

# THE REGIONAL UNIVERSITY MODEL – DOES IT STILL STAND? A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

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## Abstract

Sixty years after its establishment in 1948 by Royal Charter in Jamaica, the University of the West Indies predominates as the premier tertiary level institution with 4 campuses, a presence in 15 countries and just under 41,000 students. However, over the last 60 years the landscape for tertiary education has changed considerably with over 150 institutions now operating in the region – public, private and offshore.

This paper will discuss whether the regional University model which has guided the evolution of the University of the West Indies is still valid in the current context of globalization given the expansion and growth of tertiary education provision in the Caribbean.

What does the future hold for tertiary education transformation in the region? Does the existence and potential developmental role of another 150 institutions pose a challenge for UWI and how is this challenge to be defined? Or is there opportunity for UWI to rationalize its role as a regional institution that is even more relevant and responsive and at the same time play a leadership, developmental, rationalizing and integrative role supportive of other tertiary institutions?



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## Introduction

This paper will address the following question and seek to answer it: Is the regional University Model which has guided the evolution of the University of the West Indies still valid in the current context of globalization and given the expansion and growth of tertiary education provision in the Caribbean?

Higher Education which UNESCO describes as “all types of studies, training or training for research at the post secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments that are approved as institutions of higher learning by competent state authorities”<sup>1</sup> began to evolve in a distinctly discernable way, after the end of World War II, in the Caribbean region.

A significant event in the history of higher education in the then British West Indies was the establishment of the University College of the West Indies in 1948 in Jamaica. Sixty (60) years later, the University of the West Indies (UWI) predominates as the premier tertiary level institution in the Caribbean, forty-seven years after receiving its royal Charter in 1962 when Jamaica became independent.

UWI now has four (4) Campuses in the region (the most recently established being the Open Campus [2007]), a presence in fifteen (15) countries which contribute financially to UWI in different proportions, a wide offering of undergraduate, post graduate, certificate and diploma programmes and a student population of just under forty-one thousand (41,000). There are three (3) physical campuses in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados. The mandate of the Open Campus is to provide a leadership presence in the twelve (12) non-campus countries and to reach out to the underserved communities by leading the charge in e-learning and multimode education. The Open Campus represents a transformation in concept of the traditional distance and continuing education initiative and because a significant part of what the Open Campus does involves developmental programmes, bridging programmes, feeder programmes to degree offerings and leisure, pleasure and skills-oriented training, almost two-thirds of its 25,000 plus students (in addition to the 41,000 involved in degree programmes at the University of the West Indies) are not involved in traditional degree programmes but can (and some do) prepare themselves for matriculation into such programmes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, “World Declaration on Higher Education/The Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action” adopted by the World Conference on Higher Education, October 1998. [www.unesco.org/education/educprog/wche/declaration\\_eng.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/wche/declaration_eng.htm)

<sup>2</sup> The UWI Statistical Review covering the period 2007-2008 shows the Open Campus as providing education at degree, diploma and certificate levels for 9.57% of the total UWI population or just under 4,000 students (3915). However, through a range of non-degree, continuing education type programmes the Open Campus enrolls another 20,000 plus students according to documents presented in April 2007 to the founding Council of the Open Campus.

## **The institutional fabric of higher education in the region**

Today, UWI remains, irrefutably, the only truly regional higher educational institution in the Caribbean in concept, scope and reach. However, a lot has also happened in the tertiary sector over the last sixty (60) years in the region traditionally served by UWI including the fact that institutions such as the University of Guyana and Anton de Kom University in Suriname have remained by and large national institutions while new national universities such as University of Technology in Jamaica, and University of Trinidad and Tobago in Trinidad and Tobago have emerged with strength and others, such as the National College of Barbados make space for themselves.

At present, the scope and coverage of the sector are large and diversified. There are over one hundred and fifty (150) institutions of which 60% are public, 30% private and the remaining 10% receive more limited government support. St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia and Grenada have among them attracted fourteen (14) offshore tertiary education institutions, the majority of which are US investments and mainly, medical schools. The reality is that there have been, in addition to new national universities, a proliferation of Community Colleges and other tertiary institutions across the region.<sup>3</sup>

While the existence and potential development role of another one hundred and fifty (150) institutions need to be carefully assessed and fully taken into account in a region of just six million people, there is still opportunity, not only for UWI to strengthen its role as a regional institution that is relevant and responsive, but also to play a leadership developmental, rationalizing and integrative role supportive of the other tertiary institutions, especially those in the public sector. Moreover, UWI could not but be a vital institution in any regional tertiary system that might emerge nor can UWI be easily ignored in any national system that may emerge in any country as part of a regional sub-system. Currently, at the level of CARICOM (Caribbean Community institution which coordinates the regional development agenda) the issue of rationalizing, integrating and harmonizing a regional tertiary sector is now receiving attention.<sup>4</sup>

## **Significant growth in tertiary participation**

Slow progress in the 1950s, 60s and 70s gave way to significant growth of the tertiary sector in the 1980s and after. Globalization has been a major factor. The global liberalization of education has led to an increase in privately owned tertiary level institutions and an influx of foreign providers in the Caribbean region. A recent World

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<sup>3</sup>Howe, Glenford D. (2003) "Contenting with Change: Reviewing Tertiary Education in the English Speaking Caribbean" p.52.

