



UCJ representatives elected to CANQATE Board



Delegates at the 12th annual Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE) in St Kitts and Nevis.

The 12th annual Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE) conference and meeting was held in St Kitts and Nevis, from October 8-9, 2015, under the theme “Quality Assurance and Socioeconomic Development in a Global Environment: Regional and International Perspectives”.

Dr Angela Penny, Director, Research and Development, the UCJ, and former Vice President of CANQATE; was elected Regional Representative North; and Mrs Lisa Henlin, Accreditation Officer, was elected as Board Member for the term 2015–2017, at the Annual General Meeting.

The Conference, hosted by the St Kitts and Nevis Accreditation Board and the Ministry of Education, with the support of a number of private and public sector partners, included a series of concurrent workshops and plenary sessions.

Topics addressed at the conference included: Quality in Cross Border Education; Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Competitiveness; Investing in Quality Assurance in Higher Education; Quality Assurance as the Driver of Excellence in Education and Economic Sustainability in Tertiary Education (Medical Education), in the Changing Landscape of the Sector; the Quality Stamp of Approval; and Student Assessment as a Measure of Quality in an Accountability Framework.

INQAAHE

Board members meet in Barcelona

Dr Yvonne Marshall, Executive Director, the UCJ, attended the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) Board meeting in Barcelona, Spain, from November 7-8, 2015.

The Board, approved plans for the INQAAHE Forum, scheduled for May 22-24, 2016, in Fiji; revised the constitution; finalised the yearly calendar and ratified Board committees and working groups.

Ten sub-committees were named and each committee will consist of a maximum of three Board members and one or two members from the general membership.

Dr Marshall currently chairs the Recognition sub-committee and serves on the Meetings and Events; and the Communications and Outreach sub-committees.

The UCJ to assess programmes delivered 100 per cent online

The UCJ has reviewed its policy regarding the recognition of qualifications obtained through programmes delivered by distance learning/online programmes.

Overseas institutions that are delivering programmes 100 per cent online are required to have the programmes assessed by the UCJ against local standards for recognition in Jamaica.

Dr Yvonne Marshall, Executive Director, the UCJ, said: “The review came about as a result of increasing concerns about the quality of some online programmes currently being offered and whether they

are comparable in standards to those offered in the conventional face-to-face setting.”

Dr Marshall, added: “The UCJ’s mandate as an external quality assurance agency means that it must develop, communicate, and use a set of standards for distance education to ensure that quality is preserved and ensure that such programmes are viewed as comparable to those in institutions where instruction is offered face-to-face. The UCJ holds distance education programmes to the same high standards as those delivered by face-to-face modality.”



Striking the balance between Autonomy and Public Interest

Matthew Andrews

Academic Registrar, Oxford Brookes University and
Vice-chair, Association of University Administrators.

It seems axiomatic in higher education that new proposals emanating from government, or any of the myriad statutory and regulatory bodies that exist to monitor, assure or enhance different parts of the sector, will be met with a clarion call to protect institutional autonomy. And rightly so.

Institutional autonomy is vital. It supports academic freedom and is its necessary corollary: without it, higher education institutions cannot be self-governing, and if they are not, the danger is that external interference will ultimately limit academic freedom. Higher education without academic freedom – the ability of staff to pursue research and teach without fear of being censored or disciplined – is not higher education at all. It is incumbent upon all who work in the sector to protect these values, as recognised and enshrined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation’s 1997 recommendation on the subject.

And yet...and yet...institutional autonomy is not the only principle that higher education staff should defend. The sector does not exist in a vacuum, beyond the needs and interests of society at large. Higher education should have at its heart a desire to make a difference to the lives of individuals, regions, nations and the world. Learning and research, teaching and knowledge exchange, are valuable and valued, which is precisely why it is important to monitor, assure and enhance these activities. Institutional autonomy should operate consistently and in harmony with systems of accountability and the legitimate public interest in the sector’s activities. Funding all too often is the accepted reason for external intervention, but who funds higher education – and hence whether an institution is private, public, charitable or for-profit – is not the salient point: public interest

in higher education is legitimate precisely because what we do is so important. Greater appreciation of the balance that needs to be struck between institutional autonomy and the public interest would benefit the sector as it grapples with numerous thorny issues.

