1. Defining Roles and Increasing Stakeholder Involvement in Internal and External Quality Assurance

The quality assurance process involves both internal and external quality assurance systems. It is recognized for its ability to effectively drive student performance and continuous improvement in education and to distinguish institutions adhering to a set of educational standards. This is especially important in an era when governments and international agencies are insisting on more explicit assurances about quality in tertiary and higher education and a shift away from traditional academic controls. All stakeholders must appreciate the importance of both the quality assurance process and the role that they have in the sustainability and effectiveness of the education provision. Stakeholders include, but are not limited to, institutional leadership and improvement teams, administrators, teachers, lecturers, parents, community, board members, support staff and students.

Papers presented under this sub-theme should acquaint higher education stakeholders with the role that they each play in the quality assurance process, and with the knowledge needed to be actively and effectively involved.

Issues to be covered could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Dissemination of general knowledge on the role of quality assurance and the importance of setting and adhering to standards
- Training on the key components of internal and external reviews
- Skills on the use of diagnostic tools for ongoing data collection
- Recommendations for the adoption of practices that have promoted involvement
- Highlights on how institutions use the feedback obtained from all stakeholders
2. Qualifications Frameworks: Opportunities and Challenges at the National and Transnational Levels

The importance of the establishment of integrated national frameworks for learning achievement has been recognized for some time now. The need for further discussion of the issues, challenges and opportunities that relate to the establishment of such frameworks at all levels has now become urgent. In the wake of the Caribbean Single Market Economy (CSME), many territories now face the increased presence of persons with qualifications obtained from another country in our region. Examination of the issues and opportunities will provide vital information that will equip educators and policy makers, particularly at the tertiary level, with knowledge to facilitate the completion of work begun in this area.

Papers for this sub-theme should address strategies that Caribbean nation-states may use to complete the process of clarifying national qualifications frameworks while seeking to identify the challenges that may be faced in articulation of qualifications at the transnational level.

Issues to be covered could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Identification of the value of an established Qualifications Framework
- Clarification of learning outcomes at each level to ensure seamless transitioning
- Incorporating the Vocational Qualifications in National and Regional Frameworks
- Bases for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages, and public and labour market recognition of qualifications within the region and extra regionally.


Students are the primary clients and products of educational institutions. Higher education institutions should therefore be paying attention to providing appropriate support to help students access and complete programmes that will equip them with the attitudes, skills and knowledge they will need if they are to become part of a highly skilled workforce driving development in the region. Any dialogue about institutional quality must therefore consider issues such as providing students with access to higher
education through face-to-face, distance and online learning opportunities; scholarships and other financing prospects, teaching strategies that are geared towards the adult learner, and literacy-based curricula. Institutions must examine the systems in place for mentoring and supporting the development of productive, responsible and moral citizens through conscious efforts being paid to all aspects of students’ development.

Issues to be covered could include, but are not limited to, the following:

• Improving access to higher education by diversifying delivery modes to cater to wider variety of students
• Support systems for helping students deal with non-academic challenges such as physical and emotional wellness, accessing financing etc.
• Government and wider society support for students’ access to technology at the household level and in the classrooms
• Articulation of programmes nationally and regionally to facilitate student transfers between higher education institutions
• Impact of student-friendly learning, advising, and research environment on student achievement
• Programmes supporting improvement of literacy, numeracy and critical thinking skills to help students achieve acceptable standards of cognitive development
• Provision of internships and other training opportunities for development of students’ creativity, emotional, workplace and entrepreneurial development

4. Quality Assurance, Institutional Autonomy and Protection of the Public Interest

In its broadest sense, Quality Assurance (QA) is an all-embracing term which refers to an on-going, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, maintaining and improving) the quality of education systems, higher education institutions (HEIs) and/or programmes. In other words, QA is built on the process of checking that the standards and quality of higher education provision meet agreed expectations.

Institutional autonomy is based on the argument that the HEIs can properly undertake this work if they
have freedom of choice and action. Implicit in this assertion is the notion that they are not to be exempted from public interest and criticism, or periodic review of practices and policies. This is because autonomy and accountability are two sides of the same coin.

In exchange for greater autonomy, HEIs need to be accountable to their stakeholders — students, faculty and staff, business community and the labour market, the general public and the government. Such accountability may be realized if appropriate mechanisms and enhancement procedures to maintain standards are institutionalized.

Papers for this theme should seek to examine how quality assurance and accountability processes can be used to strike an appropriate balance between securing the public interest on the one hand and encouraging institutional autonomy on the other.

Issues to be covered could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Promoting accountability through QA processes
- Quality enhancement procedures for greater institutional autonomy
- Autonomy in Higher Education and its Implications
- The Balancing Act – Institutional Autonomy vs. Protection of the Public Interest

5. Changes in Higher Education: Implications for Quality Assurance and Accreditation

Structural changes to the global economy have given rise to the need for changes in higher education. The global economy, over the years, has changed from agricultural, to industrial, to knowledge-based. The skills and resourcefulness of individuals are paramount for survival in a knowledge-based society. Changes in economic focus have affected the workforce, and by extension, the responsibility of higher education institutions. It is now imperative to connect school developments in more fundamental ways with current global transformations.

Papers for this subtheme should address the challenges faced by higher educational institutions, both
internal and external, as they struggle for currency and relevance.

Issues to be covered could include, but are not limited to, the following:

• Changes in higher education: innovations and challenges
• Financing higher education in challenging times
• Implication of changes in higher education on Quality Assurance and Accreditation

6. Governance and Autonomy: Challenges for External Quality Assurance

The primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution. As such, governing bodies of institutions play a vital role in ensuring growth and improving standards. Institutions continuously covet autonomy and closely guard their right to develop policies and direct the programmes to be offered. At the same time, national accreditation and quality assurance bodies continue to exercise significant control over these institution. Therein lies the challenge.

The other side of the coin is the need for the integrity of the decision-making process of accreditation bodies to be protected from external influence. Credibility once compromised cannot easily be regained.

Papers for this sub-theme should examine on the one hand, the challenges faced by institutions in ensuring compliance with external quality assurance standards, and on the other, the challenges faced by EQAAs in preserving the integrity of their processes. In addition, they should provide guidance to governing bodies in developing the structures/mechanisms to achieve these objectives.

Issues to be covered could include, but are not limited to, the following:

• The development of structures and processes to support the development of internal quality
• Incorporating accountability in the achievement of quality to meet external standards
• Ensuring transparency and accountability in external quality review processes
• Models of governance in accreditation