<sup>4</sup>The Report of the Seventeenth Meeting of the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD XVII) - Education records the fact that this author made a presentation on behalf of the University on collaboration among tertiary level institutions, particularly in the context of the CSME and the EPA and agreed that seven (7) issues identified in the presentation "should form part of the discussion framework for consideration by the proposed cluster of HRD institutions." This meeting took place November 2008

Bank document indicates that between 25 and 50 percent of the tertiary sector in Jamaica and in St. Lucia and 10% in Trinidad and Tobago are private sector.<sup>5</sup> Within the region itself the growing momentum for democratization of tertiary education increased demands for access by regional governments to the University of the West Indies, particularly from those governments from territories not served by a physical university campus. Market demand also grew as the information age became a reality, as the knowledge economy began to evolve and as skilled, knowledge workers became essential to building a competitive regional economy. World Bank studies indicate that 79% of the GDP of the OECS countries (the smaller island countries) is produced by the service economy, that there is a mismatch between skills acquired in secondary school and the market and that lack of skills and limited educational attainment are a severe drawback to building competitive economies.<sup>6</sup>

Today, the English speaking Caribbean region, served by the University of the West Indies is an extremely competitive market for the provision of tertiary and higher education with new national institutions supported by governments, private sector investors and foreign providers either in joint-ventures or alone emerging in almost every island or jurisdiction as demand increases and opportunities present themselves. The question as to what is the best way forward for the region in terms of a tertiary education strategy that will serve the region and its people well does indeed rise. In addition, while none of the OECS countries are included in the 2008-2009 Global Competitiveness Report<sup>7</sup>, those that are included can certainly improve their competitiveness ranking with educational support at tertiary level and increased throughput of tertiary level graduates. Barbados is ranked 47, Jamaica 86, Trinidad and Tobago 92, and Guyana 115 out of 134 countries assessed. In the specific area of Higher Education and Training Barbados ranks 29, Jamaica, 75, Trinidad and Tobago 80, and Guyana 112. The benefits of tertiary and higher education for the individual for social good and for developmental impact has been well documented<sup>8</sup> and the World Competitiveness Report does specifically identify higher education and training as one of twelve key factors in capacity building for competitiveness. Below is a diagram which illustrates the point and which this author designed with a colleague for another forum.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kapur, Devesh and Crowley, Megan, Beyond the ABCs: Higher Education and Development: Working Paper 139, Feb 2007, Centre for Global Development, p.17.

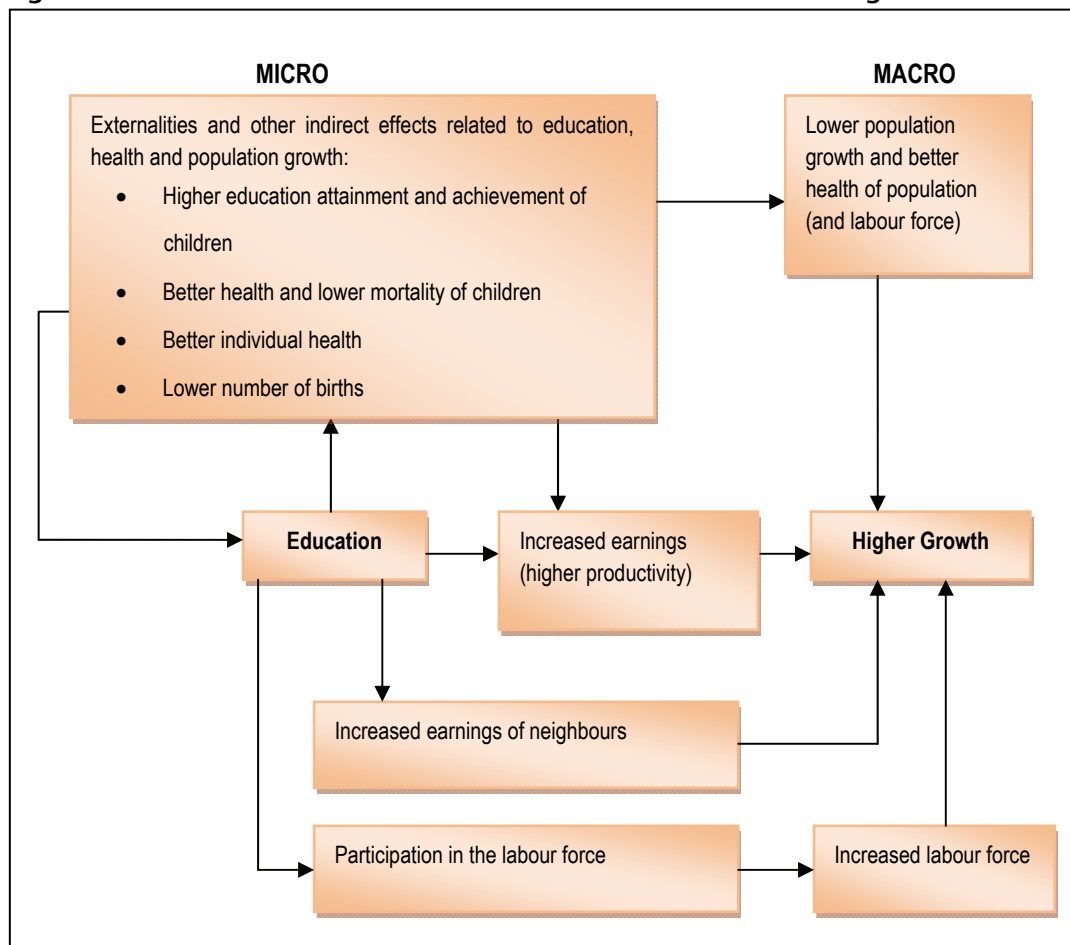
<sup>6</sup> See Jules D., Miller, E and Armstrong, C. "Caribbean Education Strategy 2020, World Bank, Washington 2000

