

HIGHER/TERTIARY EDUCATION IN THE CARIBBEAN: EVALUATION, ACCREDITATION, QUALIFICATIONS AND CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS

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Section One: The Caribbean Higher Education Context

Geo-Politics and Governance

From a geo-political perspective, the Caribbean region can be considered an archipelago of islands in the Caribbean Sea geographically bound by Bahamas in the extreme north to Trinidad and Tobago in the south, stretching to both Guyana and Belize in the Southern and Central American continents respectively. Presently it includes the Anglophone (English-speaking), Hispanic, Dutch and French territories. The Anglophone countries are either sovereign States having achieved independence between the 1960s or 80s or are still connected to mainland British rule through the leadership of an appointed governing authority. Anglophone Caribbean countries include those that are CARICOM member and observer States: *Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos and the US Virgin Islands*. The Non-Anglophone territories which are mostly partly independent States are divided into the Dutch speaking (*Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, Saint Marteen, Saba and Suriname*); French speaking (*Guadeloupe, Haiti, Martinique and St. Martin*) and Spanish speaking (*Cuba, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico*) countries.

The territories which comprise the Caribbean archipelago include the following:

Map 1: Showing the Geographical Distribution of Countries within the Caribbean © Mapquest



The political sovereignty of the particular Caribbean territory has implications for the governance of its higher education system. In most situations, as within the CARICOM region where most islands are independent and/or republic States, governance of higher education is coordinated by the politically elected or negotiated government with support from its representative educational bureaucracy. This bureaucracy may include the policy and funding role led by a Ministry of education with responsibility for higher/tertiary education together with especially established departments and State enterprises which play implementing roles. In some instances there are delegated and assigned responsibilities for research-based organizations including universities for conducting assessments and evaluations of the State of higher education and providing independent advice to the State. Such is the case in smaller territories with limited coordinating and implementing capacity or in larger States like Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominican Republic and Cuba where given the complexity of the emerging higher education systems, the Ministries of Education/Higher Education delegate such responsibility to specialized higher education councils, agencies and universities to deliver results.

Higher/Tertiary Education Policy and Developments

In historical terms, apart from the post-independence influence of Britain on the Anglophone Caribbean education scene at the primary and second school levels, there was a growing and significant influence on higher education as was seen through the establishment of partnerships between the State or independent schools with universities

in Britain or the decisions made by the State to have their exceptional graduates of secondary school or employees of the State sent to England for further and higher education. The 1960s and 70s was then characterized by a period of cultural revolution when Caribbean society contested the educational terrain and attempted to challenge the very ties with Britain even through their higher education. This era of educational enlightenment certainly met some resistance by some but was being challenged by the very enlightened Caribbean university graduates of the United Kingdom who returned to better civil society. In similar respects, these challenges were faced by the larger Hispanic Caribbean countries many decades (or centuries) beforehand but who had a longer history of establishing cultural identity and the role of higher education in their societies. The smaller Dutch and French Caribbean territories, however, apparently had closer governance ties with mainland Netherlands or France and many natives were much more easily sent to the mainland for higher education.

The initiation of higher education policy within the Caribbean region could be best seen through the agendas of inter-governmental organizations and structural adjustment reforms in the 1980s coordinated by international funding enterprises. Nettleford (1991, pp. 18-19) argues that it was United States foreign policy in the English-speaking Caribbean, in particular, that was instrumental in the period immediately following the second World War that challenged British education development thinking and led to neo-colonial inter-governmental and development agencies which promoted the idea and practice of structural adjustment. As articulated by Downes (2000, p. 2), the interest by Caribbean societies in structural adjustment programmes for education, including higher education, had to do with growing foreign debt, fiscal and balance payments, stagnant productive sectors and rising unemployment levels. Human resource development would therefore be seen as the panacea for solving all these economic and social problems faced by Caribbean States.

With the establishment of UNESCO representative posts and offices in Ministries of education in many Caribbean islands, and the sub-regional office for coordinating the work of the region itself, there has been much policy discourse, research and planning to support the development of higher education systems and institutions in the region. The UNESCO World Forum for Higher Education (WFHE), for example, has produced a convenient framework for policy action (the World Declaration and Framework for Priority Action for Change and Development in Higher Education) which enables Caribbean territories to reflect on, adapt and/or adopt and to position their higher education institutions for continuously changing environments. These global articles, alongside the other policy ideas and recommendations proposed by UNESCO, have captured the attention of funding agencies like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the European Commission (EU) and others who have prepared country strategy papers, conducted sector assessments and made educational economic projections in order to finance universities and other tertiary education institutions in the region. These agencies have called for collaboration amongst the region, national governments, funding agencies and universities to implement higher education improvement measures within Caribbean territories. In a recent paper (Ali, E., 2007), reference was made to the need for collaborative partnerships for research into higher/tertiary education policy in the Caribbean in order to maximize implementation

efficiency and avoid duplication of efforts in the wake of already scarce resources. Whilst some have deliberately focused on national policy and higher education developments, others have looked at measures for integrating the Caribbean archipelago through a mix of research and development, policy, strategic planning and programme/ project implementation.

A good example of the impact of higher education policy reform on development projects is the joint collaborative work among UNESCO, the Japanese-Funds-in-Trust for Capacity Building, the University of the West Indies (UWI) as the project management office and CARICOM as a policy body. CARICOM as a regional policy body has been intimately involved in this policy dialogue, which was hailed as the first truly regional distance education project for higher education institutions. UNESCO and the Japanese Overseas Development Authority have financed the establishment of the Caribbean Universities Project for Integrated Distance Education (CUPIDE) which supports the integration of the resources of five (5) universities to promote human resources development in the Caribbean. The project was aimed at cost-cutting measures for managing course development and offerings as well as other resources to support teaching and learning amongst these 5 universities from English, French and Dutch territories. The partner institutions benefiting from the project include the University of Technology (Jamaica), the University of Guyana, the University of Quisqueya (Haiti), Anton de Kom University of Suriname and the UWI (operating in 15 Anglophone territories). Further details of the project can be viewed on the CUPIDE portal at <http://www.cupide.org/moodle/>. Another similar project, the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network (CKLN), has been established by joint funding from the World Bank, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the CDB and the EU while CARICOM and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) have sanctioned it as a higher education capacity building and integration project for the region. This project seeks to enhance the region's competitiveness through the use of information and communications technology (ICTs) delivered through tertiary education institutions. Again it is a good example of how the Caribbean region is mobilizing its resources to link as many islands as possible through higher education reform policy and a blend of technology, human capacity and institutional change. What may be needed though are more concentrated efforts across language and other barriers to ensure that all the resources of the region from Anglophone and non-Anglophone territories are properly utilized.