Writing in *Times Higher Education* about the recently launched consultation on the future of quality assurance, Madeleine Atkins, chief executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England, noted the importance of maintaining confidence in academic standards and supporting students’ interests while still respecting institutional autonomy (“standard-bearers,” Opinion, 2 July). A key part of the proposals relates to developing training and a national register for external examiners. Some doubt whether such a system is needed or whether academics would play along: “The majority of them will not do it,” asserted Derfel Owen, director of academic services at University College London, at the Quality Assurance Agency’s annual conference, held in Leeds on 11 June (“I’m out:” compulsory register would deter external examiners,” *THE*, News, 18 June).

While Hefce recognises that the sector has previously discussed and set aside similar proposals, it cites the plan’s “reputational benefits”. There seems weight to that argument. The external examiner system is often referred to as one of the major assurances of the comparability of academic standards between institutions. If that is the case, and the public have a legitimate interest in consistency of standards across the sector, then professionalising external examiners and achieving more consistent recruitment, training and recognition for them naturally follows. Can the sector credibly insist that maintaining more localised mechanisms is a better way to reassure the public?

The Higher Education Academy’s final report into the grade point average system struck a similar balance. The report affirmed providers’ autonomy in determining their own award regulations, but also recognised the GPA’s potential benefits and the advantages that could accrue from its more consistent adoption, compared with the multiple ways in which degree classifications are currently agreed. Addressing Universities UK on 1 July, Jo Johnson, the universities and science minister, threw his weight behind the system, recognising that it would “encourage consistent effort, make it less easy to coast within the 2:1 band and give employers more information about candidates within that classification”. On one level, the debate – and it is clearly a legitimate one – is about which system provides the greatest benefits to students and the sector. On another, it is about whether the academy wishes to adopt a consistent mechanism that could help ensure the public comparability of institutional standards.

Whatever comes of the Hefce consultation and the HEA report, the sector would do well to remember that institutional autonomy is not the only aspect of higher education worth protecting. We must defend it whenever it is attacked, but we must also recognise the authentic and justifiable public interest in our activities and be willing to use our autonomy to engage willingly and collegially in sector-wide developments.

This article was first published in the Times Higher Education magazine on July 23, 2015.

The UCJ presents its Council members for the period 2015–2018



Front row, left to right:

Dr Carol Hordatt Gentles, Lecturer in Education, School of Education, University of the West Indies (UWI); Mrs Audrey Anderson, Former Senior Deputy Governor, Bank of Jamaica; Mrs Lorna Parkins, Executive Director, Caribbean Accreditation Authority for Education in Medicine and Other Health Professions (CAAM-HP); Dr Yvonne Marshall, Executive Director, the UCJ; Mrs Yvonne Clarke, Principal, Bethlehem Moravian College; Dr Lou-Anne Barclay, Senior Lecturer, International Business, Mona School of Business, UWI.

Back row, left to right:

Dr Asburn Pinnock, President, The Mico University College; Dr Phylcia Marshall, Assistant Chief Education Officer, Tertiary Unit, Ministry of Education; Mr Ward Mills, Project Specialist, Strategic Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations, Cabinet Office; Ambassador the Hon. Burchell Whiteman, OJ, Chairman; Dr Trevor Smith, Lecturer, Head of MIBES, Mona School of Business & Management, UWI; Rev. Dr Gordon Cowans, Principal, Knox Community College; Dr Trevor Gardner, President, Northern Caribbean University; Dr Claire Sutherland, Senior Director for International and Institutional Linkages, U-Tech; Dr Wayne Wesley, Executive Director, HEART/NTA; Professor Carol Clarke, Interim President, The Mico University College (Council Member up to September 2015); Mr Joseph Taffe, Retired Business Executive; Professor Ronald Young, Emeritus Professor of Human and Comparative Physiology, UWI.

