TTIT). As we heard yesterday, the Government of Trinidad & Tobago is considering the creation of a university of Trinidad & Tobago on the basis of COSTAATT and TTIT. In Antigua, a similar development took place in 2001 with the establishment of the Antigua & Barbuda International Institute of Technology. We can also note under this heading the merging of the Bahamas Hotel Training College into the College of the Bahamas as recently as this year. Just next door in Jamaica, the Mico College, the oldest teacher education institution in Jamaica, has applied to become affiliated to the University of the West Indies.

Influx of foreign tertiary education providers

Howe's document has provided a very comprehensive listing of foreign tertiary education providers offering programmes in the region. Appendix 3 of his paper refers. There are over 60 of them and depending on how you count them, the numbers could rise. Some began as offshore institutions but are now national institutions, for example, the St. Georges University which enjoys a charter from the Government of Grenada. In Dominica, Ross University does not have the same legal status but is strongly identified with the country. Obviously, not all of them entered the market since WCHE but there is no doubt that their penetration of the region has become more of an issue since the Conference. The Report of UWI's Vice Chancellor to the Council in April of 2000 explicitly said that "... the University has lost market share to 'growing penetration of the region's education market by foreign-based universities'." The admission is important because for almost all of its 50 years in existence the UWI had been virtually operating as if it had a monopoly on higher education. Clearly, it does not.

In my view, the impact of the foreign tertiary level institutions on tertiary education in this region will not be measured so much in the effect on numbers of applicants to the regional and indigenous institutions as in the effect on the standard attained by students preparing themselves to enter higher education. The foreign tertiary level providers, and especially the commercial institutions among them, require different and in many cases less rigorous entry qualifications than the UWI. Students coming out of secondary schools may not therefore continue to be motivated towards the currently established qualifications in view of the fact that they can still have access to a higher education without the same initial effort. The theory is worth testing and we ought to begin immediately to monitor the output of the secondary sector in relation to the shifting thresholds introduced by these institutions.

Research focus

A significant development in higher education in the region is the formal decision of the UWI to favour research in specific areas rather than to foster the individual choices of its

academics. The areas on which the UWI will focus attention are the following – biotechnology; cultural studies; education, health and wellness; information technology; natural resources; environmental studies and management; social, economic and governance issues; tourism. Interdisciplinary research will also be favoured.

Concern for quality assurance procedures

The universities that have grown out of the transplant of British traditions into the Caribbean have always sought to maintain their parity of rating with universities of similar tradition in the Commonwealth. The main instrument has been the use of various versions of systems of external examining or review processes. For most of their lives, these processes have been benign in nature and carried no strong power of sanction. However, within recent times, the pressure for institutional accountability has spawned a much more rigorous approach to quality assurance.

The University of the West Indies has taken the matter very seriously. It needs to do so because the British institutions with which it has traditionally been linked are themselves undergoing extremely rigorous scrutiny in the United Kingdom's quality assurance procedures. In addition, the professional faculties of engineering, medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine maintain their international status by reference to British accreditation agencies.

Starting in 1996, the UWI began working towards the establishment of quality assurance units under the portfolio of the Board for Undergraduate Studies. From 2001, there has been a unit at each of the university's three campuses and the processes of self-assessment and quality review involving both external and internal assessors is becoming a regular part of faculty life. Appraisal of staff performance in all categories has been increasingly formalized and is acquiring greater weight in the institution. In addition, Instructional Development Units have been created to assist faculty members in improving their teaching prowess and their programme delivery skills.

The University of Guyana has re-introduced its external examining procedures as part of its attempt to improve its quality assurance procedures.

Expansion of the use of ICTs

The presentations by Koul and by Howe have offered very detailed information on the applications of information and communications technology in the tertiary level institutions of the region. I shall not repeat their contributions. I need to mention however that the UWI Distance Education thrust is about to take a new shape. It will shortly be oriented towards asynchronous delivery and will use a management structure that will make it significantly more self contained than it is at present. The current management structure links the distance offerings very clumsily to the faculty programmes. The disadvantages of the faculty driven model have been onerous and the institution has now made the decisions that would give to its Distance Education Centre the autonomy to follow pathways that are more appropriate to open systems of education and to the delivery possibilities of contemporary virtual education.

Outreach

My presentation would not be complete without reference to the new initiatives on the part of the regional university to vary the quality and the modes of its outreach into the community that it serves. In his section 2.19, Howe has described the programme for scholars and artists in residence in non-campus countries of the UWI system. There is another initiative that deserves mention and it is the convocation by the School of Continuing Studies of the UWI of what are called Country Conferences. A Country Conference is a multidisciplinary conference whose theme is the country in which it is held. Since May 2000, Country Conferences have been held in St. Kitts-Nevis, Dominica, Belize and Grenada. In one week, Montserrat will be the venue for a similar conference.

The idea underlying these conferences is to encourage scholarship in and on the countries that have been less studied in the Caribbean region. The success of the venture has been high and the appearance of the published papers will consolidate the initiative.

The most recent outreach initiative that I wish to mention is the launching of a radio station by the Mona Campus (Jamaica) of the UWI. Radio Mona is a 24 hour seven days per week FM station that can cover all of Jamaica. It features educational programming, news and entertainment. The potential is enormous and the University is already considering similar developments at its other campuses.

Closing remarks

Before I close, I must add a few words on the funding of higher education. In its most recent budget exercise, the University of the West Indies showed that its funding now comes 60% from the contributing governments and 40% from other sources including fees, grants, and earnings from research and other sources. The increase of earned income with a corresponding drop in dependence on government contributions has been a steadily growing trend.

The purpose of my presentation has been to provide you with a sketch of the developments in this region since 1998 that point to the qualitative enhancement of higher education and the expansion of the scope of the sector in the interest of the development of the region. There has not been in my opinion a cause and effect relationship between the initiatives on which I have reported and the report or the proceedings of the WCHE. What I think has been an important influence of the WCHE is that it gave international legitimacy to a number of the ideas that were being advanced within the academy and by governments in our region. The level of acceptability of certain changes was enhanced by the conference and the pace of change has been favoured by its outcomes.