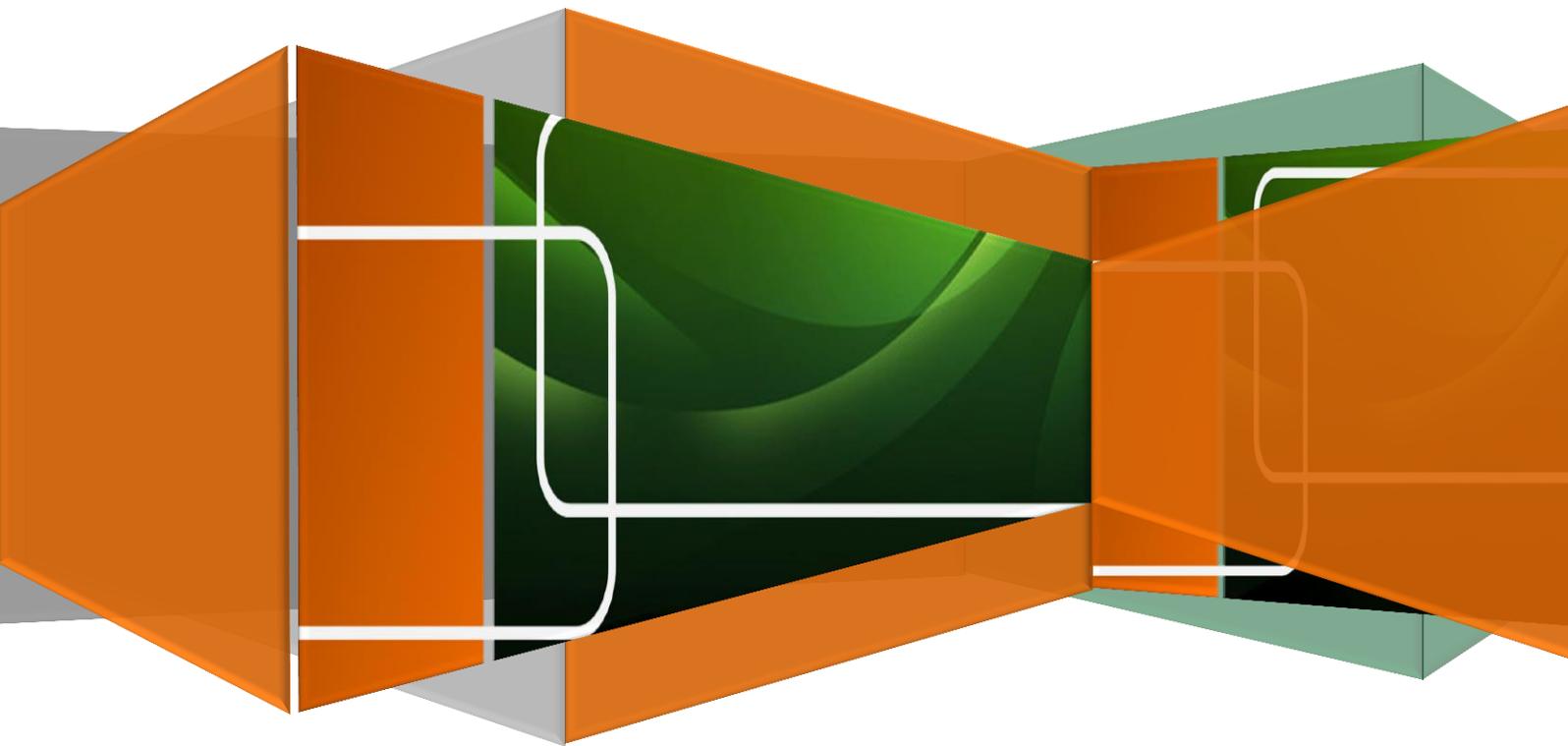


**SCOPING STUDY OF QUALITY
ASSURANCE IN TERTIARY
EDUCATION IN THE CARIBBEAN
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



SCOPING STUDY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN TERTIARY EDUCATION IN THE CARIBBEAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Background

The regional focus on tertiary education in the past quarter century has seen rapid growth of tertiary education provision including the expansion of longstanding tertiary institutions, new indigenous public and private entities, off-shore universities from the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia, small specialised institutes offering high-demand programmes, and a variety of other collaborative partnerships between local and foreign institutions. The expansion has presented many opportunities for Caribbean people but also many challenges. Governments of the region have become increasingly concerned about the nature and performance of their tertiary education systems as they seek to establish measures to ensure greater accountability for the use of scarce resources. Quality assurance mechanisms must now focus not only on local and regional institutions offering indigenous programmes but also on a number of cross-border arrangements.

In 2002, a decision was made by regional governments to give priority to the establishment of autonomous national accreditation bodies in all CARICOM member states. This scoping study is being conducted in a context where regional leaders envisaged a network of External Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAAs) that was expected to develop common standards and measures for quality assurance and accreditation. The focus was twofold – to provide a strong regulatory framework to protect stakeholders of tertiary education from poor quality and to facilitate a culture of continuous quality improvement through robust internal quality management systems within regional institutions.

