

DIVERSITY, QUALITY and EMERGING QUALITY ASSURANCE IN BELIZEAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract:

The Belizean higher education system is a multi-tiered, diverse system composed of several institutional types serving differing needs and granting an assortment of awards. Approaches to quality assurance have traditionally included a reliance on external examinations, relevance to the emerging job market, and the transferability of credits to US institutions. Formal, institutionalized quality assurance was only recently introduced both by the Association of Tertiary Level Institutions in Belize (ATLIB) as part of an emerging quality culture, and by the Ministry of Education in a dual response to a mandate by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Heads of State as a tool to facilitate the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), and to the Central American commitment to establish a regional accreditation body.

This paper will discuss the diversity within the Belizean higher education system as it responds to differing mandates to establish a National Accreditation Council, and to cultivate a culture of quality enhancement within institutions and across the system.

Overview

The paper will consist of three parts. The first section will describe the Belizean higher education landscape, while the second will discuss in detail the diversity found within the system as it relates to measures of quality. The final section of the paper will elaborate on the quality assurance framework being developed by ATLIB institutions and the Ministry of Education, and how this can accommodate the diversity within Belizean higher education while raising standards.

The Belizean Higher Education Landscape

In Belize, higher education is generally any form of post-secondary education offered by universities and other institutions that award academic degrees, such as colleges, junior colleges, or teachers colleges (MOE, 2004). It occurs within what used to be called a “2+2” system in which a Bachelor degree is delivered in two halves, with the first half acquired at a mix of junior colleges and the two Belizean universities, and the last two years (an equivalent of 60-72 credits) of a four year baccalaureate degree offered at one of the two universities. Some credits from the lower level transfer into the upper level, but at this time this is done in the absence of any articulation agreement between the junior colleges and the universities. Certificates, diplomas and associate degrees are awarded at the lower level.

There is much diversity among the Associate Degree programs. They are of varying lengths, ranging from as few as 60 credits to as many as 94 credits; some have the breadth of offerings found in American programs, including what are called “general core” requirements in the Natural Sciences, Humanities, and Social Sciences while others retain much of the structure of the traditional British sixth form, offering curricular depth in a few “majors”, such as in Biology and Chemistry. Both types will prepare candidates to take the external Caribbean and British examinations at the Advanced level within the framework of the Associate’s Degree curriculum. At this point there is no consensus of what constitutes an Associates Degree, its credit value, and/or its component parts.

While the Caribbean Examinations Council is attempting to articulate the curriculum at

this level through its proposed Associate's Degree, its relevance is being questioned by heads of Belizean institutions.

At the upper level there are two universities, one public and one private. The University of Belize, the national university, was formed from the merger of several diverse publicly financed institutions, with the expressed goal of providing a higher standard of needed education and training in an increasing number of fields. It was envisioned that the integration of the institutions would provide (i) greater access to university education to Belizeans, (ii) an increased pool of well-educated university graduates to power national development, and (iii) an enabled university community to engage in research and development related to national development (Aird, 2001). Of the five merging institutions, only one, the University College of Belize (UCB) offered Bachelor's degrees on the aforementioned "2+2" system in which the credits earned at the junior colleges formed a part of the Baccalaureate programs. The other institutions were a teachers training college, an agricultural training college, a nursing school, and a sixth form offering a variety of technical and science programs.

The University of Belize initially consisted of six faculties that have since been down-sized to four: Management Sciences, Health Sciences and Social Work, Education and Arts, and Applied Sciences (including Agriculture and Natural Resource Management). Programs are developed on the principle that a Bachelor's degree can be completed in four years. However, in practice it could take students longer depending on the number of transfer credits earned, and the equivalency between their Associates

Degree programs and their major at UB. There are no articulation agreements between UB and the junior colleges.

Galen University, a new private university in Central Farm, in the western part of the country, is designed to cater to an international population as well as a local student body. It offers a variety of Business degrees (Management, Marketing, Finance and Economics, International Business and Sustainable Development) at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as baccalaureate degrees in Hotel and Tourism Management and Anthropology. Associate Degrees are also offered. Galen's programs are designed as full four year programs but it does accept credit transfers on a course equivalency basis from the junior colleges towards its baccalaureate degrees.