<sup>7</sup> Porter, Michael E and Schwab, Klaus (2008) The Global Competitiveness Report 2008-2009, World Economic Forum. Statistical Tables pp.16-22

<sup>8</sup> Since 1974 Jacob Mincer suggested through econometric evidence that a one year margin in educational attainment increased individual earnings. Psacharopoulos (1994) survey 78 countries to find fluctuating rates of return to education across countries. Other economist have argued for positive impact on growth through Schumpeterian growth theories diffusion and transmission of knowledge and through endogenous or new growth theories which argue that the climate of ideas exchange which higher education throughput in large numbers produce can be crucial in triggering the growth of nations.

<sup>9</sup>See Tewarie, Bhoendradatt and Roger Hosein, "Tertiary Education Export Strategy can Build Capacity in Caribbean Region" presented at UWI/University of Alberta Conference on Remapping the Americas, UWI, St. Augustine, Trinidad, 2005

**Figure 1: Micro and macro influence of education on economic growth**



## The development of the UWI as a regional university

From the 1960s, with the breakup of the Federation, and the embrace of Independence by Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados, the University of the West Indies has had to change in order to respond to changing demands in a changing environment. The nationalist aspirations which accompanied the drive to Independence led to demands for a University to serve national needs, demands and ambitions. This, however, led not to an abandonment of the idea of a regional University but for a demand for Campuses of the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados. The creation of the Open Campus in 2007 was also in response to the demand by the other twelve countries that were served only through distance education and continuing education programmes by the University of the West Indies for greater access and participation by its citizens in tertiary and higher education at lower cost and at greater convenience accompanied by criticisms of the University of the West Indies for not facilitating access and not being as responsive as it needed to be to student needs in the underserved areas of the West Indies.

With the emergence of three full campuses of a single regional University decentralization and greater autonomy for each campus emerged as an issue as well as the challenge of how to sustain coherence and strengthen the regional character of the institution while facilitating decentralization and a greater degree of autonomy to support flexibility and responsiveness. Funding patterns were affected by such



discussions as were governance arrangements. Up to the 1970s all participating governments paid into a pool of funds which was centrally controlled. The Principal of the Mona (Jamaica) Campus up to this time functioned as Vice Chancellor. In 1984, a decision was taken by heads of Government to decentralize the operations of the University of the West Indies and to alter the method of funding the Campuses and the Centre.<sup>10</sup>

In the Grand Anse Declaration of 1989, CARICOM Heads of Government explicitly recognized the pivotal role of the UWI and made a commitment “that it shall continue indefinitely as a regional institution.”<sup>11</sup> The implication of this act was to reinforce the central role of the University of the West Indies in a changing landscape of tertiary education, to underscore the continuing financial commitment of the Governments of the region to the University of the West Indies and to reaffirm the value of the University of the West Indies as an agency of development.