The study focuses on the implementation of this network of EQAAs, including the current landscape of tertiary Education quality assurance organisations and their existing gaps; their impact on the internal quality systems of tertiary institutions; and the way forward to strengthen and improve quality assurance systems in the region.

Methodology

In performing the work of the scoping study the project limited its review to member states of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The specific countries which were targeted in the study included Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St Lucia, St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines,

Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. Specifically, the project adopted an approach of methodological triangulation which included documentary review, survey research, and unstructured interviews.

Documentary Review

A desktop review and analysis of existing literature were conducted to provide a background to develop the survey instruments used in the study, as well as to contextualise the work based on the body of knowledge and documents developed by other practitioners and researchers who have and continue to study tertiary education quality assurance in small states particularly those within the Caribbean. This review included published reports by CARICOM on the implementation of accreditation bodies in the region; draft and enacted legislation on tertiary education quality assurance in CARICOM territories; and articles and conference presentations on appropriate models for tertiary education quality assurance in small states.

Survey Research

Two online data collection instruments were developed and administered to support this study. The major instrument was distributed to the Heads of the twelve known EQAAs operating within the CARICOM region. These were administered over the period 13-26 December 2013 to EQAA heads or their designates. That survey focused on issues related to EQAAs' jurisdiction and scope of operations, recognition status, functions and general approach, funding and human resource capacity, external evaluators and panels, and accountability arrangements.

Additionally a second instrument was administered to 210 institutional personnel directly involved in quality assurance and improvement activities at 85 tertiary institutions throughout the 14 territories included in this study. The sample for this survey was selected from among the membership of the Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE) and the Quality Professionals Forum (QPF). CANQATE is an association of tertiary institutions, EQAAs, and quality assurance professionals involved in quality assurance and accreditation activities in the Caribbean. QPF is a virtual membership platform for regional quality assurance professionals and institutional personnel involved in quality assurance and accreditation activities to share resources and best practice on tertiary education quality. This survey asked participants a range of questions related to their institution's quality assurance and improvement activities. Participants were also asked to rate their institution's progress on several quality indicators related to five broad evaluative themes. These indicators were adapted from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Review and Improvement Model (RIM), and the institutional accreditation criteria of current EQAAs in CARICOM.

Unstructured Interviews

Unstructured telephone interviews were held with some EQAA heads or their representatives, and senior ministry officials in CARICOM territories where no formal EQAA had been established to clarify existing documents and other information on the operations in the respective CARICOM territories. Interview questions focused on the challenges and successes of implementing national quality assurance systems, existing gaps in implementation and the way forward for regional QA.

CARICOM Model in Review

When CARICOM took the decision to give priority to the establishment of External Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAAs) in member states it proposed draft legislation which allowed governments of the region to set broad expectations for the agencies, while giving them the autonomy to develop criteria and procedural arrangements for evaluating and monitoring institutional quality within their jurisdiction. The legislation provided a blueprint from which territories would follow.

At its foundation, the legislation envisaged that national agencies would be established as semi-autonomous corporate entities. Arguably this would allow the EQAA to be insulated from the political directorate in its work and judgments. Given the small population size of the countries, and the unique characteristics of the tertiary education systems, the legislation proposed multiple functions for regional EQAAs. In other jurisdictions such functions are usually performed by different agencies, both public and private. The CARICOM model legislation proposed several broad functions for national EQAAs including:

- *Institutional Registration*
- *Programme Approval*
- *Specialised Accreditation*
- *Conferment of Institutional Title*
- *Recognition of Foreign or Transnational Institutions, Awarding Bodies and Programmes*
- *Equivalence Assessment of Foreign Qualifications*
- *Facilitation of Free Movement in the CSME*
- *Development of a Unified Credit-based System for the Tertiary Education Sector*

The wide range of functions proposed in the CARICOM model legislation presented significant resource challenges for many of the CARICOM territories. The challenge for the small states like those in CARICOM is to develop a model that is rigorous but at the same time implementable and affordable. Conceptually, the CARICOM model recognised the need for a comprehensive and rigorous model. CARICOM envisaged sweeping changes to the tertiary education quality assurance landscape. In it, EQAAs were positioned as super agencies able to address a range of challenges faced by the regional tertiary education sector.

Most would agree that having an integrated and comprehensive EQAA is an appropriate model for small states like those in CARICOM. Many organisations which can carry some of the proposed functions were either fragmented or simply do not exist. In a context of limited resources, the rationale to avoid duplication and leverage economies of scale seemed an extremely attractive one. However, the CARICOM model may have gone too far in proposing a range of functions that were not all feasible for national EQAAs.

The challenges to implementation were becoming evident by the slow pace with which EQAAs were being established, and also in the ways in which their legislation and establishment had varied from the CARICOM model. The model had included some gaps which required clarity and was less affordable or implementable for most of the territories. Trinidad and Tobago was one of the first territories to enact the CARICOM-aligned legislation and establish its EQAA. In enacting its legislation Trinidad and Tobago included Institutional Accreditation as one of the EQAA's functions. It included a mandatory deadline by which all existing institutions were to be evaluated and awarded Institutional Registration. Institutions which failed to meet this deadline faced strict penalties including the risk of closure. This legislation would now influence several that followed in other territories. By 2013 over a decade after CARICOM proposed the establishment of EQAAs in all territories nine states have established national bodies - Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname and Dominica.