The student population is diverse across the sector. Students enter the junior colleges from high schools with varying standards. Students in both the lower and upper levels of the system enter with significant deficiencies in English and Mathematics, and for most, English is a Second Language, as Spanish and Creole are the primary first languages of most of the population. Students also differ in their plans for study beyond the Associate degree: some aspire to enter the regional University of the West Indies and British universities, as well as universities in Guatemala and Mexico, to pursue such careers as Law and Medicine and thus will sit the British Advanced Level examinations while others desire to pursue study in the United States and avail themselves of a wider variety of programs not available in Belize. Others will remain in Belize and enter one of the two local universities. Still others will enter the workforce immediately and have the

reasonable expectation that their education will enable them to join the labor force in their field.

Finally, there are multiple stakeholders of higher education. (1) There are parents of junior college students who demand quality for their investment, and who interpret quality in varying ways (such as passes on an external examination). (2) There are students who either wish to further their studies or want jobs with high(er) paying salaries than with no degrees. (3) There are a variety of employers who each want college and university graduates with very specific skills. (4) There are government officials, including the Ministry of Education, who also make their own demands on the institutions and have their own interpretations of quality. (5) Lastly, there are international students who come to Galen University for the promise of a high quality education with an international flavor.

Traditional Measures of Quality Assurance

To date, no institution of higher education or program in Belize is accredited. While programs are “recognized” by the Ministry of Education and institutions are chartered, there is no systematic, rigorous evaluation (neither internal nor external) that is done to assure quality. While the government meets much of the of the junior colleges and the University of Belize expenses, there are currently no regulatory mechanisms guiding program development, approval and monitoring, and requiring public accountability.

Traditionally, quality has been measured in several ways. At the lower level, quality has been interpreted to mean an institution’s success on the external Cambridge

General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (A'level) examinations. A' level passes have been valued because they secured admission to the regional University of the West Indies and to British institutions and as entry into the civil service where each pass results in salary increments. Later, with the movement to self-government and independence, quality was also interpreted to mean relevance of programs to the emerging market place. The sixth forms were transformed into junior colleges offering liberal arts programs and Associate Degrees were awarded. Today, the Cambridge Advanced Level Examinations are gradually being replaced with the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE) in several subject areas. In fact, the Ministry of Education is encouraging institutions to prepare students to sit the CAPE examinations, regarding this as a measure of quality and high standards. (Certainly, the CAPE syllabi are rich in Caribbean content.) Only a few institutions offer the CAPE syllabi, however; these syllabi are seen to be incompatible with the broad-based Associate's Degree programs. Furthermore, well-developed and relevant syllabi are just one measure of quality. Passes on external examinations may be indicate high standards of teaching and learning, they cannot be the only measure, especially when only a very small percentage of the relevant cohort sit the examinations. As a matter of fact, these examinations are costly, and most of the Belizean junior college student body wishing to continue their education abroad look to American universities as their primary higher education destination.

Quality has also been measured by the transferability of credits earned at the junior colleges into U.S. institutions, and the ability of graduates of the public university to enter graduate programs abroad, including those of member institutions of

the Consortium on Belizean Education Cooperation (COBEC), a group composed of ATLIB institutions and several universities across the US collaborating on the development of Belizean tertiary education.

Quality Assurance at Galen University

From its inception, Galen University, the new private institution, offers an example of an institution that is consciously weaving quality in its programs in everything it does. It has established relevance in its curriculum by selecting and offering (i) such Business programs as Marketing, Finance and Economics, and International Business as opposed to offering the much duplicated standard Business Administration degree, (ii) Hospitality and Tourism Management programs, and (iii) Anthropology. Relevance is further enhanced through the weaving of the theme of Sustainable Development in all of its programs, Student Services and administrative practices.

Quality is assured through partnerships it has developed with the University of Indianapolis and other institutions which allow for the vetting of Galen University syllabi in its Business programs. Students are thus able to transfer credits earned at Galen University into the University of Indianapolis, do a year there, and earn a B.Sc. degree.

At its inception, Galen University made a commitment to providing a quality education for its students, and appointed a Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction whose task it is to ensure that quality is built into its programs. Towards this end, it is cultivating an environment that is conducive to excellence in teaching, learning and research: it employs faculty with terminal degrees in their fields, and who are committed to relevant research and service; it is slowly developing the necessary instructional media, including library, text books and ICT quality programs require. Furthermore,

because the institution caters to both international and local students, it intends to secure accreditation from an international agency in the near future.

I will now propose a Quality Assurance Framework for Belize.