Quite apart from the work of UNESCO and other extra-regional agencies, CARICOM and national governments have been establishing policies for the Anglophone Caribbean region, particularly the 15 member States. CARICOM has initiated policy dialogue on several areas related to development of higher/tertiary education in the region, namely enrolment and access issues and impact on/of gender, ICTs and distance education, qualifications frameworks, accreditation, technical and vocation education and national systems. Many of these issues are established on proposed policy agendas coming from particular States or from research and development organizations like universities. The matters are debated and sometimes agreed for implementation with reasonable fiscal backing from CARICOM either raised by member States or sourced through development fund resources. Implementation is, therefore, hardly the responsibility of CARICOM but rather the specific territories or agencies that are to implement the policy

decisions agreed. Outside of the agency of CARICOM some countries like Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and within recent times Cayman Islands have engaged in serious policy dialogue on the future of their nations and the role of higher/tertiary education in creating knowledge societies. In much a similar way, the OECS has been engaged in research into this area and negotiating with OECS member States.

Higher Education Institutions in the Caribbean

Knowing the role of inter-governmental organizations and international development corporations and the relationship they have had with Caribbean States, a noteworthy point is that all of the intents of these agencies could not be achieved without the implementation capacity of universities and other higher/tertiary education institutions operating within the Caribbean region. The implementation capacity is in the curriculum planned and delivered by these institutions to ensure that whatever learning that takes place in the institution it will bring enlightenment to the student and thus provide the basis for a well-informed citizenry. It is this aspect of policy change, that is the change on the curriculum or academic course or programme, and more so what and how it is taught, is a very crucial aspect of what the institution has to consider.

Among other characteristics, the institutions in the Caribbean region generally can be classified according to their geo-political locality, types of ownership, place and context of origin and the levels, nature and impact of their programme offerings within the societies. Generally, institutions may be considered to be regionally enterprising, national in scope, community-driven in outlook or simply driven by specific industries and markets. They may be owned by the State or privately, established within the country as wholly local institutions or as offshore enterprises and they may offer purely academic or vocational-type education whether they are undergraduate academic programmes and/or higher degrees by teaching and/or research. In an attempt to show the variety, Table 1 shows a sample list of some of the higher/tertiary education institutions in the region, classified by ownership, origin and country and the levels of programmes they offer:

Table 1: Classification of Caribbean Higher/Tertiary Education Institutions

Disclaimer: UNESCO-IESALC does not in any way endorse legitimacy, operations or quality of the herein named institutions. They are mainly stated from documentation sources.

Region/Sub-Region	Country	Institution	Ownership/Origin	Types of Programmes -Undergraduate (UG) -Graduate (Gr)
English-Speaking -Leeward Islands	-Bahamas	-College of the Bahamas -UWI*	-Government/National -Regional	-UG -UG
	-Bermuda	-Bermuda College	-Government/National	-UG
	-Cayman Islands	-University College of the Cayman Islands	-Government/National	-UG
		-International College of the Cayman Islands	-Private	-UG/Gr
		-Cayman Islands Law School	-Government/National	-Gr

<u>-----</u> <u>-Windward</u> <u>Islands</u> <u>-----</u>	-Jamaica	-UWI* -Mico Teachers' College -Clarendon College -Portmore Community College -Montego Bay Community College -University College of the Caribbean -Northern Caribbean University -University of Technology UWI, Mona Campus*	-Regional -Government/National -Government/National -Government/National -Government/National -Private -Private -Government/National -Regional	-UG/Gr -UG -UG -UG -UG -UG/Gr UG/Gr -UG/Gr -UG/Gr
	-Turks/Caicos	-Turks and Caicos Community College	-Government/National	-UG
	-British Virgin Islands	-Herman Lavity Stoutt Community College, Tortola	-Government/National	-UG
	-Antigua/Barbuda	-Antigua State College -UWI*	-Government/National -Regional	-UG -UG
	-Barbados	-Barbados Community College -Erdiston College -Samuel Jackson Prescod Polytechnic -UWI*, Cavehill Campus	-Government/National -Government/National -Government/National -Regional	-UG -UG -UG -UG/Gr
	-Dominica	-Dominica State College -Ross University School of Medicine -Institute of Tropical Marine Ecology -UWI*	-Government/National -Private -Private -Regional	-UG -UG/Gr -UG -UG
	-Grenada	-T.A. Marryshow Community College -St. Georges' University -UWI*	-Government/National -Private -Regional	-UG -UG/Gr -UG
	-St. Kitts & Nevis	-Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College -Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine -Medical University of the Americas -Windsor University School of Medicine -International University of Graduate Studies -International University of the Health Sciences UWI*	-Government/National -Private/Offshore -Private/Offshore -Private/Offshore -Private/Offshore -Private/Offshore -Private/Offshore -Regional	-UG -Gr -Gr -Gr -Gr -Gr -UG
	-St. Lucia	-Sir Arthur Lewis Community College -UWI*	-Government/National -Regional	-UG -UG
	-St. Vincent/the Grenadines	-UWI*	-Regional	-UG
	-Trinidad/Tobago	-School of Accounting and Management -School of Business and Computer Science -Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies -College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago -T&T Hospitality & Tourism	-Private -Private -Government/National -Government/National -Government/National	-UG/Gr -UG/Gr -UG -UG -UG