In general, what has emerged is a selective application of the CARICOM model where prioritisation of the functions included in any particular national legislation depended on the specific internal dynamics in that territory and the resources available to perform the functions envisaged by CARICOM. This had proved that the CARICOM model was flawed both in the range of functions it conceptualised and also in the support and guidance it provided to territories as they sought to implement the broad CARICOM mandate.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

National External Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAAs)

Antigua and Barbuda National Accreditation Board (ABNAB) - Antigua & Barbuda

The Antigua and Barbuda National Accreditation Board (ABNAB) was established in 2008 as a Quasi-autonomous National Agency via legislation which was enacted in 2006. Among the major institutions within the Antigua and Barbuda, there are three (3) private universities and four (4) public non-university tertiary institutions. ABNAB is governed by a Board of seven members representing government, institutions, professional bodies, labour organisations, and industry. ABNAB receives 95% of its funding from government and has only two staff members.

Currently ABNAB only performs Institutional Registration, CARICOM Skill Certificate Assessment, Equivalence Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications.

In Antigua & Barbuda the Institutional Registration process involves an institutional self-assessment submission, site visit, and external evaluation report. Both evaluators and EQAA staff provide support to the institutions during the self-assessment process. Institutional Registration at ABNAB is a one-off evaluation for which institutions are not subject to a re-evaluation process. Within ABNAB's current process for Institutional Registration, the external evaluation team makes the final decision on the status to be awarded. However, ABNAB's Board members are generally part of the teams which evaluate institutions for Institutional Registration. Currently the mechanisms to address the ABNAB's own accountability remain undeveloped.

Barbados Accreditation Council (BAC) - Barbados

The Barbados Accreditation Council (BAC) was established in 2004 as a Quasi-autonomous National Agency via legislation which was also enacted in 2004. In Barbados, there are over ninety (90) private non-university tertiary institutions, a major campus of the University of the West Indies, and four (4) public non-university tertiary institutions. BAC is governed by a Board of nine (9) members representing government, labour organisations, and industry. BAC receives 100% of its funding from government and has seventeen (17) staff members. BAC's currently performs Institutional Registration, Programme Approval, Institutional Accreditation, Recognition of Foreign or Transnational Institutions, Awarding Bodies and Programmes, Equivalence Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, and Facilitation of Free Movement in the CSME by advising on issuance of the CARICOM Skills Certificate.

BAC's major evaluation processes involve an institutional self-assessment submission, site visit, and external evaluation report, and follow-up action on recommendations as required. There is clear separation in the role and functions of the external team of evaluators and EQAA staff. The latter provide support to the institutions during the self-assessment process and guide the process while the team conducts the visit, reviews evidence and prepares the evaluation report. BAC's major processes involve periodic re-evaluation cycles of between three (3) and seven (7) years. The BAC Board makes the final decision on the status to be awarded based on the recommendation of the external team. Currently, the mechanisms to address the BAC's own accountability are in their early stages of development.

Dominica National Accreditation Board (DNAB) - Dominica

The Dominica National Accreditation Board (DNAB) was established in 2009 as a Quasi-autonomous National Agency via legislation which was enacted in 2006. In Dominica, there are two (2) private universities, a major site of the UWI Open Campus, and one (1) public non-university tertiary institution. DNAB is governed by a Board of eight (8) members

representing government, tertiary institutions, professional bodies, labour organisations, and industry. DNAB receives 80% of its funding from government and 20% from evaluation fees. There are two staff members employed at DNAB. DNAB currently performs Recognition of Foreign or Transnational Institutions, Awarding Bodies and Programmes, Equivalence Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, and Facilitation of Free Movement in the CSME by advising on issuance of the CARICOM Skills Certificate. DNAB is in a nascent stage of development and some of its processes are not fully developed, including mechanisms to address its own accountability.

Guyana National Accreditation Council (GNAC) - Guyana

The Guyana National Accreditation Council (GNAC) was established in 2006 as a Quasi-autonomous National Agency via legislation which was enacted in 2004. In Guyana, there are five (5) private universities, twelve (12) private non-university tertiary institutions, one (1) public university, and eleven (11) public non-university tertiary institutions. GNAC is governed by a Board of eleven (11) members representing government, tertiary institutions, professional bodies, industry and the National Training Agency. GNAC receives 70% of its funding from government and 30% from affiliation fees. GNAC has four (4) staff members.

GNAC currently performs Institutional Registration, Programme Approval, and Recognition of Foreign or Transnational Institutions, Awarding Bodies and Programmes. GNAC's major evaluation processes involve an institutional self-assessment submission, site visit, and external evaluation report, and follow-up action on recommendations as required. There is clear separation in the role and functions of the external team of evaluators and EQAA staff. The latter provide support to the institutions during the self-assessment process and guide the process while the team conducts the visit, reviews evidence and prepares the evaluation report. GNAC's process for Institutional Registration involves a periodic re-evaluation cycle of one (1) year. The GNAC Board makes the final decision on the status to be awarded based on the recommendation of the external team. Currently the mechanisms to address the GNAC's own accountability not developed.

