

***Creating a Culture of Quality: the role of the University of the West Indies in
Caribbean Education***

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Abstract

The paper analyses the need for and the process of change as universities worldwide emphasize quality and strive to be more relevant and responsive to external demands. The liberalization of 'trade in services', which includes higher education and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), allows transnational education and this raises the important issue of ensuring quality across country borders. Much debate has been generated in higher education about the establishment of international quality standards; and accreditation in the United States of America and elsewhere, as well as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAAHE) in the United Kingdom, both emphasize standards and regulatory frameworks. The quality imperative places new demands on all members of the academy who have to be prepared to respond to external scrutiny and the increasing demand for accountability from stakeholders. If, however, quality assurance is not guided by a deliberate policy to bring about institutional transformation, a static view of quality can result. A policy which emphasizes quality enhancement and institutional development usually requires collective engagement. Elements of the quality assurance initiative at the University of the West Indies (UWI) are highlighted to demonstrate the changing institutional culture, and the institution's leadership within the Caribbean in implementing such change.

Introduction

Technological advance, globalization, the increasing importance of knowledge economies and associated factors have triggered change in tertiary and higher education worldwide over the past twenty five years. Education policy makers in several countries have accepted that, with the world being increasingly driven by brain power, higher education institutions need to be redefined and re-engineered so that their existing systems and practices respond to the rapidly changing demands of modern economies. This paper focuses specifically on the English-speaking Caribbean as defined by the fifteen Member (Sovereign) States of CARICOM (the Caribbean Community) and its five Associated States. CARICOM governments, recognizing the centrality of education to the future positioning of the Caribbean in the global economy, have made the development of human resources in general, and through tertiary education in particular, a major priority. In 1997, the Heads of Government of CARICOM indicated that by the year 2005, 15% of school graduates (as against 7-8 % then) should be enrolled in tertiary education. The objective was in keeping with a major international trend associated with the acknowledgment of the importance of education as the currency of knowledge economies; that of deliberate movement from the traditional elite system to a mass system of tertiary education. More recently in the Caribbean, new projections are being used as indicators to guide policy on tertiary education. Barbados has stated that there should be access to 55% of the 19 to 30 year old cohort by 2015; for Trinidad and Tobago, 2020 is the year by which this percentage is expected to be 60%.

The Change Imperative

The “massification” of education speaks to increased access but involves much more than merely accommodating additional numbers of students. Access has been expanded significantly in the Caribbean by the addition of both public/national universities and private institutions, and there is now a diverse set of institutions offering post-secondary education. Along with the increased involvement of the private sector in tertiary education provision, the Caribbean has become host to a growing number of cross-border (foreign) education providers who are in open competition with the regional and national institutions for Caribbean students and who offer degree programmes in several disciplines. Some are off-shore branches of well established universities in North America and the United Kingdom, while others are of questionable quality. To a large extent, this trend is reflective of the inability of local institutions to meet the ever-increasing demand for higher education, thereby leaving an opening for the cross-border providers to develop a niche for themselves in the Caribbean. The issue is made more complex, however, when examined within the context of globalization and recognized as a consequence of the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) in particular. GATS is intended to address:

“....every possible way of providing a service internationally, by eliminating discriminatory measures such as subsidies, grants, nationality, residence or training requirements, as well as performance standards. By June,

2002, all member nations of the WTO were expected to submit requests to other countries, asking for liberalization in specific sectors, including higher education.” (UWI Task Force, 2003).

The fact that there has been limited response from Caribbean nations does not mean that the impact of GATS will not be felt. Indeed:

“If the principles of GATS were to be applied to higher education without any adjustment, it would be illegal to restrict the presence of foreign institutions, or the availability of on-line education and training from international providers, or to apply differential tax regulations to such institutions; or to restrict student loans or aid; or seats on governing boards, to citizens or regional national; or provide public funding for some (institutions) and not others.” (*ibid.*)

Not surprisingly, there has been a great deal of controversy surrounding the GATS as it relates to education. Knight (2002), sums up the debate on the impact of GATS on higher education thus:

“Critics focus on the threat to the role of government, the ‘public good,’ and the quality of education. Supporters highlight the benefits that more trade can bring in terms of innovations through new providers and delivery modes, greater student access, and increased economic gain”.

Higher education in the Caribbean has traditionally played a pivotal developmental role; providing the knowledge base relied upon to drive the economies of the countries of the region as well as the human resource to lead the productive activities required. Persistence of this ‘public good’ is vitally important.