----- <u>-Continental</u>	----- -Belize	Institute -University of Trinidad and Tobago -University of the Southern Caribbean -UWI, St. Augustine Campus	-Government/National -Private -Regional	-UG/Gr -UG/Gr -UG/Gr
		-Muffles Junior College -Sacred Heart Junior College -Belize Adventist Junior College -Galen University -Central American Sciences University -Medical University of the Americas -University of Belize -UWI*	-Private/Government -Private/ Government -Private/ Government -Government/National -Private/Offshore -Private/Offshore -Government/National -Regional	-UG -UG -UG -UG/Gr -UG/Gr -UG/Gr -UG
	-Guyana	-Cyril Potter College of Education -Critchlow Labour College -Kuru Kuru Cooperative College -School of Accountancy and Global Technology -American International School of Medicine -University of Guyana	-Government/National -Government/National -Government/National -Private -Private/Offshore -Government/National	-UG -UG -UG -UG -UG/Gr -UG/Gr
Dutch-Speaking	-Aruba	-University of Aruba	-Government/National	-UG
	-Bonaire	-Xavier University School of Medicine	-Private	-UG/Gr
	-Curacao	-University of the Dutch Caribbean	-Private	-UG
	-Suriname	-Polytechnic College	-Government/National	-UG
		-Advanced Teacher's Training College	-Government/National	-UG
		-Institute for Development Planning and Management	-Private	-UG/Gr
	-Saba	-Anton de Kom University	-Government	-UG/Gr
	-St. Marteen	-Saba Medical University -University of St. Marteen	-Private/Offshore -Private/Offshore	
Spanish-Speaking	-Cuba	-Universidad de Habana -Universidad de la Oriente -Instituto Superior Politecnico	-Government/National -Government/National -Government/National	-UG/Gr -UG/Gr -UG/Gr
		-Universidad de Autonoma de Santo Domingo	-Government/National	-UG/Gr
		-Universidad Central de Este	-Government/National	-UG/Gr
	-Puerto Rico	-Pontificia Universidad Madre y Maestra	-Private	-UG/Gr
		-Insituto Tecnologico de Santo Domingo	-Private	-UG
		-Sacred Heart University	-Private	-UG/Gr
		-Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico	-Private	-UG/Gr
		-Universidad Central de Bayamon -Universidad de Puerto Rico -Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico	-Government/National -Government/National -Government/National	-UG/Gr -UG/Gr -UG/Gr
French-Speaking	-Guadeloupe	-Universite des Antilles et de la Guyane (Guadeloupe campus)	-Government/Mainland	-UG/Gr
		-Institute Universitaire des Formation des Maitres	-Government/Mainland	-UG/Gr
	-Martinique	-Universite des Antilles et de la Guyane (Martinique campus)	-Government/Mainland	-UG/Gr

	-Haiti	-Universite Quisqueya -Millenium International University of the Americas -American University of the Caribbean -University of Notre Dame of Haiti -Ecole Supérieure D'Infotronique d'Haiti	-Government/Mainland -Private/Offshore -Private/Offshore -Private/Offshore -National	-UG/Gr -UG/Gr -UG/Gr -UG/Gr -UG
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The only truly regional university, the UWI, is located within 15 islands of the Anglophone Caribbean region whilst many others are national, offshore or privately owned institutions catering to serving the needs of the specific countries where they have been established. The growing trend is for institutions to be established either by charter, license, parliamentary legislation or as private company and are now being regulated by the State through official processes for documenting their existence and operational capacity. In some States, institutions are offering more and more courses and programmes that are sponsored in full or part by the State or the private sector. The State normally provides subventions or grants for development of certain programmes catering to popular economic needs and in some instances tuition and other costs are made available to students by the State as well. Thus, in general terms higher/tertiary education is fast becoming more and more affordable for many members of Caribbean societies to participate.

Section Two: Higher/Tertiary Education Certification and Qualifications

The Developments in Higher/Tertiary Education Certification in the Caribbean

Within the Anglophone and non-Anglophone Caribbean, the concept of certification has undergone some change from purely what was traditionally the issuance of academic credentials to a mix of academic and vocational education and training credentials. Historically, focus on the acquisition of academic credentials meant that they were only accessible to a very small section of the population. This was due in large measure to the matriculation requirements for universities which meant that students must have had earned some tertiary level qualification or secondary school graduation standing alone for admission to a university programme. Other types of factors such as a mix of other qualifications and prior experience were hardly considered until the revolution in vocationalization of higher education in the 1980s and 90s. Even today many institutions still grapple with the idea of admitting students to undergraduate or even graduate programmes without fairly flexible admission standards which ensure that all with a passion to learn and develop are given adequate 'second' chances. Thus, while there have long been provisions for developing regional skills in agricultural sciences, engineering, construction and other technical areas, the importance of vocational and technical education and training had been undervalued for a long time. Over the past decade especially and with the changing social patterns, technological advances, labour market demands and governmental influences, dramatic changes in types of certification being sought and provided by tertiary institutions in the region.

Certification and credentialing are comparable concepts today. Certification can be described as the granting of a credential to an individual who has acquired competencies at a desired level through a process of assessment of learning and demonstration of competence. Policy dialogue held between regional ministries of education, the International Labour Organization (ILO), universities and other tertiary education institutions and employers' bureaus in the past decade have certainly contributed to this development. Many employers already expect that their employees can be adequately trained once the competencies required for the jobs they hold and the industries in which they are located are considered within the education and training sectors. Investment by employers in training and professional development of employees is now being carefully managed with the intent that certification granted can lead to credits for higher learning in academies. In fact, more and more employers bargain with universities and other institutions to provide specialized training for their employees culminating in credentials being awarded by the academy.

Alongside this development, CARICOM, the OAS, the ILO and other agencies have advocated and introduced the establishment of specialized agencies for coordinating technical and vocational training within the region. National Training Agencies develop occupational standards for particular economic and social sectors and industries by working with employers, use these standards to prepare national vocational qualifications (NVQs) which can be issued to employees within the labourforce and which are to be considered technical and vocational education equivalents to academic education received within universities and other higher/tertiary education institutions. NVQs are nationally relevant, granted based on assessment of competencies, may be used by academic institutions for credit and can be used for progression in the workforce. The NVQs are presently issued at one of 5 levels. Levels 3-5 are considered tertiary education and training equivalents. NVQs are now predominantly used in Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago with Cayman Islands, Guyana, Belize, Antigua and Barbuda and St. Lucia presently examining the potential merit of the qualification with the intent of introducing the qualifications nationally. Presently no such standardized qualification exists within the French, Dutch or Hispanic higher/tertiary education system. However, within the past 5 years or so, there have been significant strides by the Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies (CANTA) working along with CARICOM to establish regional vocational qualifications for the Caribbean of (CVQs) which although are primarily targeting CARICOM member states, could eventually influence and shape the development of similar policies in non-Anglophone territories. The CVQs are standardized vocational qualifications granted by one National Training Agency and approved by another in another territory based on some common occupational, assessment, competency and quality assurance standards and processes. Table 2 shows a simplified version of the CVQs with competencies at each level.