University Council of Jamaica (UCJ) - Jamaica

The University Council of Jamaica (UCJ) was established in 1987 as a Quasi-autonomous National Agency via legislation which was also enacted in 1987. Its establishment and related legislation predates the CARICOM model and varies from it significantly. In Jamaica, there is one (1) private university, twenty-three (23) private non-university tertiary institutions, two (2) public universities (including one of three UWI campuses), and twenty-one public non-university tertiary institutions. UCJ is governed by a Board of fifteen (15) members representing government, tertiary institutions, professional bodies, industry and the National Training Agency. UCJ receives 44% of its funding from government, 55% from affiliation fees and 1% from evaluation fees. UCJ has twenty (20) staff members.

UCJ currently performs Institutional Registration, Institutional Accreditation, Specialised Accreditation, Recognition of Foreign or Transnational Institutions, Awarding Bodies and Programmes, Equivalence Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, and Facilitation of Free Movement in the CSME by advising on issuance of the CARICOM Skills Certificate. UCJ's major evaluation processes involve an institutional self-assessment submission, site visit, and external evaluation report, and follow-up action on recommendations as required. There is clear separation in the role and functions of the external team of evaluators and EQAA staff. The latter provide support to the institutions during the self-assessment process and guide the process while the team conducts the visit, reviews evidence and prepares the evaluation report. UCJ's major processes involve periodic re-evaluation cycles of between four (4) to seven (7) years. The UCJ Board makes the final decision on the status to be awarded based on the recommendation of the external team. Mechanisms to address UCJ's own accountability are developed and partially implemented.

St Kitts and Nevis Accreditation Board (SKNAB) - St Kitts and Nevis

The St Kitts and Nevis Accreditation Board (SKNAB) was established in 2001 as a Statutory Board within the Ministry of Education via legislation which was enacted in 1999. In St Kitts, there are six (6) private off-shore universities, four (4) private non-university tertiary institutions, and two (2) public non-university tertiary institutions. The Statutory Board has seven members made up of government officials and representatives from public tertiary institutions. The Board is funded solely by government and has one administrative support staff member.

SKNAB only performs Institutional Accreditation with special emphasis on off-shore institutions. This process involves a two-year re-evaluation cycle. Board members review the evidence, conduct site visits, and prepare the external evaluation report on which follow-up action may be required by the institution. The government administration through the Minister makes the final decision on the status to be awarded based on the recommendation of the Board. There are currently no mechanisms in place to address SKNAB's own accountability.

National Accreditation Board St Vincent and the Grenadines (NABSVG) - St Vincent and the Grenadines

The National Accreditation Board St Vincent and the Grenadines (NABSVG) was established in 2006 as a Quasi-autonomous National Agency via legislation which was also enacted in 2006. In St Vincent and the Grenadines, there are about four (4) private universities, ten (10) private non-university tertiary institutions, one (1) public university, and 2 public non-university tertiary institutions. NABSVG is governed by a Board of sixteen (16) members representing government, institutions, professional bodies, labour organisations and industry, and the National Training Agency in that territory. NABSVG receives 100% of its funding from government and has only two staff members. Currently NABSVG only

performs Institutional Registration, and Recognition of Foreign or Transnational Institutions, Awarding Bodies and Programmes,

In St Vincent and the Grenadines the process for Institutional Registration involves an institutional self-assessment submission, site visit, external evaluation report, and follow-up action where required. Registered institutions are subject to a three-year re-evaluation cycle. Within NABSVG's current process for Registration the government administration through the Minister makes the final decision on the status to be awarded based on the recommendation of the Board. Currently the mechanisms to address the NABSVG's own accountability remain undeveloped.

National Body for Accreditation (NOVA) - Suriname

The National Body for Accreditation (NOVA) was established in 2011 as a Quasi-autonomous National Agency via legislation which was enacted in 2008. In Suriname, there are about six (6) private non-university tertiary institutions, five (5) public non-university tertiary institutions, and one (1) public university. NOVA is governed by a Board of nine (9) members representing government, tertiary institutions, and industry. NOVA receives 80% of its funding from government and 20% from evaluation fees. NOVA has only three (3) staff members.

Currently NOVA only performs Programme Accreditation, Recognition of Foreign or Transnational Institutions, Awarding Bodies and Programmes, and Equivalence Assessment of Foreign Qualifications. Programme Accreditation involves a one-year re-evaluation cycle and the Board makes the final decision on the status to be awarded based on the recommendation of an external evaluation team. NOVA is still in a nascent stage of development and mechanisms to address its own accountability remain undeveloped.

Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago (ACTT) - Trinidad and Tobago

The Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago (ACTT) was established in 2004 as a Quasi-autonomous National Agency via legislation which was also enacted in 2004. In Trinidad and Tobago, there is one (1) private university, about eighty (80) private non-university tertiary institutions, two (2) public universities, and one public non-university tertiary institution. ACTT is governed by a Board of ten (10) members representing government, tertiary institutions, professional bodies, labour organisations and industry. ACTT receives 70% of its funding from government, 10% from affiliation fees and 20% from evaluation fees. ACTT has fifty-four (54) staff members.