In the Report of the Chancellor’s Commission on the Governance of UWI, July 1994, it was recognized that the region’s need to remain competitive in an increasingly globalized and liberalized world demanded that there be a clear articulation of the role of UWI in the development of human resources in the region and also spoke to UWI’s specific location within the constellation of tertiary and other educational institutions serving the needs of the region. The Chancellor’s Commission on Governance also came up with ways and means of addressing the budgetary cycle and of structuring the University for making decentralization of operations possible. One critical component of the recommendations made was that “the role of the University Centre should be primarily strategic ... concentrate on strategic planning, the maintenance of the University’s International reputation, relations with governments, the needs of the non-campus countries, the generation of funding and ensuring that the University is fully committed to regional development.” In terms of restructuring, one of the issues identified beyond internal restructuring was the extent to which the University could be made more outward looking in terms of relationships with other tertiary institutions and outside participation in its governance.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> In 1982, there was some debate among university stakeholders concerning the tension between the preservation of the regional nature of the University and the devolution of autonomy to the three campuses. There was a desire by the three major contributing countries to have greater input into the way the campuses were governed and managed and an aspiration by academics for greater autonomy. It was also the wish of the non-campus countries to see an institution more responsive to their needs. This resulted in a new governing structure for the University in 1984. The responsibility of preserving the regional character while giving greater autonomy to the campuses to respond to national needs and those of the non-campus countries was translated into the creation of the Campus Councils and Campus Grants Committees. The central University Council and University Grants Committee retained their regional character and centralized roles. One of the more significant developments was the emergence of the Centre established as a separate institutional structure for the office of the Vice-Chancellor but who still assumed the leadership of the Mona campus. In 1988, the Office of the Principal of the Mona Campus was separated from the office of the VC and the Centre functions were aligned with the Vice Chancellery.

<sup>11</sup> Extract from Report of the Chancellor’s Task Force on Governance, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Report of the Chancellor’s Commission on Governance of UWI, 1994.

In 2004, with the changing of a regime at the University of the West Indies (a new Vice Chancellor and a new Chancellor took office at the same time) another review of Governance took place with a focus on reform of the Councils (University and Campus) so that UWI could be made to operate in a more business-like manner and be more effective in decision-making to changing realities.<sup>13</sup> The Report of the Chancellor's Task Force on Governance of UWI (2006) indicated that given the new thrust for Caribbean integration there was an even greater need for the University to continue to be regional in theory and practice. It also outlined the possible structures and processes for sustaining and preserving regionality.

In addition, during this period the Open Campus was established, a strategic plan was made central to action over the five-year period 2007-12, national engagement and regional responsiveness and integration were emphasized and a Pro Vice Chancellor was named to lead the Planning and Development function.<sup>14</sup>

Within more recent times to rationalize delivery within the University of the West Indies system, an On-line Policy was established and a policy to avoid duplication, wastage and overlap within the system is currently being worked through based on a market segmentation, product differentiation and division of labour among the four (4) UWI Campuses.<sup>15</sup> More significantly though, in terms of the external environment the University of the West Indies through its Vice Chancellor is working with CARICOM (the regional integration body) to establish a Regional Accreditation Agency and has given a mandate to its campuses to work out a two plus two arrangement with other tertiary educational institutions in the region.<sup>16</sup>

So the regional model has not remained as something cast in stone. It has been evolving overtime to address internal as well as external challenges and to cope with ever changing demands both internally and externally.

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<sup>13</sup> The initial terms of reference were:

To examine the position and functioning of the major organs of governance of the University Centre and campus levels with a view to improving their ability to produce the policies, strategies and pertinent decisions needed in a University hat will continue to be a relevant and respected regional institution essential to the development of the Caribbean.

To examine the possible mechanism to preserve and strengthen the image and presence of the University in its "non-campus" countries.

<sup>14</sup> The planning function was centralized and development added to the portfolio and simultaneous with the approval of the 2007-2012 Strategic Plan a PVC for Planning and Development was appointed at University Council Meeting, April 2007. Vice Chancellor E. Nigel Harris initiated a consultative and participatory process to effect buy in for the plan.

<sup>15</sup> See Rationalizing Effective Delivery by the University of the West Indies Through its Four (4) Campuses Through market Segmentation prepared by PVC Planning and Development following appropriate consultations initiated by the Vice Chancellor.

<sup>16</sup> The University of the West Indies is currently involved in two plus two arrangement and franchise arrangements with a number of community colleges and a concerted effort is being made to improve standards at community colleges and to increase the flow of students from community colleges across the region to the various UWI Campuses.

The fundamental question is really whether UWI has been evolving fast enough and whether it has been responsive enough given the nature of change and the rate at which change is being demanded in terms of a tertiary sector response from the region and whether it will be proactive enough in a highly demanding environment in the immediate years ahead..

The expansion of the UWI has been significant over the past decade. Although it took UWI fifty-three (53) years to grow its student population from 33 to 20,000, it took UWI only seven (7) years to grow from 20,000 to 40,000 students.<sup>17</sup> Notwithstanding, the significant growth in student intake and the increased output of graduates annually (8,000 in 2008 as compared to 3,000 in 2001), the fact is that the demand for higher education has also increased and increasingly high targets have been set by countries across the region and this has led to a push in tertiary expansion.

### **Increasing social demand for tertiary education in the region**

Currently the secondary school age population for the CARICOM region is 636,000 (635,701), the primary school age population is 754,000 (754, 759) and the pre primary is 290,000 (289,832). Approximately 130,000 offer themselves for the CXC examinations every year and a further 19,000 for the Cape examinations. In addition, an examination of participation rates at tertiary level will indicate that most CARICOM countries are underperforming. There is need to increase the tertiary participation rate in every country in the region, it is no wonder therefore, that nationalist aspirations are manifest and that an expanded tertiary sector is emerging.<sup>18</sup> Two challenges are emerging from the secondary school sector: the need to increase participation at tertiary level given the size of the secondary pool and the need for better prepared graduates from the secondary sector so that the tertiary experience can be more meaningful to them.