Absent from the photograph are:

Ms Bevon Morrison, Environmental Scientist, Professor Colin A. Gyles; Acting President, U-Tech; Professor Archibald McDonald, Pro Vice Chancellor & Principal, UWI; and Dr Anna Perkins, Senior Programme Officer, Quality Assurance Unit, Office of the Board for Undergraduate Studies, UWI.

Ambassador Whiteman receives Honorary Degree

The UCJ's Council members and staff extend hearty congratulations to Ambassador the Hon. Burchell Whiteman, OJ, Chairman of the Council, who was conferred with the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws (LLD), from the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, at a presentation ceremony at the university, on Saturday, October 31, 2015.

Ambassador Whiteman's Honorary Degree is in recognition of his stellar contribution to Caribbean development.



CHEA'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND CIQG SET FOR JANUARY 2016 IN WASHINGTON D.C.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) will hold its annual conference under the theme "The Future is Now: Where is Accreditation?" at the Capital Hilton Hotel, Washington, D.C. from January 26-27, 2016.

The annual meeting for CHEA's International Quality Group will follow the annual conference, under the theme "Quality Assurance and Accreditation: Multiple Demands; Multiple Challenges" on January 27-28, 2016. For further information about the conference and CHEA, log on to www.chea.org.

SAVE THE DATE FOR YOUR DIARY!

The UCJ will celebrate its 11th Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education Week under the theme "Assuring Quality in Programme Outcomes: Imperative for Graduate Effectiveness" from March 7-11, 2016.

The "week of activities" will be used as an opportunity to further inform and educate students, parents, employers, the general public and other stakeholders about quality assurance in tertiary education.

Activities will include: workshops for assessors and staff; training in improving internal quality assurance systems for tertiary institutions; an annual awards ceremony and a students' forum.

UCJ and UDC sign MoA for Construction of new Office Building

The UCJ and the Urban Development Corporation (UDC), signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) on Wednesday, November 11, 2015, concerning the construction of an office complex for the UCJ at 31 Windsor Avenue, Kingston 5.

The project, which will be funded by the UCJ, is estimated to cost JA\$176,185,000.00 and the construction time will be from October 2016 to April 2017.

The new office at 31 Windsor Avenue, will accommodate a total staff compliment of approximately 43 persons featuring office/administrative spaces with supporting restrooms, storage, meeting rooms and other amenities as requested in the Business Requirement Document drafted by the UCJ.

The scope of the work will result in the construction of a new two (2) storey building totalling (13,273.2 sq. ft) 1233 sq. m. The construction will include parking, internal roadways, perimeter fencing, hard/soft landscaping and all supporting civil, mechanical and electrical infrastructural works.

Dr Yvonne Marshall, Executive Director, the UCJ, said: "This is an exciting time for the UCJ. The signing of this MoA with the UDC is confirmation that the UCJ has come of age after 29 years of assuring quality in tertiary education in Jamaica."



Dr Yvonne Marshall, Executive Director, the UCJ (2nd left), and Mr Desmond Malcom, P.E., J.P, General Manager, the Urban Development Corporation (UDC), sign a Memorandum of Agreement. Mrs Yvette Sibble, General Council of the UDC and Mr Richard Rose, Director, Communications and Public Education, the UCJ, acted as witnesses.

Dr Marshall, added: "The Council and staff at the UCJ are looking forward to seeing the realisation of this project and working in partnership with a great team at the UDC."

Mr Desmond Malcolm, General Manager of the UDC, said: "The UDC is proud to be associated with the UCJ as designers and project managers for their new corporate office. We value the confidence that the UCJ have placed in the UDC to complete this project within budget and on time."

UCJ Standards available for purchase

The UCJ's Guidance and Counselling Standards – Bachelors Degree and the Standards for Distance Education are available for purchase from the UCJ.

The UCJ has produced "Guidelines for Recognition of Transnational Education Qualifications". Overseas institutions delivering programmes 100 per cent online should read the guidelines in conjunction with the UCJ's Standards for Distance Education.

For further information, contact the UCJ on (876) 929-7299, 906-8012 or via info@ucj.org.jm