**Table 2: Illustration of the CVQ levels, including the Competencies at Each Level
(Source: CARICOM Secretariat)**

<u>CVQ Level</u>	<u>Description</u>
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Level 5	GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL Competence in theoretical and practical knowledge in developing strategic solutions to abstract and concrete problems relevant to a particular field of learning or occupation; autonomous with significant responsibility for the management of people and projects
Level 4	MANAGER/ENTREPRENEUR Competence involving the application of a range of fundamental principles and complex techniques with personal accountability for the analysis, design, planning, execution and evaluation of work functions
Level 3	TECHNICIAN/SUPERVISOR Competence in supervisory capabilities demonstrated through the responsibility for the work of others and the allocation of resources with strong problem solving, planning and designing skills
<u>CVQ Level</u>	<u>Description</u>
Level 2	INDEPENDENT/SKILLED WORKER Competence in a broad range of complex, non-routine work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts. Considerable control, responsibility and autonomy are demonstrated and guidance of others is often required
Level 1	SUPERVISED WORKER Competence in a variety of routine work related activities performed in different contexts most of which requires supervision during the early stage of employment

In some Caribbean countries the principle of establishing a seamless education and training system is becoming a necessary policy. Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica have become this course by creating quality and competency standards for every level in the education and training systems from early childhood/pre-school to higher/tertiary education. The seamless education system ensures that on entering the system, a person can be educated to desired levels of competence and progress throughout the system by building upon his/her knowledge, skills and competencies and that such persons could be assessed at any stage and so have multiple entry points for their progress within the system. In the system, both academic and vocational qualifications can be issued and professional courses valued and certified by employers could be evaluated for access into the system. For certification of workers and graduates of higher/tertiary education institutions this innovation and policy is a useful as it enables articulation throughout the system, recognition of skills and competence as more applicable than academic knowledge which may not be as relevant in the workplace. A seamless education and training system is established on a credit based system which operates within a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (to be discussed after). Credits can be earned for academic and vocational education and training received and may be transferable within

the system once they are assessed as equivalent to other credits earned for courses, units, modules or programmes elsewhere. Learners and graduates may ‘bank’ their credits through credit accumulation and transfer such credits within the NQF, another Caribbean territory that will recognize it or in other regions outside the Caribbean.

Another definition of certification has to do with professional recognition for persons who require professional designations to be acceptable for the industry. These are not related to NVQs or CVQs per se. Engineers, medical doctors, nurses, lawyers, teachers, accountants and other similar professionals require professional licenses and other designations to enter and practice in their professions. These are other forms of certification that must be considered and are normally only granted by relevant national or international professional bodies that can grant such certification. In some instances, such bodies have continuing education or professional development for their members who are sometimes required by the bodies to earn a certain number of continuing professional development or CPD courses and so earn either continuing education units (CEUs) or professional development units (PDUs). These units may count for advancement in the profession and could acquire credits for higher learning in an academy.

Apart from person/professional certification offered within the sector, yet another kind of certification is offered as a mark of quality. These can be awarded to higher/tertiary education institutions or to agencies involved in the work of quality assurance and accreditation. Accreditation agencies may offer certificates of registration or accreditation as measures of institutions having attained their quality standards. Thus, this is an institutional certification which signals to the society that the institution is ‘certified’ to offer programmes or has achieved in the context of national quality standards. Accreditation agencies can also be ‘certified’ for the work they do. In the Anglophone Caribbean, National Bureaus of Standards have been in existence in some instances long before the accreditation agencies themselves. In fact, such bureaus are also certifying and accreditation bodies for goods and services offered for trade on the global market by industries. Most of them such as the Jamaican, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Lucia and other bureaus are members of the Caribbean Regional Organization for Standards and Quality (CROSQ). Bureaus may also be required by their national laws to certify organizations and persons involved in the work of quality assurance. Such is the case in Trinidad and Tobago and any organization including accrediting bodies such as the national accreditation agency should ideally have their quality assurance processes and personnel examined and certified by them, as stated in national laws. Accreditation agencies in the Caribbean could be recognized outside of the region and given status through a similar certification process. The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) has produced a code of practice for accreditation and external quality assurance agencies worldwide. Accreditation bodies seeking to be recognized by INQAAHE should apply for such ‘certification’ by demonstrating how their policies, processes, standards and practices match to the code of practice. This official status given by INQAAHE gives credibility to the accreditation agency and ensures that holders of qualifications from institutions that are accredited by that agency are recognized internationally. Many accreditation agencies in the Caribbean including Hispanic states are members of INQAAHE and therefore enjoy the privileges attached.

The Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks

One of the recent developments of CARICOM was the establishment of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) which makes it imperative that qualifications awarded at institutions in the region are aligned with regional and extra-regional standards, and as such, the development of a Regional Qualification Framework (RQF) for participating states also becomes important. The CSME is a regional economic block which was created to encourage free movement of persons, goods and capital. In 2004, CARICOM initiated the establishment of the RQF as a measure for ensuring that all academic and vocational qualifications awarded with each member State would allow for persons to have their credentials assessed and would be eligible to receive CARICOM Skills Recognition Certificates and so move comfortably within the region for the purposes of employment. Already university graduates, sports personnel, artists and media workers enjoyed such privileges. However there was no formal means for assessment and so the qualifications awarded needed to be benchmarked for comparability and equivalence to allow formal recognition for movement. The RQF started as a 5-level classification system documenting all qualification types and general competency and academic/vocational/technical education or training entry requirements and outcomes. This was subsequently concerted into a 7-level framework in a technical meeting in May 2007 organized by CARICOM. Figure 1 shows a simplified version of the emerging RQF with 7 classification levels.

Figure 1: Emerging Regional (Tertiary) Qualifications Framework (Source: Adapted from CARICOM Secretariat)

<u>Level</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Qualifications</u>
Level 7	Learner displays ability to create and interpret new knowledge, and the ability to conceptualize, design and implement projects for the generation and application of new knowledge. They will have mastered the skills and techniques of research and advanced academic enquiry	Academic Doctorates e.g. PhD Professional Doctorates e.g. DBA; DM; EdD
Level 6	Learner displays a mastery of knowledge, all of which are from current frontiers of discovery and understanding in an academic or professional discipline. They will have conceptual understanding that will enable them to evaluate critically current research and new knowledge. Their conceptual abilities will support decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts, involving professional judgment	Masters degrees; Postgraduate Diplomas; Professional qualifications for accounting, legal and other professions
Level 5	Learner has moved from empirical to conceptual approaches to problem solving. Apply knowledge and skills to difficult and complex problems, requiring initiative and motivation. There is some mastery of academic knowledge as measured by research and development	Baccalaureate; Bachelors degrees; Honours Degrees; Graduate Diploma
Level 4	Learner develops cognitive skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation to support decision making. Acquires set of occupational skills to apply to specific occupational area.	Associate degree; Higher Diploma; Advanced Diploma

Level 3	Learner develops knowledge and skills of evaluation and interpretation that will support decision making such as solving problems in the workplace or academic studies	Undergraduate Diploma
Level 2	Learner demonstrates comprehension of underpinning principles of particular occupational or academic area such as learning how and why things are done in particular ways	Advanced Certificate
Level 1	Learner acquires basic knowledge and skills for occupational competence at entry level to a profession or progress to tertiary education at higher levels	Certificate

National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) already exist in Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago and these take into account the technical and vocational qualifications and academic credentials awarded by higher/tertiary education institutions. These NQFs are either approved by governments or are being considered as policy and as such are to be formally introduced into the national systems of education and training.