The Emerging Belizean Quality Assurance Framework

There are multiple efforts that will mandate quality control measures and assure quality in Belizean higher education. At the opening ceremony of the CARICOM Quality Assurance Workshop on November 13 and 14, 2003, Mr. Ernesto Xiu, then Deputy Director of Tertiary Education within the Ministry of Education, announced the government's endorsement of the Caribbean Regional Accreditation Agency and its continued support for the Central American counterpart developed under the umbrella of the *Consejo Superior Universitario Centro Americana* (CSUCA), the emerging Central American accreditation authority. The Caribbean Regional Accreditation Agency is a critical aspect of the Caribbean Single Market Economy (CSME) and the smooth movement of skilled workers and professionals (university graduates) within the region as provided by CARICOM's revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. Belize is also obligated to establish the National Accreditation Council as part of its commitment to the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME). (In fact, the National Accreditation Council Act was recently passed in the National Assembly, and the Council will be established in the near future.) The Ministry of Education, supported by the Association of Tertiary Level Institutions in Belize (ATLIB) is also preparing a *Handbook on Rules and Regulations*

that will govern the opening, licensing, and administration of institutions. When this is ratified, it will have tremendous implications for how institutions are administered, how faculty are appointed and promoted, and even the description of the workload of faculty.

Anticipating these local and regional developments, in January 2004, the ATLIB established a Standing Committee on Quality Assurance to design an institutional framework through which quality could be built into tertiary education one year ago.

(Aird, 2004) As the ATLIB works toward developing its quality assurance framework, it is cognizant that the quality and standards it cultivates in Belizean higher education programs must meet international scrutiny while accounting for the diversity within the system. It is also mindful of the many inadequacies within the system, including under-qualified faculty, significant duplication of programs and other curricular irrelevances in the system, an absence of any qualifications framework and poorly defined standards in curriculum development and assessment, and a general paucity of library and other instructional media, including textbooks in general, and textbooks relevant to Belize.

(ATLIB Quality Assurance Committee, 2004) The framework will also have to optimize available local expertise and resources.

In the year of its existence, the ATLIB Quality Assurance Committee has forged a quality partnership with the Ministry of Education and enhanced its relationship with its US partners of the Consortium on Belizean Education Cooperation (COBEC) toward the common goal of assuring quality in Belizean higher education. These quality partnerships have resulted in the ATLIB's meaningful contribution to the development of the National Accreditation Council Act, its collaboration with the Ministry of Education in crafting the *"Rules and Regulations for the Administration of Tertiary Institutions"*, and an enhanced

and more relevant COBEC sponsored College Administrator Faculty Experience (CAFÉ) professional development exercise.

I propose a National Quality Assurance Framework that is composed of the following elements:

1. A National Higher Education Policy
2. System wide Quality Control Measures
3. The ATLIB Quality Assurance Committee

Each of these will be discussed below.

A National Higher Education Policy

At a meeting with senior officers from the Ministry of Education, the ATLIB Quality Assurance Committee spoke of the importance of having a National Higher Education Policy to guide the strategic long term planning and management of Belizean higher education. The committee is of the opinion that such a policy is needed to guide what higher education does and connect it to socioeconomic development both nationally and within a regional and global framework. A national higher education policy that indicates the kinds of programs needed in business, technology, tourism, agriculture and other sectors of the society could better inform the overall development of tertiary education, including decision making regarding program development, funding and the professional development of faculty and staff. This policy should be informed by a national development strategy, and should be developed by all stakeholders of higher education.

This process of drafting a National Higher Education Policy has already begun as a part of the long term higher education strategic planning exercise. According to the draft policy “The mission of Belizean higher education is to promote and sustain human resource development and socio-economic growth, provide access to emergent ideas and technologies, and enable their application to domestic needs. It is to contribute to the development of knowledge, enterprise, leadership, governance, participatory democracy, and poverty alleviation.” (The National Accreditation Council Act.) It calls on partners in higher education to consciously plan a higher education system that is responsive to national socio-development needs through curriculum, research and service. The draft policy also speaks to the goals of creating a national quality assurance system within the framework of a coordinated higher education system, and planning for the sustainable financing of Belizean higher education. This draft policy has to go through several layers of approval before it is ratified.