The UWI, while recognizing the reality of cross-border providers, yet has the expectation that governments of the region will ensure that any commitments made will not “undermine the regional effort to develop indigenous institutions”, nor will they “subvert the regional project as far as higher education is concerned”. (Beckles, 2004) There is also the real danger that cross-border providers’ intent on financial gain rather than national/regional priorities, may offer a sub-standard product which simply adds to the growing number of “degree mills” operating throughout the world. Already Contreras (2004), commenting on Ross University’s medical and veterinary schools in the Caribbean points to the fact that these schools fall “well below the normal accreditation radar horizon”.

International trade in education services also disadvantages those countries in the developing world which do not have a strong export capacity, and who will thus be the recipients of the educational services of those developed countries

with such capacity. The assumption that the developing countries will welcome overseas providers while the wealthier nations retain barriers on trade has been cited as one aspect of the injustice which will typify implementation of the GATS. The higher education industry is also a money maker: it was estimated (Larsen et al, 2002) that the value of trade in education services was approximately US\$30 billion in 1999, taking into account students studying abroad but excluding other forms of cross border education. Of this sum, the USA, the largest provider, is estimated to have earned US\$8.5 billion (Hayward, 2002). Significant sums are earned in the Anglophone Caribbean countries, where there are over 100 extra regional universities operating actually or virtually (Beckles, 2004).

There is now significant diversity among tertiary providers in the Caribbean in terms of their:

- Management/organizational structure/governance
- Size
- Funding sources and funding availability.
- Student recruitment and student profiles
- Types of programmes offered: pre undergraduate/ undergraduate/ postgraduate; part time/ full time; general/ professional/ vocational focus.
- Involvement in and commitment to research
- Involvement in consultancy and community outreach
- Modes of delivery

Advances in information technology have broken down international and national barriers to tertiary education and the way in which it is delivered. Distance education permits extra regional providers to offer their programmes via the new technologies with the incentive of 'anywhere, anytime' participation of persons with different schedules, and with residence in remote areas. Technology, the internet and web based delivery of courses open new avenues of virtual communication, and the opportunity which these provide for Caribbean markets is being aggressively pursued.

It can be expected, therefore, that in the future diversity will increase, with:

- Significant broadening of participation
- Additional providers of tertiary education: distance, virtual, private, for-profit, extra-regional
- Offerings by these providers of different ways of experiencing higher education
- Growth in niche market and specialist institutions in order to satisfy the for-profit objective.

Persisting will be concerns about:

- The funding of tertiary education
- Fragmentation and heterogeneity in tertiary education provisions across the Caribbean.
- Quality.

The remainder of this paper focuses on the issue of Quality.

The Quality Imperative

The tension between the need to expand and modify the existing tertiary education systems and the importance of retaining certain established principles which govern how tertiary education ought to be structured and delivered is real and must be addressed. Issues of relevance and quality have become paramount, as the sector struggles with the global context of higher education, the diversity of institutions, the liberalization of educational offerings within and across countries, the competitive nature of the sector, and the high demand for the education product. These factors have created a central concern – that of quality assurance. The issue of institutional and programme accreditation has become one of great importance to higher education institutions, with concerns of global educational standards and institutional recognition constantly being debated. Other concerns include cultural penetration and the erosion of indigenous cultural forms as well as the protection of intellectual property, and ensuring relevance and high standards.

Quality within an educational setting has been variously defined: it has been viewed in terms of excellence, of consistency, of meeting certain standards, as transformation of students, as value for money and as fitness for purpose. It is often defined and assessed by examining certain indicators, such as: access, enrolment, attendance, retention and dropout ratios, literacy levels, examination results, and expenditure on education as a percentage of national budgets. These indicators of quality are vitally important but they are also inadequate in terms of providing a comprehensive definition or indication of quality.

In the United States of America (USA), concern with quality and competitiveness of the country's higher education system led to the establishment in 2005 of the Spellings Commission. The trigger was a fear that the American higher education system was inadequate for the preparation of a workforce able to function competitively in the global marketplace. Assurance was being sought that the outputs of the American system support and maintain the USA's competitiveness in industry and retention of the country's "collective prosperity" was a major consideration.

