

ASSURING QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN JAMAICAN TERTIARY EDUCATION

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Introduction

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The University Council of Jamaica (UCJ) was established in 1987. It is the national quality assurance agency for tertiary education and is entrusted with the responsibility for assuring and enhancing quality in the Jamaican tertiary education system.

The UCJ functions as an accrediting and academic development body for programmes developed at approved tertiary institutions.

The UCJ:

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- Acts as the national information centre for institutions and programmes registered and accredited by the Council;
- Establishes equivalence and facilitates local recognition of qualifications obtained overseas;
- Assures the quality of programmes being offered in Jamaica by overseas institutions.

Structure of Tertiary Education in Jamaica

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- 3 recognised universities
 - University of the West Indies
 - University of Technology, Jamaica
 - Northern Caribbean University
- Diverse colleges and institutes

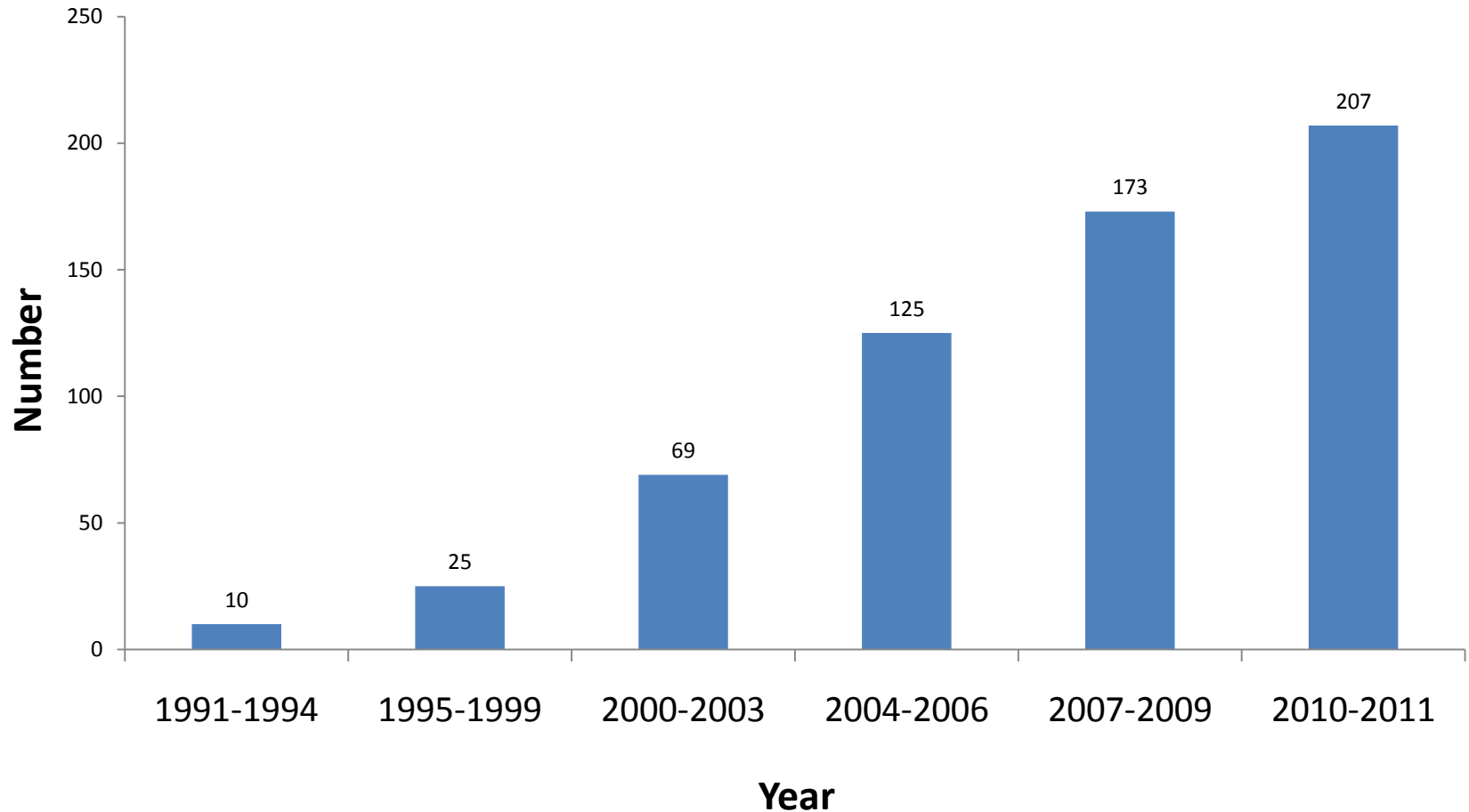
In total, 51 institutions registered by the UCJ

- 25 public and 26 private institutions

To date, some 207 programmes have been granted the UCJ accreditation

Growth of Accredited Programmes

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- The UCJ effects programme accreditation, which evaluates the quality of specific programmes as offered by an institution.
- Outcomes of the accreditation process are developmental rather than punitive. A programme's strengths are lauded and attention drawn to those areas that need to be improved.