ACTT currently performs Institutional Registration, Programme Approval, Institutional Accreditation, Specialised Accreditation, Recognition of Foreign or Transnational Institutions, Awarding Bodies and Programmes, Conferment of Institutional Title, Equivalence Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, and Facilitation of Free Movement in the

CSME by advising on issuance of the CARICOM Skills Certificate. ACTT's major evaluation processes involve an institutional self-assessment submission, site visit, and external evaluation report, and follow-up action on recommendations as required. ACTT's major processes also involve periodic re-evaluation cycles of between three (3) to seven (7) years. The ACTT Board makes the final decision on the status to be awarded based on the recommendation of the external team. Mechanisms to address ACTT's own accountability are developed and partially implemented.

Regional Quality Assurance Agencies and Organisations

Caribbean Accreditation Authority for Medicine and other Health Professions (CAAM-HP)

In 2001 the practice of accrediting overseas institutions was discontinued by the General Medical Council (GMC) of the UK in keeping with European Union (EU) regulations regarding academic and professional training programmes. The medical education programme of the University of the West Indies (UWI), the major regional institution offering medical education, would no longer be quality assured. The reputation of the UWI programme and its many regional and international graduates would be negatively affected as a result.

In response to these developments and the regional thrust to ensure quality education and training in the context of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), a regional accreditation system for medical education was established. Thus, the Caribbean Accreditation Authority for Education in Medicine and Other Health Professions (CAAM-HP) was launched under the aegis of CARICOM in 2004 to accredit the education programmes of medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, nursing and other health professions in CARICOM member states. Currently, there are eleven medical programmes, a veterinary programme, and a dentistry programme accredited by CAAM-HP across the CARICOM region.

Caribbean Accreditation Council for Engineering and Technology (CACET)

In 1989 the Washington Accord was signed among national bodies responsible for accrediting engineering degree programmes. The Washington Accord (WA) recognized the equivalency of member accreditation systems and the competency of graduates from programmes accredited by those member EQAAs. Generally, the signatories of the WA are limited to larger, more developed countries and economies. Currently, there are no Latin American or Caribbean countries who are signatories to the WA. This has driven efforts in the Caribbean to develop robust EQAAs for engineering programmes in a context where the ability of countries to sell their products and attract foreign investments depends on their ability to demonstrate sound engineering and technical capacity.

The Caribbean Accreditation Council for Engineering and Technology (CACET) was officially established in 2009 in San Juan, Puerto Rico, at a meeting of members of the Caribbean engineering fraternity, the national accreditation agencies in the region, academics from regional universities, and representatives of CARICOM. Subsequently, the CARICOM Heads of Governments formally agreed to recognise CACET as the regional accreditation body for engineering and related technology academic programmes. This was the culmination of several years advocacy by academics and professional engineers in the region.

CACET was operationalized with financial and technical support from the Educational Activities Board of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE), and its early stages of operations benefitted from contributions and grants from other independent bodies. CACET also received support from the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) based in the United States. Fees from evaluation activities now largely cover CACET's current operations. In its short time of operation CACET has demonstrated its capacity to work within the existing structures - engaging in joint visits and evaluations with the national agencies in the region, and international accreditation bodies which still evaluate some regional institutions like UWI, UTT and UTECH. To date CACET has accredited 13 engineering programmes in the CARICOM region. Its focus at this time is to gain sufficient experience and recognition to become part of the Washington Accord.

Greater Caribbean Engineering Accreditation System (GCREAS)

Around the same time that CACET was being established, the Greater Caribbean Engineering Accreditation System (GCREAS) was also established to accredit engineering and related academic programmes in the wider Caribbean and Latin America. GCREAS was established based on collaboration among a number of institutions and EQAAs in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Panama, Colombia and others in the wider Latin American region.

Its establishment occurred in the context of the Engineers for the Americas (EFTA) initiative which was conceptualised in response to the need for the region to access the benefits of the Washington Accord. The EFTA's specific goals are to build technical capacity in engineering for Latin America and the Caribbean. GCREAS's establishment was financed with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and with additional sponsorship by private international entities. GCREAS has not yet accredited any engineering programmes in CARICOM but is currently working on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with CACET to coordinate their quality assurance activities for engineering programmes within CARICOM.

Caribbean Community Accreditation Agency for Education and Training

There is also an Inter-governmental CARICOM Agreement to establish the Caribbean Community Accreditation Agency for Education and Training. The intent of the initiative is

to establish a regional coordinating body for national EQAAs within CARICOM that would function similarly to the way the Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) both function in the United States of America and Europe respectively. The main functions of the regional body will be to:

- Develop guidelines for good practice in tertiary education to assist national accreditation bodies in discharging their responsibilities
- Develop core criteria, standards and procedures for facilitating the further development of a tertiary education quality assurance system in CARICOM
- Collaborate with national accreditation bodies, professional bodies and other relevant bodies to develop training programmes designed to create a regional cadre of trained external evaluators
- Co-ordinate tertiary education accreditation initiatives in the region, including establishing a code of good practice for specialised agencies and professional bodies to maintain the integrity of the quality assurance system in CARICOM
- Provide guidance or guidelines for the evaluation of foreign qualifications

Some Heads of Government have been slow to sign the agreement and to date less than half of the 15 member states have signed. This has occurred in a context where several CARICOM member states have experienced economic hardship since 2008 and are reluctant to commit to the financial responsibility in establishing and maintaining such a body.

