

# The Value of a Higher Education and Significance of Accreditation



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Question: How would you convince the average citizen of Trinidad and Tobago of the benefits of the benefits of accreditation to students, higher education institutions and to the development of the country?

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To begin, in order to assess the significance of accreditation we must first understand its meaning and purpose. The initial question, of course, would be, 'What is accreditation?'. An exact definition would be that it is an act of endorsement or the authorization of an institution, particularly an educational institution, although there are accreditation systems for healthcare and so on, the main focus here will be on educational institutions. What this definition is saying is that organizations that provide accreditation services for educational institutions ensure that recognition and support is given and also help to ensure that institutions have and are able to up keep the standard of quality set by the accreditation status of the organization. By accepting the accreditation status from the organization the educational institution is obligated to meet these requirements. There are also steps taken before accreditation is given to an institution. They are as follows:

## 1. **Preparation**

The institution seeking accreditation status prepares materials that effectively display the institution's accomplishments. The institution must also create a written report of its accomplishments according to the standards set by the accreditation organization.

## 2. **Review**

An intensive review of the prepared materials is conducted and a written report is made of the general workings of the institution seeking accreditation status. Teams of peer reviewers visit the institution. Most accreditation boards are populated by faculty and administrative peers in the field.

### 3. **Examination**

In addition to the visits made by the peer reviewers, most accreditation organizations also gather a visiting team that visits the institution seeking accreditation. This team is often made up of members of the public who volunteer their time because of a strong interest in the quality standards of higher education institutions.

### 4. **Judgment**

After the previous steps are completed, the accreditation organization calls upon their commission to review the steps and confirm or deny accreditation for the institution under close examination.

### 5. **Observation**

By accepting accreditation status, the institution agrees to undergo a review on a regular basis every few years, sometimes every ten years. An institution is usually required to go through all the steps of the accreditation process each time it is reviewed. The purpose of the continuous review is to ensure that the accredited institution continues to maintain the required accreditation standards.

The Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago is one of the organizations that provide this service to institutions, and one of their main purposes is to encourage and endorse post-secondary and tertiary education institutions and programs in Trinidad and Tobago. However, this is only one of their key functions; they also play a very significant role in the development of tertiary education in our country and are recognized both regionally and internationally. One of their main goals is to provide the basis for the creation of a seamless education and training system. Their mantra “Learning from the best practice, and creating the next practice”, is

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portrayed in all their policies and procedures within the organization. The mission and vision of the ACTT is to be the principal authority in Trinidad and Tobago for quality assurance and continuous improvement in a higher education and to be the leader in innovation, which, as said in the 2020 vision statement, will be the driving force that will lead our economy into growth and development. They intend to ensure the quality and integrity of higher education through recognition, registration and accreditation. Efficiency is assured as they demonstrate commitment to the nation's development and global competitiveness.

Now that we have developed an understanding of what accreditation is and its purpose, we can now begin to assess the benefits and significance. There are many ways in which the act of accreditation is beneficial, not only to the institutions involved and the students, but also to the public and the economy as a whole. Firstly, we will examine the benefits to those directly involved in the accreditation process; these are the institutions and the students themselves. Institutions that have accepted accreditation status from an accreditation organization, as stated earlier, are required to uphold a certain standard of quality, this, therefore means that students and potential students can be more confident that the quality of the education they receive at the institution they intend to invest their time and money into is of a high standard and that the credentials they leave with are of some value. Not only would they have assurance of receiving a high quality education at accredited institutions but there is also the possibility of financial aid being provided by the government, to those who may attend any of these institutions and may be unable to cover the complete cost themselves. This would encourage more people to go on to pursue tertiary education to further themselves, which would then, in the long run, provide the country with a greater percentage of skilled individuals in society. This would, of course, have a very positive effect on the country's economy which we will cover later on. Last but not least,

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considering that a student has graduated from an accredited institution or program signals to potential employers the level and quality of education and training that this individual has received is of a high standard, and in some cases this, along with other factors, is what qualifies an individual for entering into a certain position. Basically, along with having the skills and attitude needed to carry out that the employer thinks would benefit his/her company, it may be safe to say that the higher the accreditation status of the institution the individual attended, the higher the chance of employment. What sometimes occurs is that with institutions that are already highly accredited and already have a very high reputation for providing employers with highly skilled employees they tend to go to that institution more often when they need more workers and are even willing to employ graduates who may be in search of a job. This benefits both the institution and the employers as well making it a lot easier for them to find good quality workers. However, this shows that the institutions and the students are not the only ones who benefit from accreditation, the public also can benefit from this, both generally and from an economic stand point.