Moreover, there is need for an expanded tertiary sector because the University of the West Indies on its own, even with the expansion possibilities of the Open Campus cannot meet the demand which is certainly going to grow as the years progress. In addition, within the framework of its 2007-12 Strategic Plan, limits to growth in undergraduate education have been agreed, and there is a decided emphasis on growth in graduate students to support capacity building in research and innovation at the University of the West Indies.<sup>19</sup>

In 2002, CARICOM had set a 15% participation rate for the region by 2005; while individual countries such as Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados would have achieved this, most other countries would not have done so. Meanwhile, Trinidad and

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<sup>17</sup> UWI Statistical Review, Academic Year 2007-2008 prepared by the Office of Planning and Development

<sup>18</sup> Several countries in the CARICOM region have tertiary participation rates of less than ten (10) percent.

<sup>19</sup> See Strategic Plan 2007-2012 which identifies slow undergraduate growth and accelerated graduate growth up to 2012, pp.56-58.

Tobago has set a target of 60% participation by 2015, Barbados has set a target of one graduate per household and other countries are also anxious to achieve higher levels of participation. In a proposal on tertiary expansion, rationalization and integration, this author has suggested a minimum participation rate for the region of 35% by 2020.<sup>20</sup>

## **Emerging new needs: co-ordination and articulation**

The tertiary sector in the region has been growing and is quite diverse including a range of regional and national institutions of various types, including technical vocational and more specialized institutions. There is great diversity too with respect to governance arrangements<sup>21</sup>, public and private sector, the mission of institutions and the student and staff population. Against this background, attempts have been made to bring order and purpose to the system. One such is the initiative by the Association of Caribbean Tertiary Institutions (ACTI) to work through issues such as regional equivalence and articulation.<sup>22</sup> However, formidable challenges remain and it is in the resolution of these formidable challenges that a rational and rationalized and integrated system should emerge. It is my view that for this to happen the leadership, guidance and support of the University of the West Indies is absolutely critical. Not only is leadership and guidance required of the University of the West Indies but cooperation and collaboration on the part of all institutions are absolutely necessary for constructive, purposeful and rational action moving forward. For one thing the growing number of institutions supported by the State will have to draw from the same pool of funds in circumstances that are certain to be increasingly challenging. Currently the main contributing countries to the University of the West Indies are Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, which spend approximately 17%, 30% and 27% of their education budget, respectively, on tertiary education. In countries such as St. Lucia, it is about 8% and St. Kitts 25%.<sup>23</sup>

## **Student support schemes**

Secondly, growing participation by students in the tertiary sector will require fees from students or their families and the issue of equity of access will demand some kind of student support in the form of subsidies and loans. Cooperation, therefore, is an imperative, collaboration seems to have its own wisdom, integration and rationalization would certainly help to minimize duplication, needless overlap and wastage, while institutions can still continue to enjoy a significant amount of autonomy and independence to respond to market realities and to carve out their individual competitive strategies. The financial requirements to support an expanded

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<sup>20</sup> See Bhoendradatt Tewarie Concept paper for the "Development of a CARICOM Strategic Plan for Tertiary Education Services in the CARICOM Single Market and Economy" prepared for consideration by CARICOM.

<sup>21</sup> Roberts, Vivienne "Caribbean Tertiary Education Development (1996-2006), Tertiary Level Institutions Unit, University of the West Indies.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. This is also an on-going thrust of the CARICOM Secretariat.

<sup>23</sup> Various sources including annual budgets of countries and individual ministries in relevant countries

but sustainable tertiary sector both from the institutional capacity and quality perspectives and from the student financing perspective require careful and thoughtful attention and might perhaps be the key to the future of the sector and system.

It is interesting to note, however, that in the ten (10) year period 1996-2006, while the increase in enrolment for 26 tertiary institutions in ten (10) countries was less than 5,000 students (34,421 to 39,221) in the same period, the increase at the University of the West Indies was 17,000.<sup>24</sup>

## **Academic development of staff**

Most (but not all) tertiary institutions which have emerged alongside the University of the West Indies are teaching rather than research institutions and are meant to be directly responsive to student and community. While this is a plus, there are many hurdles to climb in terms of improved quality and capacity building.

For instance, Vivienne Roberts reviewed thirty-seven (37) institutions across the region to determine the highest qualification of teaching staff: in twenty (20) of these institutions “more than 50% have masters degrees as their highest qualification, in 11 institutions, more than 70% and four institutions, less than 25%. Looking at Doctorates, there were three institutions (5% where over 50% of the faculty were at that level.)”<sup>25</sup> Comparatively at the University of the West Indies 60% of the full-time faculty are PhDs, 27% have Master’s Degrees and 13% have Bachelor’s degrees.<sup>26</sup> Part-time staff at UWI are also required to have Master’s degrees.