Section Three: Accreditation and Evaluation Systems in the Caribbean

The Role of the State versus Institutional Networks in Evaluating Higher Education

In reporting trends in Latin American evaluation and accreditation, Ayaza (1993) suggests that ‘university evaluation is not common practice and there is relatively little experience with regard to well-established policies, systems or mechanisms, based on recognized, independent and objective criteria, against which universities and faculties can review their work, their results and their academics in a systematic way’. Ayaza further explained that while there are formal procedures for granting recognition to the operation of higher education institutions, which may enjoy some degree of autonomy, they alone are responsible for academic standards without permanent procedures for regular and systematic evaluation and accreditation. The close inter-relationship among accreditation, evaluation and regulation was cited with the differences being recorded in three (3) distinct phases: ‘recognition’; ‘systematic follow-up’ and ‘accreditation’. Whilst many higher/tertiary education institutions themselves hardly determine the need for self-regulation of their academic quality or their relationship with the State and other actors, within the past decade they have been influenced by philosophies and measures for evaluation and accreditation adopted from North America and even more recently Europe. A comprehensive analysis of the trends noted here within the Caribbean shows that there has been an emergence of some relatively ‘new’ or ‘different’ ideologies and concepts related to evaluation and accreditation.

A concept such as ‘recognition’ is hardly now applied to institutions alone but rather to the qualifications and certification conferred on persons receiving higher/tertiary education. In some contexts, ‘recognition’ refers to the means of assessment and acceptance of a qualification, award or certificate conferred by an institution, whether local or foreign, yet still the term can be loosely applied to acceptance of an institution based on some form of standards that are locally, regionally or internationally accepted. Thus, the term recognition is still applied to many universities within the non-

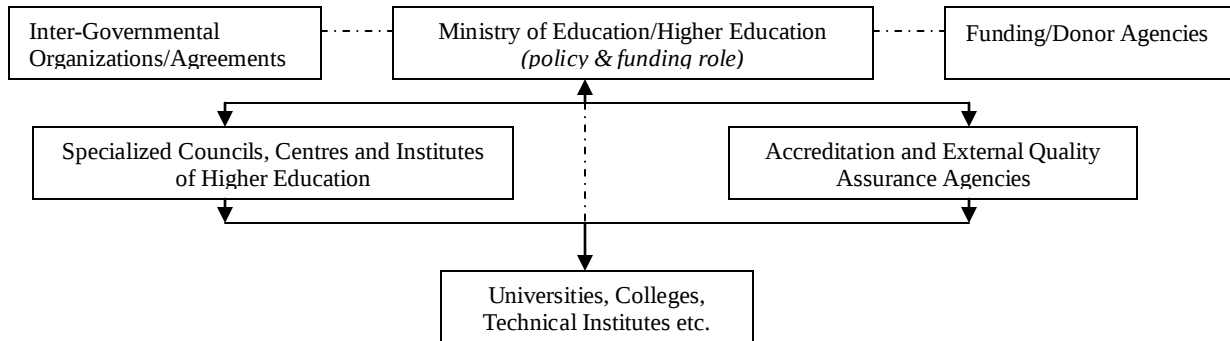
Anglophone Caribbean States where the reputation of the institution is well known over many centuries. This is seen, for example, in the Dominican Republic where the first University (Universidad Autonoma de Santo Domingo) had been established since 1538 and has had centuries of development to be well known for its graduates within Latin America. This has evolved despite the fact that over the centuries the response was a slow one for any evaluation or accreditation system to be formally introduced. Other than the varied understanding of the concept of ‘recognition’ of institutions, a relatively new but legally accepted term in some Caribbean territories is being used to formally acknowledge the existence and operational capacity of institutions. ‘Registration’ is the process conducted by a regulatory authority and which formally assesses an institution’s operational capacity, collects statistical and other data on it and gives legal authority to operate within the particular jurisdiction. In the Anglophone Caribbean, many laws are being established to set up national accreditation bodies which have the authority to legally give authority to institutions seeking to operate within their shores.

Within the realm of qualifications and awards, the term ‘validation’ is also being used. Among CARICOM States, validation refers to the process of determining whether or not a new course leading to an award or qualification satisfies the standard for that award or qualification. In other words, it is a means by which a higher education institution or regulatory agency determines whether any new course or programme being offered, whether from local or international sources, seamlessly fits within the particular Qualifications Framework for that country or region. Yet another term, that is, ‘equivalence’ is being rapidly absorbed into the jargon of higher education systems. ‘Equivalence’ is an evaluation to determine the status, level and comparability of different programmes of study. This evaluation helps higher education institutions and regulators determine whether two programmes or courses with similar titles and objectives, but yet different credit loads are in fact one and the same. A good example would be a Master of Arts degree in Cultural Studies awarded by the UWI which gives 32 credits and Master of Arts degree in Mass Communications awarded by University of Leicester, a UK institution offering programmes within the Caribbean, which equates to 180 credits in their Qualifications Framework. While both award different number of credits, they both have the same degree of complexity and rigour in design and instruction to award a Master’s degree. It is these terms and others that have entered the vocabulary of the higher/tertiary education systems of Caribbean territories and which are becoming very prevalent in terms of their understanding, usage and application.

