In celebrating the achievements of the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) since the Inaugural Meeting of the Council, cognisance must be taken of the prevailing conditions in the region in 1973. On reflection the Council came into existence as part of the process of decolonisation in the Commonwealth Caribbean since the 1930s. This process led to the constitutional changes resulting in the independence of states of the Caribbean thereby allowing them to enter the world stage as sovereign states. There was considerable optimism about the future embodied in the raising of national flags, the adoption of national symbols, the composition of new national anthems and membership in the United Nations and other regional bodies.

Decolonisation is more than the constitutional independence. It involves the reversal of the process of European imperial expansion with all its political, economic, social, cultural and racial consequences. In the Caribbean decolonisation and independence were expected to provide the framework for sustainable economic development, development of democratic institutions and significant improvement of the standard of living of the people. There were notions that independence would lead to the creation of a new Caribbean man that would be imbued with a distinctive identity, self reliant and self confident and equipped with the skills and competences to manage challenges of the new independent countries.

At the centre of this vision was the belief that education would be an indispensable instrument for the transformation of the Caribbean people and the building of a new civilisation. The Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) was created to give voice and concreteness to those aspirations. There was consensus that without the Caribbean’s ability to construct its own curriculum, develop its own pedagogical methodologies and appropriate content to respond to the needs of the Caribbean people decolonisation would be incomplete. The challenge was how to devise a system that would replace the entrenched colonial education structure. There was considerable dissatisfaction with the overseas system of examinations and syllabi that were not considered relevant to the needs of the developing societies in the region. Specifically it was felt that that system did not provide for the involvement of the teachers who were the major players in the delivery of education and catered almost exclusively to the needs of an academic elite.

One of the remarkable aspects of the background of the creation of CXC was that although independence had been achieved in most of the territories that would eventually become
members of the Council, the alternatives for the education system were presented as between the English overseas system and a regional structure, not a national system.

The explanations for the choice of a Regional system can be found in the strength of the regional ideology that had taken hold of the region. The ideology of integration exemplified in the phrase “integrate or perish” was widely adopted by the framers of the treaty establishing the Council. It will be recalled that the Treaty of Chaguaramas establishing the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) was signed in 1973. The Treaty provided for cooperation in three areas - Economic Integration, Functional Cooperation and Coordination of Foreign Policy. The motivation for establishing integration among the countries of the Region rested on the conviction that given the small geographic size, small population, openness of economies, the prevailing patterns of trade, the uncertainties in the global environment, integration was the only option if these countries were to remain viable and provide their populations with a decent standard of living and the opportunity to create a Caribbean identity and civilisation.

The Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) was a direct outcome of these beliefs and this vision. To ensure that it became an instrument of decolonisation, CXC adopted a mission that would provide the Region with “syllabuses of the highest quality; valid and reliable examinations and certificates of international repute for students of all ages, abilities and interests”. In addition it was mandated to provide “services to educational institutions in the development of syllabuses, examinations and examination administration, in the most cost effective way”. CXC was given an all-inclusive mandate “to conduct such examinations as it may think appropriate and award certificates and diplomas on the results of examinations so conducted”.

Beyond the specific examination role, CXC was expected to facilitate the development of the human resources for Caribbean development, provide the training for the leaders of the Region and serve as the intellectual and ideological apparatus to nurture our identity as a Caribbean people. As an indication of its continued role as an instrument of decolonisation, the current Registrar has redefined the new vision as one that seeks to “reposition the organisation as the leading certification body for the Region, and its new mission is to assure the global intellectual competitiveness of the Caribbean”

One of the distinctive features of CXC from the beginning was the broad based involvement of its stakeholders. There are sixteen participating states on the Council. The Council is composed of the Vice Chancellor and three other representatives from the University of the West Indies, the Vice Chancellor and one representative from the University of Guyana, two government representatives each from Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, one representative from each of the other participating governments and one representative of the teaching profession appointed by each National Committee from among its members. Of equal
significance is the involvement of over two hundred and forty persons in subject panels and over one hundred and forty in examination committees with many teachers and research persons participating in a range of other activities.

There can be no doubt that in its conception CXC attempted to address the dissatisfaction felt by teachers and stakeholders about their exclusion from the process as experienced during the colonial period. These frequent meetings have created a network of teachers to share ideas and resources that have contributed to the development of teaching and learning. There is also an indigenous capacity building for curriculum development, measurement and evaluation across the region.

One of the central concerns of nationalists before independence was the restrictive curriculum offered in the secondary schools. During the past forty years CXC has aggressively addressed that concern moving from five subjects in 1979 to over thirty subjects at the CSEC level in 2013. Of great importance in this expansion of subjects has been the consultation with policy makers and educators resulting in new courses being offered to meet emerging needs of the society. Among these new subjects are Physical Education and Sport, Music, Theatre Arts, Human and Social Biology, Economics and Office Administration. The successful implementation of the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination – CAPE, is further evidence of the realisation of a vision to create examinations appropriate to the needs of the Caribbean. From its introduction in 1998 when five units were examined to forty four units in twenty five subjects in 2010 the CXC has continued the rapid expansion of its examinations in response to the growing demands of the candidates in the Region.

It should be evident by now that the vision, mission, structure and operation of the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) reflect the overwhelming desire on the part of the Caribbean people to create indigenous institutions to support their quest for dignity and freedom. The success of the organisation can be measured by tangible and concrete outcomes. The inclusion of Caribbean topics and subjects in the curriculum has been a major plank in the decolonisation of our education system over the past forty years. The wide acceptance of the examinations in the Region and recognition internationally signal that the Caribbean people, through cooperation, are able to build institutions that can project their sense of achievement at the regional and international level. The rapid introduction and use of technology within the organisation not only promotes efficiency but has placed it on the cutting edge of examination bodies globally. For all these reasons it is reasonable to conclude that the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) which was established to give expression to Caribbean desire for freedom and self definition has delivered on its mandate over these forty years.
Bibliography