In terms of number of students enrolled in particular institutions, these range from the largest with 8,632 students (University of Technology in Jamaica) to 136 (Jamaica Constabulary Staff College) with a range of a few hundred to about four thousand in between.<sup>27</sup>

It is clear from the information provided above that the issue of growth and expansion of the tertiary sector presents both quantitative and qualitative challenges and that triumph over such challenges would be better achieved through collaboration and cooperation to design and develop a mutually supportive framework for development of the tertiary sector.

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<sup>24</sup> Roberts, Vivienne “Caribbean Tertiary Education Development (1996-2006), Tertiary Level Institutions Unit, University of the West Indies.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> UWI Statistical Review, Academic Year 2007-2008 prepared by the Office of Planning and Development.

<sup>27</sup> Roberts, Vivienne “Caribbean Tertiary Education Development (1996-2006), Tertiary Level Institutions Unit, University of the West Indies.

## **Transformation and innovation**

There are those who regard the 60s, 70s and 80s as an era of expanding access through institutional establishment, the 90s as the period of consolidation and this first decade of the 21st century as one of transformation and innovation. In my view, expansion, consolidation as well as transformation and innovation<sup>28</sup>, all need to take place simultaneously at this time. As a matter of fact the pressing need is for a rational, orderly system of tertiary institutions which meets the needs of the region as well as international requirements for the highest possible standards.

## **A regional strategy for the development of tertiary education**

As I have pointed out in another document<sup>29</sup>, the Caribbean is way behind the level of participation at tertiary level that obtains in the more competitive countries in the world. And as I pointed out earlier it may well be possible to argue that the countries of CARICOM (while considered middle and in some cases high human development countries)<sup>30</sup> are nevertheless not as competitive as they need to be because of a deficit in tertiary access, provision and throughput.

In another paper, targeting decision-makers in CARICOM, I have described the condition of tertiary education in the region in this way:

“While the sector is growing in response to increasing demands for an ever-widening range of services and products, it continues to be characterized by fragmentation, insufficient resources, inadequate collaboration/cooperation among institutions and several other factors which militate against its effectiveness.”

I then make the case for agreement on a regional policy framework which will establish the basis for the development and implementation throughout the Caribbean of national policies, programmes and action plans in relation to tertiary education. This is in a context in which CARICOM has reached agreement to establish a single market and economy (CSME) among the countries which constitute CARICOM. The CSME provides for the free movement of goods, people and services across the region. There are currently ten (10) categories of workers who can work anywhere in the CARICOM region without a work permit. One of these categories is tertiary trained teachers. As one would immediately discern the easy movement of teachers throughout the region has implications not only for the development of the education sector but for the development of teacher education as well.

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<sup>28</sup> This is the thrust of my CARICOM paper that consolidation through rationalization, transformation and strengthening of existing institutions, expansion and innovation must all take place simultaneously.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> See UNDP (2007) Human Development Report 2007/2009, Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World, pp.229-233.

In that paper for CARICOM seven (7) challenges which an effective policy framework would need to overcome have been identified as follows:

1. **Legal Framework:** Given the significant developments that have taken place in education regionally as well as internationally over the last twenty (20) years and given the desire articulated by several Ministers responsible for education for a seamless tertiary sector across the region legislation across the region related to the tertiary and higher education sector needs to be reviewed, rewritten and harmonized. What is required is a legal framework that is comprehensive in scope, covering all pertinent issues ranging from the powers and responsibilities of Line Ministers and regulatory bodies to the rights and responsibilities of the students.
2. **Regional Qualifications Framework:** In the context of the CSME, it is imperative that qualifications awarded at institutions in the region are aligned with regional and international standards. There is need, therefore, for the establishment of a Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) for participating states. A framework has been developed and considered by a CARICOM technical committee but decisions are yet to be made.
3. **Regional Accreditation Regime:** National Accreditation exists in some countries but not all. Initiatives are now being taken to establish a Regional Accreditation Authority. Three countries have signed on to this initiative. Another four countries have signaled their intention to sign. But a Regional Accreditation Authority would only make sense if all countries are committed.
4. **Financing:** Three issues in financing are urgent:
  - a. The sustainable financing of publicly funded tertiary education in the region to meet desired targets and objectives taking into account a rational system of tertiary delivery.
  - b. Financing mechanisms to support students lacking the financial wherewithal to support themselves.
  - c. The expansion and upgrading of physical plant and infrastructure to meet contemporary needs especially in science and technology related programmes.<sup>31</sup>
5. **Participation Rates and Sustainable Development:** The need to link tertiary strategy with development and transformation strategy within the context of a strategic plan for the region, a human resource development strategy for each individual country and an appreciation of the linkage between quality assurance issues and strategic planning in educational systems in order to ensure quality educational outcomes is urgent. The mismatch between educational output and market demand and the gap between academic research and policy formulation need to be bridged.

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<sup>31</sup>Secondary throughput from the system is woefully inadequate, when one takes CXC statistics into account.