A major criticism of the Spellings Report is that the recommendations relating to accountability of educational institutions place heavy emphasis on quantitative indicators or education metrics for use in decision making. The qualitative nature of the educational process and the intangible as well as tangible outcomes have been pointed out and the difficulty and undesirability of reducing these to "scores" emphasized, but the increasing influence of rankings by *U.S. News and World Report* based on input and resource data has supported the need for metrics to guide stakeholders as to the quality of institutions in the system. As information about quality increases so too will the use of metrics in order quickly assess performance and allow for comparisons across a range of areas. As Margaret Miller (2005) points out "numbers are a way to tell a complicated story succinctly,

so that those we are trying to inform about our activities don't drown in a sea of information". At UWI, the use of metrics to assess faculty performance has been proposed and on one Campus, indices of research, teaching and outreach productivity are being developed.

The crucial questions of relevance are - what sort of intellectual competencies are going to be required in the future (output), and how can societies through their educational systems prepare their citizens, from birth to adulthood, to develop these competencies (input, process)? Responses to these concerns have to be guided by a wide range of factors, not least of which is the serious shortage of resources in Caribbean countries, and a recognition that those resources that are available must be used to best advantage.

An expanded view of quality in education points to the need for:

- An improvement of the standards and value of educational outcomes: the special competencies, skills and attitudes which graduates of the educational system will need to possess. In the USA, the 'big three' core educational outcomes are: development of critical thinking, analytical reasoning and written communication skills. (Kirwan, 2007)
- Research, in order to understand the context within which learning is taking place, to establish the relevance of educational offerings to the generation of students being served, and so enable responsiveness to the demands of the public and private sectors, and the development needs of societies;
- The curricular transformation needed to ensure production of the graduate whose total educational experience is an integrated learning one, and whose needs are met, regardless of whether they are gifted, or specially challenged;
- A transformation of the teacher education process, and an understanding of the importance of technology;
- Ensuring the accountability of educational systems, institutions, and educators in the management of resources and delivery of the education process.

The quality initiative in higher education, therefore, must address but cannot be limited to academic quality. It is important to emphasize the scholarship of teaching and to facilitate quality teaching underpinned by research and outreach, and using the most appropriate methodologies, as well as up to date technology. Quality imperatives encompass a much wider agenda, however, challenging disciplinary boundaries, faculty autonomy, and administrative bureaucracy. The objective is to create a more satisfying, a more facilitating environment for learning and knowledge creation. Much of the change has been stimulated by the concept of building learning societies which can generate economic growth and prosperity and universities are being urged to become learning communities

so that students can be oriented to learning and working collaboratively. A significant transformation in the institutional culture is needed if the desired outcome of a learning community is to be achieved

Culture change

Kuh and Hall (1993) identify four different levels of institutional culture, the deepest level involving assumptions which are:

Tacit beliefs that members use to define their role, their relationship to others, and the nature of the organization in which they live. (p.7)

The other three levels: artefacts – visible tangible expressions of the core values of the institution; perspectives – the norms, standards and rules which govern behaviour; and values – stated as well as practiced ideals of the institution and which can be used to judge that institution; all express and reflect this fourth level, the assumptions, which are the critical elements in the building of institutional culture.

Culture, therefore, is socially constructed, is not static and is continually changing. Robert Barr and John Tagg (1995) as well as Barr (1998) point out that in the development of learning communities what is often needed is transformation at both individual and institutional levels. The structure and processes of the entire university (artefacts, perspectives) must be transformed so as to bring together sectors within the university, which may have different missions, objectives and cultures, to create a new institutional culture which is student centered, emphasizes teamwork and actively fosters partnership and collaboration across functional areas, faculties and departments (values, assumptions). At the individual level, each person within the community must come to see himself or herself as a learner as well as a teacher, providing and experiencing positive learning experiences in every interaction (values, assumptions). A significant qualitative change ought to result; in the form of an environment and a culture which stimulates, promotes and sustains learning in its broadest sense.

Building learning communities, therefore, demands that different areas of the university work collaboratively, to create an institution which values the synergy which can emerge from partnership and community in the learning enterprise. This optimizes the use of the skills of the partners to solve complex problems and deal with multifaceted situations. The focus in this principle is on the learning context – the institutional values expressed and the commitment demonstrated to those values. The methods and nature of communication, the support provided for learning, the support services such as counselling and guidance available - all speak to the facilitating nature of the learning environment in which quality is the primary focus.