Quality Control Measures

The second element of the proposed Quality framework is the establishment of *Quality Control* measures that should ensure accountability within the sector as a whole and within institutions themselves, with the former ensuring the latter. At this point, there are hardly any QCMs to which institutions must adhere, or meet any specific criteria in order for them to be recognized or chartered by the Ministry of Education, and to receive funding. Thus far, junior colleges are opened as extensions of high schools, offer Associate Degree programs in a variety of fields, and are recognized as legitimate institutions. Their graduates are hired and are paid on the appropriate salary scales. New

programs are developed and delivered with no formal program approval mechanism in place. Funding for most of the local tertiary institutions is provided by the government with little accountability measures in place. New, fully private institutions (privately owned and privately funded) can be “chartered” by the government and thus recognized. But, there are no controls in place ensuring accountability within a quality framework.

Quality Control measures include all the procedures, standards and structures that ensure accountability within higher education institutions (McGhee, 2003).

I propose that the following quality control measures be put in place:

1. A *Higher Education Council* whose main role would be the oversight of the tertiary system. It would approve the establishment of new institutions and the introduction of new programs etc., and establish policy as it relates to the financing and administration of higher education, the approval of new institutions and programs, special funding in areas such as research and faculty development, and more. Its composition would include representatives of the ATLIB body, the Ministries of National Development and Education, the National Accreditation Council and members of the private sector and civil society.

2. The already proposed “*Rules and Regulations for the Administration of Tertiary Institutions*” which should be enacted at the start of the 2005-6 academic year. As mentioned earlier, these will prescribe minimum criteria that institutions must meet in order to be licensed. Criteria will include standards to be met in categorizing institutions (university, junior college, technical institute etc.) governance, financing, staffing, conditions of service, the management of student records and so on. It is important for us to understand that these criteria will only be as good as how they will be interpreted and

applied. These rules should be used to rationalize and guide the development and administration of higher education, and not to constrain or strangle it. That they are being developed collaboratively between personnel from the Ministry of Education and the heads of institutions amidst much discussion about the nature of higher education is a good sign.

3. *The National Accreditation Council* whose mission includes (i) the registering of institutions, (ii) the recognition of awards granted by Belizean institutions and foreign providers operating in Belize (including distance education), (iii) the articulation of awards within the regional qualifications framework, and (iv) the ensuring that all programs and courses offered in Belize meet established academic and professional standards, and to ensure that there is a culture of continuous quality enhancement in Belizean higher education. According to the National Accreditation Council Act, all institutions will have to meet minimum criteria in order to be registered, but not all will have to be accredited. It is expected that the process of establishing the Council will commence shortly, with the appointment of members of the Council, and training sessions in the principles and practices of accreditation for all who will be involved in the process, including institutional leaders and members of the Council.

Lim (2000) cautions developing countries not to establish sophisticated quality assurance systems such as those found in developed countries. This advice should be heeded by Belize as it establishes the National Accreditation Council, especially as it relates to the nature of the External Quality Review: whether there will be whole institutional reviews, or individual program reviews. It is doubtful whether Belize has enough expert personnel in all the fields to effectively carry out disciplinary evaluations;

however, a cadre of experts could be trained to evaluate the management of teaching, research and service against established Minimum Academic Standards (MAS). On the other hand, in such critical areas as the Health Sciences and Teacher Training, it may be crucial for there to be disciplinary reviews in these areas.

Similarly, Belize must be careful to “frame standards that apply across institutions and between institutions” (Leo-Rhynie, 2000). The ATLIB institutions must be active participants in the process of establishing what Okebukola (2000) has termed Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) for the core aspects of higher education. Perhaps Belize does not have to re-invent the wheel here: the guidelines established by the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ), with permission, could be useful in developing these Minimum Academic Standards. Furthermore, I would urge that Belize invites personnel from the UCJ to provide the requisite training and lead personnel in its standards setting exercise. In fact, as a member of CARICOM and the Association of Caribbean Tertiary Level Institutions (ACTI), Belize should avail itself of the expertise of its Caribbean partners who have enjoyed a long tradition of excellence in higher education.

Professional bodies (such as the Association of Chartered Accountants, the Pharmacy Board, the Belize Medical Association etc.) could also recognize and certify the quality of Belize’s programs.

4. The *Institutional Quality Assurance system* that ensure quality and accountability within the institution, and that should ideally be developed collaboratively by the entire institutional community. It may include the following elements:

(a) The Quality Improvement Plan which contain the institutional mission, vision, goals and objectives along with a strategic development plan for realizing these. It should address the full development of the institution, including the programming,

faculty and staff, instructional media, any research program, and the sustainable financing of the institution.