Territories which have not yet fully established national EQAAs

Some territories have all been extremely slow to establish EQAAs. Belize, Bahamas and Grenada passed legislation in 2004, 2008 and 2011 respectively but have not yet established national EQAAs. Belize was early to enact the CARICOM-aligned legislation but changes in leadership within the Government ministry with oversight responsibility for tertiary education and a general lack of capacity on the island have impacted the pace of implementation. A committee was established over a year ago and has been working on a plan to revise the legislation and operationalise the EQAA.

Due to its close proximity to the USA, the Bahamas has been able to have some of its institutions and programmes evaluated by specialised and regional accreditation bodies in the USA. Additionally, courses offered in some specialized areas are evaluated locally. For example the territory has a strong nursing council which determines the standards for nursing qualifications, and evaluates institutions which offer those programmes. The ability to secure arrangements with reputable USA-based EQAAs to evaluate programmes in the Bahamas might help explain the slow pace with which government has moved to establish a national body.

In Grenada the legislation establishing the EQAA was enacted in 2011 and a Board has been appointed. Since June 2013 the Board has been working and planning on operationalizing the EQAA. A draft Bill was developed in St Lucia but no legislation has been enacted by Parliament to establish a national system for tertiary education quality assurance and accreditation. There exists however a department within the Ministry of Education that has had responsibility for developing quality assurance policies and practices. A draft implementation plan was developed to guide the way forward towards establishing the EQAA but this has been under review by senior government officials for over a year now. St Lucia recently had a change of government and some of the previous efforts were paused as the new administration sets its own priorities for the local tertiary education sector.

Montserrat is still a British territory even though the local government exercises significant autonomy. In 1995 the island was hit by a major volcanic eruption which forced major evacuations and reduced the population to below 6000 persons. In 2007 the island enacted legislation to establish the Higher Education Advisory Board which was developed to accept applications from institutions for a licence to operate as a tertiary institution in Montserrat. The Board comprises ministry officials with oversight for education in Montserrat. It is also empowered to offer accreditation to institutions which are not otherwise accredited or wish to do so in Montserrat. Since its establishment the Board has approved the application of an offshore medical school but the school has since relocated to another island.

Regional Institutions' Progress on Internal Quality Assurance

Two hundred and ten (210) institutional personnel directly involved in quality assurance and improvement activities at their institution were invited to participate in a survey which was administered electronically via e-mail. The sample was selected from among the membership of CANQATE and the Quality Professionals Forum (QPF). Faculty and Administrative personnel directly involved in the work of quality at their various institutions were invited to participate. Participants were given the assurance that data collected would be used only to provide summary findings on their general perception of institutional changes in internal quality over the past three years.

The survey was premised on five broad evaluative themes namely *Change and Institutional Responsiveness, Communication and Engagement, Learning and Scholarship, Human Resource Development, and Managing Material and Financial Resources*

	Change and Institutional Responsiveness	Communication and Engagement	Learning and Scholarship	Human Resource Development	Managing Material and Financial Resources
Institutions with a central Quality Assurance Office or dedicated QA personnel	74%	85%	78%	70%	51%
Institutions without a central Quality Assurance or dedicated QA personnel	100%	67%	100%	67%	33%
Conducted a self-study within the past five years	82%	78%	78%	70%	52%
Has not conducted a self-study within the past five years	67%	33%	100%	67%	33%
Has successfully undergone an external evaluation process by an EQAA within CARICOM	82%	82%	73%	64%	45%
Has not successfully undergone an external evaluation process by an EQAA within CARICOM	73%	82%	100%	82%	54%
All Respondents	79%	82%	82%	69%	48%

Table 1 – Distribution of QA personnel that indicate institutional improvement on the five broad evaluative themes over the past three years

The responses of QA professionals, administrators and faculty members directly involved in the work of quality assurance suggest that the internal quality systems within institutions have progressed notably in the past few years. Key developments include:

1. The establishment of central QA offices and dedicated personnel at the institutional level and in some cases also at the department level is an increasing phenomenon in the past five years.
2. Evidence that institutions are increasingly engaging in self-review and evaluation - whether for a formal external evaluation or to improve overall internal quality. This is further emphasised in the number of institutions that have successfully been evaluated for either a programmatic or institutional status.
3. Increasing confidence among institutional personnel that their institutions have improved their planning processes to handle change and respond to stakeholder needs and expectations; have also progressed in their processes for communicating and engaging stakeholders to achieve common goals; and are progressing in the way they support and encourage the achievement of student learning outcomes.

However, institutional personnel were less optimistic about the progress being made by institutions in their processes to manage people, plant and financial resources. These factors significantly affect the level of quality institutions can offer to learners and should be monitored more closely by EQAAs. As EQAAs in the region continue to develop their processes, consideration will have to be given to how they guide and support institutions in addressing their challenges. This is particularly important as the system matures and moves from a regulatory emphasis to one of continuous quality improvement and developing a quality culture.