If universities are to be effective learning communities, they must be redesigned to satisfy quality criteria through the experiences provided for students at the

levels of the individual, course, programme and institution. At the institutional level, strategic plans must state clearly the university's commitment to building a quality driven learning community and this intent must be reflected in the mission and value statements, in the stated goals and objectives and must be evident in the administrative practices of the university and the interactions students share with faculty, staff and other students. At the level of university programmes and courses, learning outcomes must be stated in both cognitive and affective terms, and strategies for achieving these must be reflected in the curriculum, the pedagogy and assessment, as well as in the academic advice available and given to students. All members of the community have to be engaged in these principles of learning – as teachers as well as learners. There must be recognition that all members of the institution have expertise, power and responsibility in relation to the achievement of the quality objective. The challenge has to be to involve all in the strategic vision and mission and have them commit to the values and the understandings of the culture of the organization.

Creating a culture of quality at UWI

Commitment to the development of a university in which quality is a central feature was made explicit in the report of the 1994 Chancellor's Commission on Governance which made recommendations for a new structure for the University of the West Indies (UWI). The report identified 'academic quality control' as one of the major initiatives for implementation at the UWI and proposed a Board for Undergraduate Studies whose mandate included the major task of establishing a system of Quality Assurance in the university. The UWI has always had internal quality assurance measures for all programmes, including course and programme approval, use and approval of first and second examiners, university and external examiners. These are all written into the regulations of the university. The rationale for the new approach was:

- Transparency in the university's operations for parents, employers and universities to which students may go for graduate work,
- Awareness that commitment to and engagement with quality would give UWI the edge in the growing market for higher education in the region
- The need to ensure that UWI's first degrees meet international standards
- The importance of demonstrating UWI's commitment to the international concern about measuring and ensuring quality in higher education.

A change of this sort in a university with three campuses, and in an academic culture which had permitted complete autonomy of the academic in the conduct of his/her duties, was not an easy one. Introduction of accountability and developmental measures, the challenge of periodic assessment; external review which extended beyond just the examination process, and implementing recommendations for ongoing improvement was a major, and perceived in some areas as a threatening, change. It needed a change broker who could be persuasive yet firm, understanding of the academics' position yet committed to the administrative demand, capable of initiating, negotiating and implementing change without seeming to rigidly impose this. The change process was initiated

in 1996 when a formal process of internal quality assurance was developed and implemented; a Quality Assurance Unit was established in 2001 and quality reviews are now carried out on a departmental basis on a five to seven year cycle. These reviews involve a Team of at least three persons: an external academic, a professional in the discipline, external to the UWI, and a faculty representative from another UWI campus. Although administered by the UWI, the work of the Review Team is independent, with minimum input from the UWI officers who manage the system. Review teams study the Self-Assessment reports, prepared by the Department under review, and conduct meetings with stakeholders so as to obtain an unbiased view, from which recommendations can be made for the improvement of courses and programmes. One aspect of the change which was very important and which had to be carefully managed was the need for collaboration and partnership between the newly established quality assurance function and the administrators and academics in the faculties, departments, centres and units offering undergraduate programmes. The initial fear among academic groups was that this new initiative would be assessing individuals rather than the programme of study and they had to be persuaded that the evaluation was geared towards improvement and development of the learning environment and quality assurance and maintenance. These quality assurance procedures have now become an accepted part of the culture of the institution.

Changing the cultural norms of the institution to ensure the success of the initiatives designed to develop UWI into a quality driven institution was a major challenge. The Strategic Plans: 1997 – 2002 and 2002 - 2007, explicitly identified quality as one of the institution's major goals. The intent was reflected in the mission and value statements, and in the stated goals and objectives. The focus there was on academic quality, and was not explicit with regard to quality in the administrative practices of the university and the interactions students shared with faculty, staff and other students. All members of the community, however, were expected to be engaged in building the UWI as a quality driven institution.

The strategic planning process of the UWI for 2007 – 2012 has been strongly consultative and collaborative, seeking commitment to the quality vision and desired goal. The inclusive strategic planning process should result in stated outcomes which endorse the building of quality learning communities and will hopefully move quality to the level of a norm within the university community, so that it becomes a 'tacit understanding' which Kuh and Hall identify as the deepest level of the institutional culture.

Catalyzing a culture of quality in the Caribbean

The UWI has not only been concerned with creating a culture of quality within the institution but has also been a catalyst in implementing systems and entities associated with educational quality assurance in the Caribbean.