(b) At the heart of the Institutional Quality Assurance System should be a policy for the Approval, Monitoring and Review (AMR) of academic programs. The AMR policy should be regarded as an umbrella policy articulating how the institution ensures that its programs are of a high standard and that there are adequate resources to support them. The AMR policy will describe the sequence of steps to be taken in program approval, monitoring and review, the responsibilities of key individuals or academic units involved, the information required for submission during the processes, and the normal timetable for annual cycles of approval. Typically, universities in developed countries will have intricate, multi-layered systems of program approval, monitoring and review that involve Academic Boards or Senates, and several official committees that may formulate, monitor and review quality issues, and program validation and review panels. However, given the limitations in size and the stage of development of Belizean institutions, it is unlikely that similar program approval and monitoring procedures can be developed. It is important, however, that institutions have in place the following:

(i) Clearly developed process for the development, approval, monitoring and review of academic policies.

(ii) Guidelines and criteria for the development and approval of new programs, and the review of existing programs.

(iii) Clear mechanisms for the monitoring of programs to ensure that they meet the standards established at (i) and (ii) above, and that any weaknesses are addressed.

Monitoring mechanisms should include course evaluations by students, end of semester

course reports by course faculty, and annual departmental and program reports. It should also include a comprehensive evaluation of faculty, and any necessary corrective measures.

(c) The final element of the Institutional Quality Assurance System should be the Internal Quality Review that shall ensure Galen programs are meeting their stated objectives, and appropriate standards. It will assess (i) the effectiveness of the institution's quality assurance procedures described above,(ii) faculty responsibility for the maintenance of the academic standards of the programs, and (iii) faculty/departmental responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning experiences provided to students. The Internal Review should normally be scheduled on a five-year cycle, and will be followed by the external quality review.

Institutions can commit to Quality Assurance by appointing an officer whose role it is to develop and monitor the process of quality assurance and quality improvement plans at institutions.

The ATLIB Quality Assurance Committee

I am pleased to say that the ATLIB has already begun the process toward establishing the National Quality Assurance Framework. This initiative has been supported by the Consortium on Belizean Education Cooperation (COBEC)and welcomed by the Ministry of Education. The ATLIB committee established at the January 16, 2005 meeting to spearhead this project identified the following as critical elements to be immediately attended to:

1. Curriculum development, especially as it relates to establishing threshold standards for the formation of A.Sc. and Bacaluareate programs, i.e. credit value, components, course development, and criteria to be met before development begins etc.. For example, new program proposals must demonstrate a market need, resource availability (including appropriately qualified faculty, library and other instructional media, and financial resources to sustain the program.) I also recommend that we establish standards that all students must meet in such key areas as English, Mathematics and Information Technology. (The British Quality Assurance Agency calls these Subject Benchmark Statements.)

2. The establishment of a qualifications framework for the range and levels of one to four year program offerings. That is, what constitutes the award of a certificate? An Associates's degree? A diploma? A Bachelor's degree? (There is regional framework that we can use.) Furthermore, the quality Assurance committee will have to work with institutions to "rationalize" the Associate's Degree and create a policy framework through which the two universities can articulate their baccalaureate programs with the junior colleges. The rationalization of the Associate's Degree will also have to account for the role of the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) Associate's Degree which is described as being "based on the clusters of subjects taken by candidates for the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE)." It was developed in "response to the changing educational demands of the region by providing articulated programs of study," and "to facilitate the transfer of credits." (Hall, 2004) Each degree will consist of "7 units", with each unit being equivalent to 10 credits.

It is expected that the CXC Associate's Degree programs will be introduced shortly. At this time, however, there has been no national discussion on this Caribbean Associate's Degree, and its fit with Belizean higher or tertiary education which is more American in nature. Certainly, Belize was not represented by any of the institutional leaders on the panel of experts that developed the degree. Institutions will have to decide if and how they will support this program. How well does it articulate with existing programs? Can it be "imbedded" within existing programs? If so, how? Or, if institutions offer the degree, would it best be offered alongside other programs?