Study No. 1

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In 2006 the UCJ conducted a study to:

- ▣ Explore the perceptions of institutions regarding the accreditation process
- ▣ Analyse the use of accreditation by institutions to improve the quality of their practices and services

Institutions were asked to rate their satisfaction with different aspects of the UCJ's accreditation process AND

Indicate the perceived effect of accreditation on identified institutional operations and practices

Findings

Reasons for Seeking Accreditation

1. Recognition

- To enhance the marketability of programmes
- To inspire public confidence in the institution and its programmes
- To increase student enrolment

2. Ensure quality

- It was also acknowledged that participating in the accreditation process spurred quality improvement efforts throughout the institution

Benefits of Accreditation

- ❑ Increased student interest in the programme;
- ❑ greater appreciation of strengths and opportunities for improvement;
- ❑ deepened recognition of the institution as a whole by individuals and the general public;
- ❑ improvements in the curricula;
- ❑ advancement in the instructional provision with regards to the meeting of infrastructural needs;
- ❑ Standardization and documentation of institutional practices;
- ❑ Implementation of systems for information management.

Satisfaction with the Accreditation Process

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Aspects of the UCJ's Accreditation Process with the Highest Ratings:

1. Organization of the accreditation process
2. Quality of discussion and interviews during accreditation visits
3. Overall quality of the UCJ's accreditation report
4. Quality of the recommendations in the accreditation report
5. Transparency of the UCJ's accreditation process

Satisfaction ...

Aspects of the UCJ's Accreditation Process with the Lowest Ratings:

1. Monitoring by the UCJ after accreditation
2. Costs associated with accreditation
3. Length of time to receive the formal accreditation decision
4. Timeliness of the accreditation report

Impact of Accreditation...

Item Description	Percent of respondents		
	No effect	Positive Effect	Significant Positive Effect
Standardization of practices and services	0	87%	13%
Student support services	0	87%	13%
Effort to enhance learning resources	0	87%	13%
Leadership strength within the institution/department	13%	80%	7%
Curriculum design and development	0	80%	13%
Learning outcomes and educational experience of students	0	80%	20%
Rigour employed to review the performance of programmes and the department/institution	13%	80%	7%
Measuring customer satisfaction	7%	80%	13%

Study 2

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In 2005 a survey was conducted among registered institutions identified as offering programmes related to the standards already developed and in circulation.

Purpose of the Study:

1. To determine whether the standards were being used
2. To determine the perceived effect of the standards on programme development and quality improvement in the institutions.

Findings: Use of the standards

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- 92% of the respondents indicated that they actually use the standards to develop their programmes
- All the standards in print were being used
- Highest percentage of use was for standards relating to the associate degree in business, followed by standards for the bachelors degree in business, undergraduate degree in the sciences, and standards for the bachelors degree in information technology.

Effect of the standards

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- 83% of respondents indicated that the standards were “very useful” for programme development in their institutions.
- Perceived effect of the standards on 15 identified educational areas was rated on a five-point Likert-type scale—too early to tell, negative effect, no effect, positive effect, significant positive effect

Cross-Border Education Provision in Jamaica

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The accreditation of cross-border education programmes by the UCJ aims to protect students from low quality imports and from programmes lacking in relevance to the local context.

The UCJ has established clear guidelines for the delivery of cross-border education. Consequently, there is not an influx of low quality foreign programmes in Jamaica.

Demographic Information on Foreign Providers

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Characteristic	Number
Mode of delivery	
Face-to-face	5
Blended	6
Level of Programme	
Bachelor	7
Masters	16
Doctoral	1
Programme Discipline	
Business/Management	8
Education	15
Sociology	1

The Study

In 2008 the UCJ surveyed foreign providers and local partner institutions involved in delivering cross-border education programmes in Jamaica.

Aims of the Study

- ❑ To examine the benefits and challenges of cross-border education provision
- ❑ To identify the areas in which cross-border education has contributed to the capacity development of tertiary education
- ❑ To determine the lessons learned from the experience of providing cross-border education in Jamaica

Findings

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Reasons for Delivering Cross-border Education

Responses from Foreign Providers

Two main reasons:

1. Invitation – by individuals, institutions, or business organizations
2. International Mission – The opportunity contributed to the foreign institution's mission and strategic objectives to have an international focus

Reasons...

Responses from local partner institutions

The decision to invite foreign institutions to partner with them stemmed from the need to upgrade the qualifications of their own faculty members, graduates, and business executives in general.

Benefits of Delivering Cross-border Education

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Responses from foreign providers

Two main reasons:

1. **Faculty Development**

Faculty members enriched to become multicultural educators

2. **Curriculum Development**

The cross-cultural experience of faculty resulted in changes in course content and delivery, and allowed faculty to draw on relevant examples and cases in their courses on the foreign campus.

Responses from Local Institutions

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- enhancing the image of the institution,
- improving the capacity of local institutions to offer graduate programmes,
- improving operational procedures, and
- being able to satisfy the demand for access to the institution's programmes.

Cross-border Education Provision: Lessons

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- Understanding the importance of taking cultural differences into account in programme content and delivery
- Need for programmes to be academically sound and student-focused with cultural relevance
- Cross-border education best operated in a spirit of mutual trust. Foreign providers must trust in the capability of the local partner
- Need for faculty members to develop cultural awareness and understanding of the Jamaican culture

Contribution of Cross-Border Education

The main contribution to capacity building of local institutions by foreign providers was in the areas of:

1. professional development of local academic staff through means such as collaboration on research projects and opportunities for the upgrade of academic qualifications;
2. Instructional and physical resources with particular focus on improving the technological capability of local institutions.

Conclusion

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- The UCJ has a well-established and comprehensive quality assurance model that incorporates setting standards, accrediting programmes, and monitoring registered institutions.
- Over the years, this model has helped to create a quality culture within tertiary education institutions making them more responsible for the maintenance of quality and standards

Challenges

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There are some challenges:

1. There is need for more and better information to be communicated to stakeholders.
2. There is need for capacity building in order for the UCJ to be more responsive to the new and complex developments in tertiary education globally.

Thank You.