Partnerships

The diversity in Caribbean tertiary education creates a scenario in which it is easy for the sector to be heterogeneous and segmented rather than coordinated, and competitive rather than cooperative. The formation of the Association of Caribbean Tertiary Institutions (ACTI) as a regional tertiary umbrella organization and the Joint Committee for Tertiary Education (JCTE) in Jamaica have been attempts to achieve some measure of functional understanding despite the structural and ideological diversity. Both have been strongly influenced by UWI leadership and input. Such partnerships and linkages among intra-regional as well as extra-regional providers can allow for student and staff exchanges, collaborative research, and/or offerings of joint programmes, thus enabling institutions that have different missions and objectives to work together, while respecting their different goals and varying traditions. Already UWI, the University of Technology (UTech) and other tertiary institutions in the region have established links of this type, and are in the process of forming new alliances.

Mention must also be made of two relatively new regional organizations. The Association of Caribbean Higher Education Administrators (ACHEA) was spearheaded by senior administrators from the UWI and UTech. This is serving the important purpose of providing a forum for those engaged in the management of tertiary institutions in the Caribbean to dialogue on the many and varied issues confronting tertiary education in the region and beyond. Formation of the Caribbean Tertiary Level Personnel Association (CTLPA) as an affiliate of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) was led by the UWI, and has Caribbean wide membership. Its goal is to provide professional development for student services and development practitioners who are seen as educators charged with the responsibility of designing, developing and delivering meaningful out-of-classroom learning experiences for students.

Partnership among the diverse institutions becomes crucial to the easy movement of students within the sector; and provision of the support needed at the different levels to facilitate progression through a coordinated tertiary system with clear articulation and alignment. Partnerships also have the potential to break down barriers that still exist among the academic, technical, vocational, cultural and aesthetic spheres, and emphasize the interdependence of students' learning, the institutions' curricula, as well as the needs of potential employers and the demands of the economy. A quality driven tertiary education system must demonstrate flexibility and responsiveness to the requirements of local communities and national as well as regional needs, and partnerships within the tertiary sector allow for this.

School examinations

Caribbean students are all prepared at the secondary level to sit examinations which serve the dual purpose of assessing learning at the terminal point of the students' education and capacity for further study at the tertiary level. The examining body is the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), and its mandate is exercised through the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) and its Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE). The UWI was a major contributor to the development of this body and continues to be involved in policy direction as well as in the provision of technical and educational expertise. The Council of CXC is currently chaired by the Vice Chancellor of the UWI and there are other UWI personnel represented at this level. Much of the technical work associated with this examining body – serving on Examining and Awards Committees, is carried out by lecturers from the UWI.

Accreditation

In the current world environment, the need for quality assurance, accreditation and regulation of higher education institutions is crucial and must be accepted as national and regional responsibilities in the preservation of standards and also in the protection of potential and actual users of the education service providers. The importance of countries taking the initiative to determine the quality of the education they want offered within their borders, is supported by the 1998 UNESCO Declaration, which stated that national educational systems

...have the right and the duty to regulate the provision of education, including the licensing of schools and universities, the accreditation of courses, and ensuring that course contents are culturally appropriate.

The UNESCO Declaration anticipated the need for the development of international regulations for educational practice, and these issues are a priority focus of the UNESCO Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications. The main objective of this Global Forum is to address new challenges to access, quality and equity which have emerged because of the increase in private and commercial provision of higher education worldwide.

The UWI has had long experience with the accreditation of certain of its programmes. The curricula of the professional schools such as medicine and engineering have been strongly influenced by the need to retain the accreditation of the regulatory professional bodies which conduct periodic intensive re-accreditation exercises to ensure that the programmes being offered meet international standards. Accreditation in these areas provides a stamp of approval which is valuable to graduates of these programmes who use it as a 'passport' to employment regionally and overseas, as well as for further study. When notice was given that the functioning of the United Kingdom General

Medical Council (GMC) as an accreditation body for medical schools in Commonwealth countries would cease in 2003, the UWI spearheaded a successful initiative to have a regional accreditation body for the Medical and other Health professions established. CARICOM approved the setting up of this body, the Caribbean Accreditation Agency for Medicine and other Health Professions (CAAM-HP), which is now functional.