Apart from the reference made to ‘recognition’, ‘registration’, ‘validation’, and ‘equivalence’ as forms of institutional, course or programme evaluation and/or assessment, higher education systems as a whole may be characterized by a system of evaluation. For the purposes of this paper, and taking up from Ayaza’s argument mentioned earlier, a Higher Education Evaluation System is being defined as a network of higher education constructs (countries, organizations, or departments within an organization) with evaluation processes that determine the system’s quality, performance and confidence. The system, therefore, guarantees the public that the system itself is well organized and has clearly defined measures for assuring accountability, transparency and reliability in the performance and quality of the actors who are part of the system. The system itself may ideally consist of higher education bureaucracies (ministries, State enterprises and specialized departments), funding agencies, international organizations,

external quality assurance and accreditation bodies, individual universities or networks/alliances of universities and other higher/tertiary education institutions such as colleges, community colleges and technical and vocational institutes. Figure 2 shows the relationships between those organizations that may be components of a Caribbean Higher Education Evaluation System.

Figure 2: Components of a Caribbean Higher Education Evaluation System



Evaluation systems have been evolving over the past few decades within the Caribbean. In terms of their development, they have utilized a model where government departments, headed by a Minister with responsibility for higher education, or some other similar office manages the investment of public funds generated through direct and indirect taxation, international investments, major gifts and loans and are distributed to institutions for the public good. These funds have to be carefully accounted for by the government departments and so institutions have had to put measures in place for accounting and reporting on their performance and use of public funds. In some instances, funds may be allocated to other specialized departments of the State which have to manage establishment, development and advancement of higher education institutions. These specialized departments may have a reporting relationship to the Minister. Such organizations include specialized Councils, Institutes, and Centres having responsibility for institutional research, assessment and/or project support. In other instances, the funds are granted to universities for specialized higher education and scientific research projects which report on the state of affairs of the country's higher education system and may perform comparative studies on the system. In some instances, clearly defined parameters for evaluation of higher education institutions are developing within the region. There is now a better understanding of the relationship between higher education policy---strategy---programmes---projects---outcomes and so evaluation is intended to link the policy goals established by governments with the project outcomes delivered by higher education institutions. This is more and more becoming a useful tool for measurement of the effectiveness of the policy and the institution's capability to deliver results within budget, schedule and expected outcomes and outputs. In no way different, accreditation agencies which may be privately or publicly owned and operated, in most instances receive funds from the State also to evaluate and assess the quality of institutions. They conduct the necessary external evaluations and reviews of higher

education institutions and/or their programmes to report on these institutions' fitness for purpose.

Taking up on this point, a good example of an Evaluation system for higher education is seen in the Dominican Republic. The National Council on Higher Education (Consejo Nacional de Educacion Superior), a government department, has the responsibility to oversee all universities in Dominican Republic. This obligation involves coordinating all policy and funding measures for universities and higher education institutions in the country. Under this department, the State Secretariat for Higher Education, Science and Technology (Secretaria de Estado de Educacion Superior, Ciencia, y Tecnologia -SEECYT) has responsibility for regulating the establishment of universities as well as continued support in the Dominican Republic within guidelines of minimum operating standards. Once established, universities remain autonomous but may continue to receive State funding. They are further regulated through accreditation by the Dominican Association for Self-Evaluation and Accreditation (ADAAC) which is a private, independent, non-profit organization working closely with all institutions through membership arrangements.

Similar arrangements exist among countries within the Anglophone Caribbean. One can look at this from the regional policy or national policy perspective. In terms of the regional, CARICOM may approve special projects regarding the higher/tertiary education sector to be implemented by member States. Reflecting on the experience with CKLN, the approval of the project led to the establishment of a limited liability company, the approval of funds from member States for the project and the agreement to source additional funds through international donors. These funds have been allocated to the CKLN, their governing council directs its spending and the executive manages disbursement through various projects with higher education institutions. The projects have to be carefully designed, negotiated, planned, introduced, executed and monitored to guarantee proper fund management and reasonable performance against project parameters. In such a case, CARICOM represents the international organization/lending group, the Governing Council represents the decision-making power of the State and the CKLN organization represents the government department/delegating agency and the tertiary education institution the executing agency in the evaluation system. Institutional networks are fast becoming a major trend within the Caribbean. Not only do they provide economies of scale in terms of planning, cost and delivery they also present very good experiences for sharing good practices and intellectual capacity building. The CKLN and CUPIDE are just but two such institutional networks which rely upon technology, human infrastructure, fund resources and project management capacity to achieve clearly articulated and measurable outputs. Today, many professional associations and bodies in higher education exist within the Anglophone and non-Anglophone Caribbean. Some of these networks are independent and develop through local and regional professional advancement exchanges while others came about through other extra-regional networks which were requirements of funded projects and international policies. For example, the Association of Caribbean Tertiary Institutions (ACTI), which was formed more than 2 decades ago, has a membership of almost one hundred of regionally based higher/tertiary education institutions who engage in policy discussion, professional research and training

to ensure some measure of standardization. The Association of Caribbean Higher Education Administrators (ACHEA), the Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE) and the Caribbean Association for Distance and Open Learning (CARADOL) are all examples of other bodies. These associations provide good bases for professional exchanges, informal peer review, assessment and benchmarking in order to ensure improved levels of performance in the business of higher/tertiary education institutions. Annual conferences and meetings are usually the norm for such associations to engage in professional dialogue and some form of professional evaluation.

Another example can be looked from the national perspective. In the case of Belize, the Ministry of Education governs higher education policy and commands funding. It works synergistically with the Association of Tertiary Level Institutions of Belize (ATLIB) to develop the tertiary education sector and to work directly with institutions. Belize has also recently approved the establishment of the National Accreditation Council of Belize (2004) which is to be the principal body coordinating recognition, registration, quality assurance and accreditation within the country and is State funded while the University of Belize conducts research and advises the government on policy matters. Very similarly, Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and the Bahamas have established similar professional associations representing tertiary education institutions and most are lobbyists. They normally have an official reporting or advisory relationship with the Government and work with the Ministry of Education/Tertiary Education to provide recommendations for policy and standards. The Ministry sets policy upon negotiation with these and other stakeholders and finances development of the institutions and the sector as a whole. In the case of Jamaica, the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ) has overarching legislative responsibility for improvement of universities' courses and programmes and the regulation of the sector. The UCJ is recognized as the national accreditation authority having existed for over 30 years and so registers institutions and accredits their programmes. In similar respects the Barbados Accreditation Council (BAC), the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago (ACTT) and the Guyana Accreditation Council (GAC) all established by law in 2004 have legal jurisdiction over tertiary education institutions in terms of their quality. They can register, accredit and re-accredit institutions and recognize their qualifications and awards operating within their countries. They are all State financed but can charge fees for services offered to institutions for evaluations and members of the public for qualification assessments. In these countries, the major State-owned universities are sometimes requested to conduct special research assignments and report thereon. The University of the West Indies (UWI), for example, has been the principal research-based institution providing solutions and assessments on the higher education system and periodically reporting to governments and international organizations on statistics or other data required on the higher education sector. They are at a unique advantage to perform both qualitative and quantitative research studies due to their geographical vastness, cadre of research faculty and students, diversity of specializations from education to government to political sciences and library and information stock. Being the only regional university present in 15 countries in the Anglophone Caribbean with official ties with universities in the French, Dutch and Hispanic Caribbean islands, they are able to network and build resource capacity to collect data on the Caribbean region.