3. Professional Qualifications of faculty: Much of our faculty are under qualified or inappropriately qualified to teach within their disciplines. For example, faculty teaching courses leading toward a bachelor's degree (and since A.Sc. courses feed into baccalaureate degree programs either in Belize or the US, it can be argued that this criterion applies to junior college faculty) should have a Master's degree, with at least 18 credit hours of courses at the graduate level within their teaching discipline. As we plan for the development of higher education within the National Policy framework, we need to plan for the significant professional and academic upgrading of ATLIB faculty. A needs assessment survey for faculty development must be done against national developmental needs, and scholarships must be sought from such agencies as the Canadian Commonwealth Association, the Fulbright-LASPAU Agency, the Organization of American States (OAS), and other governments with which we have bi-lateral agreements (such as Guatemala, Mexico, Chile, Panama, Columbia etc.) . At the same time, there needs to be continuous faculty development, even for faculty who are appropriately qualified: having graduate and post-graduate qualifications in a specific

discipline does not necessarily enable one to teach effectively at the tertiary level. Furthermore, faculty must assume responsibility to keep themselves abreast of current and emergent knowledge and development in their fields. I am pleased to say that COBEC has an annual CAFÉ workshop series for ATLIB faculty and administrators. The most recent workshop was held last week at Galen University under the theme of English Across the Curriculum, with emphases on ESL pedagogy and Reading strategies development (ATLIB heads and faculty are generally concerned about the poor English and Reading proficiency of their students.)

Faculty across the sector, but especially at the university level, must also be enabled to develop a quality research culture, as well. Higher education practitioners in developing countries such as Belize, especially those who are highly trained, must be allowed to conduct research and development projects (especially as they relate to development), and create in their institutions centers of expertise to which policy makers and government leaders can turn for answers to problems confronting development.

4. The development of instructional media: Across the system, there appears to be a paucity of all kinds of instructional media, especially as they relate to current and relevant textbooks, library materials, and laboratory equipment and supplies. Tertiary level textbooks and library supplies (current reference books, periodicals, and other library media) are very expensive, which places their purchase beyond the reach of students. Institutions must rent texts to students and try to recoup the investment over time; this makes their timely replacement difficult, and sometimes near impossible. School budgets do not allow for library development and the full funding of computer

and science laboratories. The ATLIB needs to explore ways to ensure that institutions can be better resourced.

5. Student Development Services: This is another neglected area that is either not funded, or und-funded. In most institutions, faculty double up as Sports coordinators, Counselors, and other student services officers. While Student Services (meaning Academic Advising, Counseling, Sports, and other Student Clubs/co-curricular activities) are meant to complement the academic development of the students, they are often neglected in favor of teaching and other functions faculty must perform.

6. The physical infra-structure of our institutions: This speaks for itself. Schools are run-down and class rooms are over-crowded. Libraries are inadequately furnished, as are computer labs. Science laboratories are dated, and frequently violate safety codes.

7. Finally, the ATLIB has determined that sustainable financing for Belizean higher education must be secured *if* a National Quality Assurance Framework as well as the National Accreditation Council are to be developed and function effectively. Currently, higher education in Belize is almost completely funded by the government and student tuition and fees. However, it is unlikely that government will be able to increase the current levels of funding to keep pace with the quality improvements that are necessary.

The development of the National Quality Assurance Framework to date has been taking place as part of the long term strategic development exercise of the Association of Tertiary Level Institutions in Belize (ATLIB). This has included a year long discussion on the principles and policies of quality assurance in higher education, and the meaning of quality and standards, amongst institutional leaders, resulting in a realization that

despite the differences amongst institutions, that there is a common challenge and obligation to improve the quality of our programs across the sector, that there was a shared responsibility to meet the ever increasing demands for quality and relevance in higher education.

The ATLIB Quality Assurance Committee must continue to provide leadership in the development of a quality framework for Belizean higher education. It must continue to work with the Ministry of Education, the National Accreditation Council (NAC) and, other partners in higher education, including the Consortium on Belizean Education Cooperation (COBEC), the Association of Caribbean Tertiary Institutions (ACTI), the Teaching and Learning Institute (TLI) of the University of the West Indies (UWI), and of course, the Caribbean Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CANQATE) to create an environment in which a quality culture can be cultivated in Belizean higher education. The Committee should interface with the Ministry of Education and the National Accreditation Council to ensure a continued partnership in the ongoing development of Belizean higher education. The work of this committee will be particularly important when the National Accreditation Council is established and criteria for accreditation are developed, especially as these relate to standards of program development, teaching and assessment, research, service and administrative management.

Finally, this committee should continue to assess the development needs of institutions and facilitate their quality development.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the full development of a Belize Quality Assurance System has only just begun. There is much to be done, and the best way forward, seems to be as a strategic development of the Belizean higher education by way of quality partnerships that have already begun between the ATLIB, and other key players in Belizean higher education: the Ministry of Education, the proposed National Higher Education Council, and regional partners in higher education.

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