THE WAY FORWARD – PLAN OF ACTION FOR CARICOM EQAAs

Strategies for Action

A comprehensive assessment of the tertiary education landscape reveals that the process to establish a robust Network of EQAAs and strengthen the overall quality assurance system for tertiary education in CARICOM has been far slower than regional leaders had expected. Only three national EQAAs are fully operational and sufficiently well-resourced to perform most of its functions namely UCJ, ACTT and BAC in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados respectively. The others territories are at different stages of development and all still require significant assistance.

Since its establishment, CANQATE has played a pivotal role in developing regional and national quality assurance systems for tertiary education in the Caribbean. This plan proposes an enhanced role for CANQATE to strengthen the network of EQAAs and overall quality assurance system for tertiary education in CARICOM

Three main strategies are proposed by this plan including:

I. Public Education and Advocacy

Facilitate an aggressive public education and advocacy agenda targeting policymakers, sector leaders and the public on the importance, key processes and functions of Tertiary education Quality Assurance.

II. Synergy & Harmonisation

Promote synergy and harmonisation between regional EQAAs taking a leadership role in developing and advocating for a common legislative model, shared services, and harmonised policies, and criteria

III. Training and Technical Capacity Building

Provide training and technical capacity building support for the cadre of regional QA professionals in EQAAs and tertiary institutions, and the regional corps of external evaluators.

Action Plan Log Frame

The following framework presents the strategies and actions proposed by this plan.

Log frame Matrix	Strategy and Action Plan to Strengthen the Network of EQAAs and overall Quality Assurance System for Tertiary Education in CARICOM		
Description	Indicators of Achievement	Sources of verification	Assumptions
<p><u>Plan Goal</u></p> <p>Strengthen the Network of EQAAs and overall Quality Assurance System for Tertiary Education in CARICOM</p>			
<p><u>Plan Strategies</u></p> <p><i>I. Public Education and Advocacy</i> Facilitate public education and advocacy targeting policymakers, sector leaders and the public on the importance, key processes and functions of Tertiary Education Quality Assurance.</p> <p><i>II. Synergy & Harmonisation</i> Promote synergy and harmonisation between regional EQAAs through similar legislative arrangements, shared services, and harmonised policies, and criteria</p> <p><i>III. Training and Technical Capacity Building</i> Provide training and technical capacity building among the cadre of regional QA professionals in EQAAs and tertiary institutions, and external evaluators.</p>			

<u>Plan Deliverables</u>			
a. Regional Communication/Advocacy Plan	Communication Plan including milestones are approved by CANQATE Board	Communication plan is published on CANQATE website CANQATE Core groups are fully established in all territories	CANQATE membership supports strategy to increase communication and advocacy for QA in the region Funding can be sourced to develop and write the plan Plan will be effectively implemented by EQAAs, Core groups, & CANQATE Administration
b. Model Legislation	Consultant is assigned to review existing models and develop revised model for regional EQAAs Revised model legislation is presented to CANQATE membership and regional leaders at CANQATE annual conference	Model legislation is published on CANQATE website	Funding can be sourced for a legal consultant to revise CARICOM model legislation for EQAAs CANQATE membership supports the strategy for a revised model develop by CANQATE Public Education and Advocacy initiatives will lead to enactment and legislative reforms in regional territories
c. Model Policy Manual	Policy research and technical review panel is established Draft policy manual is presented to CANQATE membership	Model policies are available on CANQATE website and related written publications	Regional experts are willing to participate in research and technical review panel and lead the development of a model policies CANQATE membership supports the strategy of addressing regional policy gaps developing common policies for regional EQAAs Funding can be sourced to develop and write and publish the manual Material will be effectively utilised by EQAAs

<p>d. Model criteria, standards and procedural guidelines for Registration, Accreditation, Transnational Recognition & Collaborative Provision.</p>	<p>Draft Model criteria, standards and procedural guidelines for Registration, Accreditation, Transnational Recognition & Collaborative Provision are presented to CANQATE membership</p>	<p>Model criteria, standards, etc are available on CANQATE website and related written publications</p>	<p>CANQATE membership supports the review of regional criteria, approaches towards improvement and harmonisation</p> <p>EQAAs willing provide access to have their criteria, standards, etc reviewed by a regional technical team.</p> <p>Regional experts are willing to participate in review and lead the development of a revised/harmonised criteria, standards, etc</p> <p>Material will be effectively utilised by EQAAs</p>
<p>e. Regional Best Practice handbook</p>	<p>Consultant is assigned to develop best practice handbook</p> <p>Published Best Practice Handbook is available for EQAAs, QA personnel, and other stakeholders</p>	<p>Published Best Practice Handbook is available for download/purchase from CANQATE</p>	<p>CANQATE membership supports the development of a best practice handbook</p> <p>Regional experts, EQAA Heads, and CANQATE membership are willing to submit material and feedback in development of the handbook.</p> <p>Funding can be sourced to develop and publish the handbook</p>
<p>f. Partnership/linkage programme between mature EQAAs and lesser developed EQAAs in the region</p>	<p>Five (5) or more EQAAs participate in the programme</p>	<p>Evidence of milestone achievements in the programme</p>	<p>Funding is available to support the programme</p> <p>EQAAs are supportive of the programme</p>