6. **Teacher Education Strategies for the Tertiary Sector:** The evidence clearly indicates that improvement in quality across the sector depends, at least in part, on upgrading and improving the quality of teachers in the tertiary sector.
7. **Administration, Management, Leadership:** Higher educational institutions and tertiary level delivery institutions require not only teachers but administrators, managers and leaders as well. There is need, therefore, for an effective programme to train and develop administrators, managers and leaders for the sector as well.

It is imperative that such a policy framework be agreed at CARICOM level, so that following a decision of Heads of Governments or Ministerial level implementation and functional cooperation to achieve implementation objectives within a rational framework which supports harmony and integration can take place.

## Quantitative and qualitative challenges ahead

The University of the West Indies accepts just fewer than 11,000 undergraduate and related programmes applicants annually and close to 3,000 graduate students annually. The target for 2012 is 46,557 and the graduate target alone is 9,194 so that the undergraduate growth rate is expected to be quite modest.<sup>32</sup> About 130,000 students sit the CXC examination annually with about 50% doing well enough to move on to tertiary. In addition, at the level of CAPE (equivalent of A Levels) about 19,000 students sit the examination with about 14,000 doing well enough to enter a three-year university programme. The annual throughput from the secondary system is just under 150,000 and the tertiary ready pool is about 85,000 annually.<sup>33</sup> It is clear that UWI alone cannot be all things to all students and that a diversity of tertiary institutions and more tertiary places are needed to support a meaningful development effort in the region.

Based on a range of reports that have been done over time to identify challenges in the tertiary sector in the region, a number of themes recur:

- The pivotal role of tertiary level institutions in fostering the social, economic and cultural advancement of the people of the region
- The need for increased access and higher enrolment
- The need for greater functional cooperation in such areas as articulation to support student mobility, uneven access to educational opportunities especially in those territories not hosting a UWI campus
- The need to strengthen ICT systems in reach, scope and user-friendliness for the purpose of e-learning and distance education

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<sup>32</sup> See UWI Strategic Plan 2007-2008, p.58.

<sup>33</sup> This is based on calculations of CXC country reports for countries of the region and the tertiary ready pool is calculated on the basis of numbers passing at least five (5) subjects at CXC.



- The need to rationalize the qualification framework
- The need for a Regional Accreditation Agency
- The need for a framework for functional cooperation
- The need to align the tertiary sector and its output to the requirements and aspirations of CSME

All of these issues remain relevant and present opportunities for the rational, strategic development of the regional tertiary education sector in the context of a Caribbean common market and economy. Against this background, therefore, I make the case for a structured system supported by a set of coherent, strategic actions, within the framework of the policy imperatives already outlined. Any such initiative would require a collaborative and cooperative framework in which the University of the West Indies would play an important role and in which all tertiary institutions would have a voice.

Beyond the policy imperatives it is important to recognize that the structure of the sector and the system which emerges are important for operations, practice and functionality and that these things (representing the way the system behaves) will help to determine the culture which emerges and how it evolves over time. The purpose of rethinking and restructuring the system, improving behaviour and transforming the culture would be to build a sustainably responsive system that facilitates and supports development in the region and helps to create a sustainable regional economy in a competitive global arena.

## **A strategic role for CARICOM**

What is the framework therefore within which we should seek to get the system right and what are the specific actions we need to take to achieve agreed targets and identified goals for the region? The following are suggested not only as desirable but as imperative:

1. A strategic plan needs to be developed for CARICOM—taking the current global financial crisis and recessionary economic trends into account—for emerging from the crisis, identifying developmental goals for the region within the framework of a single economic, production, trade and investment zone in which the easy movement of skills will become the norm (the promise of the CSME). This would mean linking tertiary expansion to regional absorptive capacity and economically aligning programme offerings to market realities.
2. The strategy for the regional tertiary sector needs to be aligned with the objectives of such a strategic plan, specifically with trade, investment, diversification and priority developmental goals for the region as identified in the plan.
3. A minimum target needs to be established for tertiary participation within a realistic timeframe. The suggestion is 35% by 2020 which is about 3.5% expansion per year per country.
4. This plan should include a negotiated agreement between each country and the University of the West Indies on the number of students over the time period (10 years) to whom it wishes the University to offer places on an annual basis, with a broad indication of fields of study and human capital needs. This would facilitate more effective planning by both UWI and the individual country administrations, would possibly also open the door for international funding

and identify gaps between what UWI can absorb and the individual country targets.