Regional Policy and Mechanisms for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Systems

The distinctive characteristics and purpose of quality assurance and accreditation must be clearly understood as it relates to the Caribbean. Referring to Woodhouse's (1996) analysis of the trend among governments to require assurances that their higher education institutions are producing graduates contributing to economically competitive societies, Ashton (1996) identifies the United States approach to accreditation as a growing philosophical and ideological concern for the Caribbean region. He also proposes that the UK model of quality audit and assessment was also relevant to the Caribbean higher education institutions that historically had a relationship with mainland universities.

In both instances, the need for universities and other higher/tertiary education institutions to develop and maintain quality systems is important to assure the institution's stakeholders that it is achieving or surpassing minimum standards of expectation. Quality assurance systems may be established at the departmental, faculty, institutional or higher education system level. In the assurance process, quality audits and reviews may be carried out at any level to determine the whether or not the unit, organization or system is operating within expected standards of quality. This is done through programmatic or institutional self-assessments and from which the department or organization prepares a self study reporting its ability to attain standards set by external agencies. In quality reviews, peer review is an important feature that encompasses internal quality checks by intra-organizational, intra-system or external subject matter and non-subject matter experts who provide some measure of confidence that quality exists. Accreditation merely evaluates the organization's standards, processes and outcomes to guarantee that there is confidence in its internal quality systems. External quality assurance (EQA) bodies otherwise known as accreditation bodies establish nationally or regionally acceptable standards and evaluate the institution's self assessment study to make judgments about its quality. Thus there is a direct relation between quality audits, quality peer reviews, quality assurance and accreditation.

Apart from the publicly and privately created systems for accreditation within specific countries, regional accreditation movements have been a much debated topic since the mid 1990s. The proposal to establish a Caribbean Regional Accreditation Mechanism, for example, was hotly debated and contested among CARICOM and CARIFORUM countries in the wake of policy movements proposed by UNESCO, the OAS, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. The ideas emanated from policy discussions between the OAS, the United States Department of Education and the establishment of offshore universities and schools operating in the Caribbean. Further ideas were also drawn from the negotiations for reform of tertiary education within the OECD and the value of having regional mechanisms for accrediting higher education institutions.

It was these ideologies that encouraged ACTI and the National Institute of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (NIHERST) in Trinidad and Tobago to undertake a British Development Division sponsored study and present a paper to CARICOM on the establishing the Regional Accreditation Mechanism as authored by Dr.

Alvin Ashton. Following this, UWI and ACTI (2000), in collaboration with the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), the European Union and CARICOM, prepared and published 'Procedures and Guidelines for the Regional Mechanism for Accreditation, Equivalency and Articulation' which were meant to be the blueprint for operating the system in the region. In that same year, CARICOM created draft legislation for establishment of national accreditation bodies and a model legislation for a Caribbean Regional Accreditation Agency for Education was then prepared in 2002. The intent is for the regional body to be the policy-making organization which rationalizes quality standards, and coordinates and approves methods for registration, accreditation, equivalency, assessment and recognition of institutions, programmes or courses that are used by national accreditation bodies in the Caribbean. Roberts (2007) makes reference to the emerging measures for evaluation and accreditation systems and the legitimacy of quality assurance and regional accreditation. She indicates that 'the legitimization of regional accreditation is plagued with the same issues as national accreditation, but in addition there are political realities of nationalism', this has serious implications for the mobilization of member States and other regional territories to enact the legislation and execute accreditation.

National Accreditation Systems and the Role of Higher Education Institutions

National accreditation systems are the responsibility of national accreditation agencies. In CARICOM, the national agencies were developed by member States using the draft legislative model. Each country established its own laws taking into account their uniqueness and the specificity of the legislative, governance, educational contextual and operational requirements. To date, there are seven (7) national laws governing accreditation in certain CARICOM territories with five (5) accreditation councils and boards existing. These include the: the Barbados Accreditation Council, the University Council of Jamaica, the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago, the St. Kitts and Nevis Accreditation Board and the Guyana Accreditation Council. Other than these agencies, laws exist in draft or approved forms for Bahamas, Belize and Suriname. Among the Hispanic Caribbean countries, the Dominican Association for Self Evaluation and Accreditation exists in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico relies on the Middle States Accrediting Commission of the United States for decisions on accreditation and Cuba has a National Accreditation Board which makes such decisions and reports to the Ministry of Higher Education. Martinique, Guadeloupe and St. Martin having overseas departments of France which govern the islands are all dependent on the self evaluation of their single island universities which are part of the larger system established and examined by the higher education Ministry in France.

A national accreditation system is a system of externally managed processes for peer evaluation which looks carefully and comprehensively at the quality of the higher/tertiary education system in a country or region and which proposes measures for improvement of institutions within the system and the system as a whole. The accreditation bodies are those organizations which have oversight of the accreditation system, either legally and/or by government policy. The system is established on

principles of sound educational values, agreed standards and methods of operation, openness, transparency, collegiality, shared learning, peer review, quality assurance and quality enhancement. The system described appears to be common to all accreditation systems within the Caribbean, whether national or private, Anglophonic or not. Against this backdrop, higher education institutions are responsible for putting quality assurance or quality management systems in place within their organizations and ensuring that academic quality is effectively measured and achieved. Reporting to the accreditation body is a voluntary process. It comes through the self-assessment report presented to the accreditation agency suggesting how the institution may have measured up against the standards set by the agency. A typical process of accreditation can be viewed with the examples of the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago (ACTT) and the Dominican Association for Self Evaluation and a typical National Accreditation Body under the CARICOM-led system (NAB) and as in Figures 3 and 4 below.