Regionally, there is a strong initiative to establish a CARICOM accreditation body for tertiary education (Joseph, 2004). The regional accreditation of tertiary and higher education institutions and programmes has been agreed by the Heads of Government. Some of the issues with which this regional body is expected to be concerned include:

- A framework outlining Caribbean standards of tertiary education
- Rationalization of methods of assessment
- Policies to limit and/or seriously monitor the registration and functioning of extra regional providers within the Caribbean.
- A framework to allow for credit transfers, articulation and advanced placement
- Proposals for national, regional and international accreditation

Currently, there are national accreditation bodies within the region but their mandates and methods of functioning differ somewhat. The University Council of Jamaica (UCJ) is a legal statutory body which has been operating for over 15 years. While the majority of institutions accredited by UCJ are local, the Council also accredits programmes offered in Jamaica by overseas institutions. In Trinidad and Tobago, a National Accreditation Council was established in 2004 by an Act of Parliament which recognizes the Council as the principal body in Trinidad and Tobago for conducting and advising on the accreditation and recognition of post secondary and tertiary educational and training institutions, programmes and awards, whether local or foreign. In Barbados, The Barbados Accreditation Council Act 2004-2011 has been signed into Law, and the recently established Council has a very wide remit. In the cases of Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, the establishment of the national Accreditation Councils represents these countries' first step towards the development of a seamless education and training system and a National Qualifications Framework (Gift, Leo-Rhynie and Moniquette, 2005).

National quality assurance bodies such as the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ) have established certain basic quality requirements which are consistent for all tertiary institutions and programmes assessed. A number of UWI staff serve on the governing boards of these bodies and contribute significantly to both policy directions and other salient matters. Reviews which are carried out at these institutions invariably involve faculty members of the UWI, whose expertise is used to guide the decision making of the UCJ. There are concerns however, about the excessive burden which the GATS will impose on national regulatory bodies such as the UCJ, and the capacity of these bodies to handle the

registration, accreditation and monitoring demands of the expected influx of extra regional providers.

Conclusion

The UWI is not an accrediting body, but it has over the years, established a strong reputation for operating a quality assurance system which makes a positive impact on its clients. The institution is at a point where not only is there a favourable internal response to quality assurance, but also a growing demand for UWI to share its expertise in this area with an external clientele. Staff of the Quality Assurance Unit are thus frequently engaged in consulting on quality issues - offering workshops, presenting invited lectures, and staging related activities for persons and institutions that have a growing awareness of the value of providing quality education.

This paper has posited earlier that the quality initiative in higher education ought not to be limited to academic quality alone. The UWI has sought to widen its concerns to include audits of administrative and support units, and to obtain feedback from stakeholders by mounting various surveys on a regular basis. At the same time, the dialogue has begun internally, on what should be the next step. It is evident that quality enhancement activities would usefully extend quality assurance as currently operationalized: this does not mean that the on-going cycle of reviews should be discontinued. Rather, it is anticipated that the UWI will evolve into a quality enhancement-led operation, yet another culture change, promoting a culture of critical reflection and reflective analysis, with a clear focus on the learner (Barron, 2007). Enhancement themes such as flexible delivery modes, assessment, responding to student needs, and employability, will attain greater prominence in the teaching/learning agenda.

One may suggest that the quality assurance methodologies in place have provided confidence in managing and maintaining academic standards, and in offering a mechanism for enhancing the teaching/learning process. Taken to its logical conclusion, the implication is that these methodologies and the structures which underpin them provide a firm platform for quality enhancement to be aggressively pursued by all arms of the institution.

At the same time, the commitment of the UWI to the several governments of the Caribbean and its mission to provide the knowledge and human resource needed to drive the region's productivity and development demand that the quality enhancement thrust not be confined to the institution but permeate the region's educational systems. The demand for access, which will increase in years to come, will fuel the influx of for-profit providers of cross border education and this must be rationalized and regulated. The existence of the Caribbean Single Market and advent of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) in 2008 offer a unique opportunity for the region to learn from the European Higher Education Area initiated by 45 European nations through the Bologna Agreement

of 1999. This Agreement has resulted in consensus about degree structure and quality assurance which have facilitated the movement of students across Europe to study in different countries with seamless lateral, vertical and diagonal transfers being available. The Agreement has also created new methods of measuring student achievement (Floud, 2006). The diversity present in the Caribbean mirrors that of Europe and the fact that UWI is supported by several different governments places a responsibility on that institution to propose mechanisms for the development of a regional tertiary education system (a Caribbean Higher Education Area?) which welcomes and accepts diversity, yet insists on the quality necessary to be responsive to the needs of students, employers, and other stakeholders as well as to the productivity and developmental thrust of the region. Catalytic action on the part of the UWI has already begun with the agreement for the establishment of a regional accrediting body and action to implement this decision is urgently needed. This body can become the nucleus of the far reaching and quality enhancing initiatives so vital for the quality assurance and improvement of tertiary education in the region.

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