5. Each country should develop its own modus operandi for meeting its 35% target over the period by preparing a plan for execution linked to stretch strategies for existing institutions and its willingness to invest in those institutions or attract investors to expand the Education Sector. A realistic assessment would need to be made of additional capacity which needs to be created, what it would cost and how it would be financed.
6. A clear objective of tertiary sector development strategy should be the strengthening of national capacity and the improvement of local standards to meet regional aspirations and international norms. UWI should be mandated to play a key role in achieving this objective region-wide even if it has to create international and regional partnerships in order to do so.
7. At the same time excess capacity or highly specialized capacities may exist in selected countries in the region in particular areas of regional demand such as Agriculture, Veterinary Medicine, Pharmacy, Engineering, Information Technology, and Trade negotiation Skills. These may be deployed through the region by a mixture of teaching and learning techniques in a manner that is both impactful and cost effective.
8. Establish the Regional Accreditation Agency that has been under discussion – the three principal aims of which are (1) a seamless system, (2) free movement of skills, and (3) international recognition as a matter of urgency.
9. Rationalize the tertiary sector in every country so that there are complementary, supplementary and feeder relationships based on sensible, practical articulation arrangements.
10. Rationalize the tertiary sector across the region so that there are complementary, supplementary and feeder relationships between national systems and the regional University of the West Indies.
11. Draw on UWI's strengths and on the knowledge of UWI's Tertiary Level Institution (TLI) Unit to strengthen the regional system as a seamless, effectively articulated system.
12. Strengthen the educational foundation at the primary and secondary levels to ensure quality throughput to the tertiary sector. At the current time, the primary and secondary school system is inefficient and wasteful in producing the quantity of students who can absorb education at the tertiary level or who can match the requirements of the market.
13. Work through issues of financing of plant, infrastructure and equipment, as well as issues of student financing and ensuring sustainable access. A thoughtful approach to this is vital to the region's prospects for development in the knowledge era.
14. Rationalize the e-learning strategy across the sector for the benefit of the region and design a range of knowledge products of value to the world using this medium.
15. Make the commitment to build a research enterprise in the region with UWI and the specialized research institutions of the region as the foundation, building research capacity across the sector linked to regional needs and solutions and global trends, including on-going research on the tertiary sector itself.

## Overcoming challenges

There are important challenges which the region faces however. Although commitments have been made to the CSME, the tendency to pendulum swings between cooperation and fragmentation, which has characterized this region since the establishment of the Federation and its disintegration, persists. And while entities such as the West Indian cricket team, the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) and the University of the West Indies can be regarded as regional successes the fact is that tensions between regionalism and nationalism can have negative impacts on these institutions and the systems which facilitate their orderly advance of a regional agenda. For years to come the tensions are likely to persist as regional needs and nationalist aspirations continue to contend. Rational structures and systems however, can assist in facilitating behaviours and strengthening a desirable culture of cooperation even in the context of competing interests and centripetal pulls.

In this knowledge economy, where the gaps in tertiary participation, science and technology, research and innovation, industry competitiveness, institutional capacity and levels of efficiency and effectiveness between the Caribbean region and the more industrialized world is huge attention needs to be paid to the structure, policy framework and strategic actions which inform the tertiary system which eventually emerges.

## Conclusion

As Edward Green, Assistant Secretary General of CARICOM, has pointed out several CARICOM countries have achieved most of the targets in education set by the Millennium Development Goals and in some cases have surpassed them<sup>34</sup> but weaknesses in the primary and secondary system with implications for the tertiary sector are beginning to show. Tertiary education plays a vital role in supporting basic and secondary education by reinforcing the economic externalities produced by these lower levels. Improved tertiary education is thus seen as necessary for the sustainable advancement of basic education. These systems produce a supply of qualified teachers and school managers and leaders, build competence for designing curricula, conduct research on teaching and learning methods and promote economic analysis and management techniques. If these systems are weak, they also hamper the effective development of basic education. But Green also identifies gaps in ICT, language skills, science and technology, teacher training, increased participation at the tertiary level, research and development. Only a coherent system which is rationally and thoughtfully designed can address such challenges effectively.

The University of the West Indies may have been the region's first concerted attempt to build a higher educational institution. It has not been the last and there will be other institutions that emerge. UWI has active collaborative relations with close to thirty (30) other tertiary institutions in the region and is seeking to actively expand this network.

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<sup>34</sup> Remarks at Opening Ceremony, Seventeenth Council for Human and Social Development of CARICOM

ACTI and UWI are also collaborating more effectively. As the higher education and tertiary sector evolves, tertiary providers should all become institutionally stronger and more effective in servicing their students and stakeholders and so will also become more competitive. But UWI is an integral and indispensable part of the regional higher education sector. Undoubtedly UWI will learn from its regional partners and collaborators as a system develops. But UWI is essential to the structure of higher education in the region and given the longer tradition and genuine achievements over the last sixty years there is also much that UWI has to offer to the sector as well as to individual institutions. Moreover, there may well be room for increased private sector investment in the tertiary sector. The offshore schools have also shown that the Caribbean can be an attractive destination for foreign students. There is no reason why a competitive tertiary sector in the Caribbean region could not attract international students. Should the system evolve in this way, a strong and competitive tertiary sector can be the backbone of a research enterprise, a springboard for entrepreneurial initiative, and a competitive factor in attracting investments in the knowledge sector. A great deal depends on vision, imagination and will; not to mention the practical know-how required to summon resources and to harness and deploy them effectively.

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