<p>g. Structured Professional Development Programme for QA Professionals in tertiary institutions</p>	<p>Consultant is assigned to develop and deliver professional development programme</p> <p>100 or more QA professionals throughout the region participate in structured Professional development activities</p>	<p>Published schedule of training events facilitated by CANQATE</p> <p>Participant feedback report</p> <p>Results of learning outcomes assessment</p>	<p>CANQATE membership supports a structured professional development facilitated by CANQATE</p> <p>Funding can be sourced for a training consultant to develop and deliver professional development activities</p>
<p>h. Structured Training Programme for External Evaluators and Team Chairs</p>	<p>Consultant is assigned to develop and deliver professional development programme</p> <p>50 or more External Evaluators participate in structured training programme facilitated by CANQATE</p> <p>30 or more External Evaluation Team Chairs participate in structured training programme facilitated by CANQATE</p>	<p>Published schedule of training events facilitated by CANQATE</p> <p>Participant feedback report</p> <p>Results of learning outcomes assessment</p>	<p>CANQATE membership supports a structured training programme for External evaluators facilitated by CANQATE</p> <p>Funding can be sourced for a training consultant to develop and deliver training activities</p>
<p><u>Plan Activities</u></p>			
<p>1. Establish a Communication Committee to solicit feedback from membership and develop a comprehensive plan</p>	<p>Milestones on the plan are achieved during the period</p>	<p>Quarterly reports of the Communication/ Advocacy committee presented to CANQATE Board</p>	<p>Suitable members of CANQATE are willing to be part of Communications committee</p>
<p>2. Increase technical capacity/manpower of CANQATE's research and publications arm</p>	<p>CANQATE embark on research agenda</p>	<p>CANQATE research agenda is published on website</p>	<p>Funding and expertise is available to strengthen CANQATE's research and publications operations</p>

3. Strengthen existing CANQATE Core groups and establish new Core Groups with emphasis on advocacy and public education initiatives	CANQATE Core groups prepare an undertake annual agenda of activities f	Biannual reports of Core group activity are submitted to CANQATE Board	National EQAAs and Education Ministries are willing to provide support to Core groups
4. Write model legislation and regulations for regional EQAAs	Revised model legislation is presented to CANQATE membership and regional leaders	Model legislation is published on CANQATE website	Funding is available for a legal consultant to revise CARICOM model legislation for EQAAs
5. Establish regional technical team for policy research and to review regional processes, criteria and standards for Registration, Accreditation Transnational Recognition & Collaborative Provision.	Major gaps and areas for improvement, and harmonisation are identified by team	Biannual reports of policy research and review committee are submitted to CANQATE Board	Suitable members of CANQATE and other stakeholder representatives are available and willing to be part of the technical team facilitated by CANQATE
6. Write model policy manual and guidelines which give emphasis to priority areas	Model policy manual is published	Policy manual	Funding is available to retain personnel to write and compile the manual
7. Write model criteria, standards and procedural guidelines for Registration, Accreditation, Transnational Recognition & Collaborative Provision	Model criteria, standards and procedural guidelines for Registration, Accreditation, Transnational Recognition & Collaborative Provision are published	Model criteria, standards and procedural guidelines for Registration, Accreditation, Transnational Recognition & Collaborative Provision	Funding is available to retain personnel to write and compile the manual
8. Write best practice handbook for EQAAs on issues including regional database of evaluators, outsourcing and shared services, mutual recognition agreements, external review	Best Practice Handbook is published	Evidence of Regional Best Practice handbook for EQAAs	Funding is available to retain personnel to write and compile the manual
9. Establish CANQATE Education committee to determine key learning outcomes for QA professionals, institutional personnel involved in QA, and External Evaluators	Major skill gaps, areas for technical capacity building, and desired learning outcomes are identified by committee	Biannual reports of the Education Committee are submitted to CANQATE Board	Suitable members of CANQATE and other stakeholder representatives are available and willing to part of the CANQATE Education Committee

10. Develop an internship and work attachment programme for staff from lesser developed EQAAs to facilitate knowledge transfer & technical capacity building	Three or more internship/work attachment arrangements are facilitated between lesser developed and mature EQAAs	Report on internship and work attachment programme is published	Funding is available to provide sponsorship to programme participants EQAAs are willing to facilitate internship and work attachment arrangements
11. Develop professional development programme for QA professionals within tertiary institutions	Professional development content is compiled and available to participants	Published professional development programme/schedule	Funding is available to retain personnel to develop and compile training and professional development content Tertiary institutions are willing to support the programme
12. Develop structured training programme for External evaluators & Peer reviewers	Training material is compiled and available to participants	Published training programme/schedule	Funding is available to retain personnel to develop and compile training and professional development content
13. Develop structured training programme for External evaluation Team Chairs	Training material is compiled and available to participants	Published training programme/schedule	Funding is available to retain personnel to develop and compile training and professional development content
14. Implement training programmes through Webinars, online modules face-to-face training workshops and regional publications	Achievement of learning outcomes demonstrated by QA professionals and external evaluators after training.	Attendance registers Assessment results of Learning outcomes	Funding is available to retain personnel to deliver and facilitate training and professional development sessions