Accreditation of educational institutions benefit the public in various ways. Generally, one of the benefits to the public would be, as stated earlier, the assurance of quality and high standard education. This ensures the public that the image of quality given by the institution is genuine and that, not only the quality of education portrayed but also the success rate, opportunities provided and the level of training and preparation provided is accurate. This, as said before, would benefit the employers also, as it would be easier for them to find individuals with the skill needed to certain position in their organization and also lend a hand in improving the levels of productivity, we will expand on this further later on. Last but not least, this also provides opportunities for international partnerships, which would enable the institutions to

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engage in various activities like student/faculty exchanges, scholarship programs and so on. This brings us to the economic perspective that was mentioned earlier. International partnership opportunities do not only benefit the students, but also the institutions involved and furthermore, also benefit the also benefits the economies of those involved. These institutions have the opportunity to not only have their students take advantage of being about to go to other countries and universities to gain experience outside of the country, but also, those with a high accreditation status, The University of the West Indies right here in Trinidad and Tobago, will attract persons hoping to pursue a higher level of education to the country who, in coming to UWI, would have to pay fees like school fees, purchasing of books, paying rent and perhaps even food and clothes. These individuals will also involve themselves in a few recreational activities while in the country, all of this and more (seeing that it would not only be from one or two students, but hundreds) would generate more finances for the economy providing the country with more revenue. It is now clear that just as certain benefits between the students and the educational institutions influenced each other, it is in that same manner that both affect/benefit the public by helping to develop and improve the economy. Certain benefits, like the provision of financial aid to students would encourage more individuals to pursue tertiary education which would, in turn, provide the country with a higher percentage of skilled individuals, which is one of the main factors that would carry our country one step closer to a greater economy. How, you may ask? It is by granting financial aid to students and making a higher level of education available to more people that would create and increase in job opportunities and with little debt to repay, graduates will be able to pursue these opportunities more aggressively, and it is as stated in the Vision 2020 plan of the previous government, “A highly skilled, talented and knowledgeable workforce is what will stimulate innovation-driven

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growth and development.” This statement is based on the fact that the education and training of a country’s workforce greatly affects how well their economy will do. The government’s plan was to improve the pool of highly skilled nationals in Trinidad and Tobago’s workforce. It is proven that a higher skilled workforce would increase the levels of production in companies and higher levels of production means an increase in profitability, thus generating more revenue within the economy.

As a Caribbean country, Trinidad and Tobago is one of the more economically advanced, however, there is still room for growth. We live in a world where technology is ever changing and is impacting greatly on the world of business causing it to change as well. As these changes are made, there is an increase of higher level professions and in order to fill these positions, higher skilled professionals are needed. A basic primary and secondary school education cannot be accepted when individuals intend to pursue these professions and the amount of pay the jobs that will accept these qualifications provide, can no longer sustain the average family or even an individual to the degree that most people want to live or find comfortable. Living paycheck to paycheck in this economy or any economy, as a matter of fact, is not the standard of living that most people want to have. Therefore, not only does a higher education support the economy financially, but it also aids in achieving and upholding a higher standard of living in society. More educated individuals, equals more job opportunities, leading to a higher employment level which in turn, decreases the level of crime in society thus improving the qualitative aspect of the standard of living. The quantitative aspect is also improved as the more people employed means more individuals have a sufficient amount of income at their disposal, enabling them to satisfy any material needs they may have diminishing the desire or need to commit crime such as theft. The citizens of Trinidad and Tobago need to be made aware of these benefits and open their eyes

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to the great number of possibilities created by having a higher level of skilled professionals in our society, who can help to stimulate growth of our economy and lead to the overall development of our country. This can only be done with the appropriate levels education and training, which can only be provided by the post-secondary and tertiary education institutions and the accreditation of these institutions. These are what will help build the foundation for the establishment of the vision of economic growth in our country of Trinidad and Tobago. By encouraging and enabling members of society to further themselves and pursue a higher education we will begin taking our first step into our nation's growth and development. This is the value of a higher education and the significance of accreditation.



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