Figure 3: Process Map Showing the NAB Accreditation System

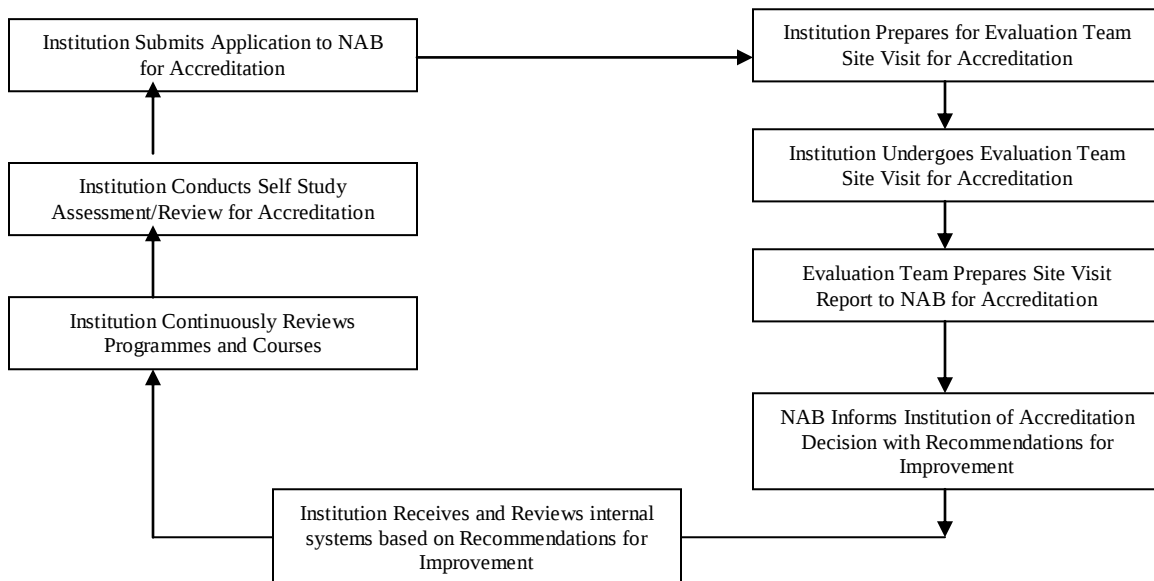
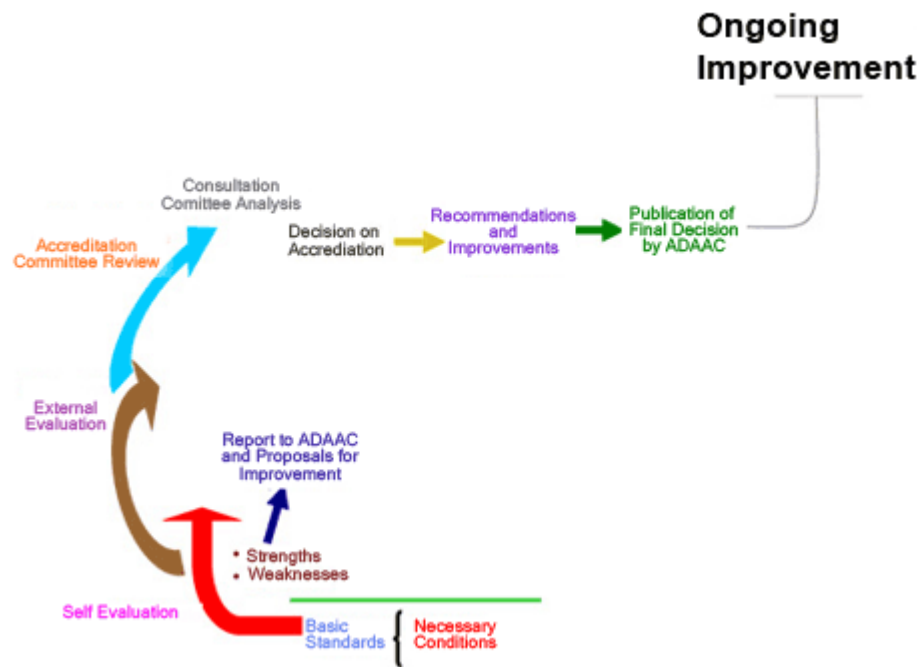


Figure 4: Process Map Showing the ADAAC Accreditation System



Conclusion

The paper documents the emerging trends in certification, evaluation, qualifications and accreditation systems in the Caribbean region. Though the emphasis appears to be on the Anglophone Caribbean where there is a preponderance of current data on changes in systems, the information applies to the region as a whole. In the Anglophone Caribbean, CARICOM, national governments, regional institutions such as UWI, some funding agencies and UNESCO are all key negotiators of these developments. Without much conceptual thought, evaluation systems are being established to include the policy and funding roles of governments with support from CARICOM and international and lending agencies. These systems emphasize accountability and efficiency in allocated national or public expenditures with some form of evaluation of the system and of institutions taking place. In terms of accreditation, this has become an integral part of the higher/tertiary education systems and likewise of any evaluation system existing. In fact in some States, the accreditation system may be the only mechanism and structure for any evaluation being done and therefore key to the success of the evaluation system. Qualifications and certification frameworks are also very important constructs within the evaluation and accreditation systems. They ensure that there are benchmarks for issuing or recognizing qualifications (academic or vocational) and any form of certification offered as well as designing and administering credit-based policies and systems within the region. Notwithstanding the value of these systems to the Anglophone Caribbean, the non-Anglophone Caribbean with greater concentration on Hispanic States such as Cuba, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico have evolved over centuries and have established accreditation and/or evaluation systems that have been impacted from either North American constructs or China as in the case of Cuba.

The current trends in the development of regional mechanisms for certification, qualifications, accreditation and evaluation frameworks and systems has been met with some open arms and some resistance at the regional, national, political and institutional levels. Knowing the different historical, philosophical, ideological and educational contexts of the territories, balancing these developments among the various sub-regional territories, whether they are classified as Anglophone or non-Anglophone, needs to be carefully considered by governments as serious and urgent policy issues. With the movement of persons within and across the region for work, study or living, persons may transit from across linguistic and cultural barriers. As explained with the CUPIDE example, higher education and other institutions are forming technological and other networks for sharing ideas, content, materials and intellectual capital as a means of convenience. Now there would more than likely be concerns about equivalency and quality of courses, qualifications and the competence of graduates and academic personnel in such cases. The only means to ensure that such issues are adequately addressed is to facilitate more dialogue and policy decisions through the machinery of CARICOM, the OAS and UNESCO in dealing with these matters expeditiously.

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