



## **COVID-19 UPDATE TO REGISTERED AND ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS**

### **TOPIC: PLANNING DURING A CRISIS OR EMERGENCY**

#### **PREAMBLE**

The Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago (ACTT) recognises that all registered and accredited institutions operating under the present COVID-19 pandemic context may be challenged to prepare 3-5 year (medium to long-term) plans including strategic plans. A recent survey conducted by ACTT illustrates the following data:

**Participation Rate:** 76.9% of all ACTT-regulated institutions

#### **Planning Results:**

*With respect to strategic and business plans to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, local Post-Secondary and Tertiary Education (PSTE) institutions, to a large extent, have adopted short-term planning processes. More than 50% of all PSTE institutions reported having plans in the 3 to 12 month period as opposed to adopting a 3-5 strategic plan or 2 year business plan. The majority or 54.8% of private institutions have crafted plans to treat with the pandemic in contrast to the non-profit and public sector's responses of 22.6%.*

Considering the above, ACTT has decided to advise institutions of the prospects for planning under the current emergency circumstances. The ACTT defines emergency circumstances as short to longer term threats that pose a serious risk to personnel (student, staff, faculty, etc.), health, safety, security, environment and property. Such threats are known to have knock-on effects on an institution's operations and financial well-being. Emergency circumstances are being considered for the Academic Year 2020-2021 commencing September 2020 or where delays have occurred by virtue of state policies and regulations, from January 2021 for a period of nine calendar months. It shall be deemed to be for this period, until further notice. Thus, an institution may develop plans to cover the stated period.

## 1.0. GUIDELINES FOR PLANNING

Strategy is important during a crisis/emergency. An institution needs to consider its manner of operating and the resources it has to put in place and made available to implement each strategy. A strategy need not be documented in a long range strategic plan. Strategies should ideally consider the following issues within the current institutional context:

- 1- The institution should have engaged in critical reflection<sup>1</sup> of its current situation/context. Data gathering is important to aid this reflection. Current market analysis is critical particularly for programmes and services.
- 2- The institution wants to ensure that it can still accomplish its stated/existing vision and mission and goals. If these need to be changed they are to be tweaked.
- 3- The institution may want to be very clear and explicit about what it wants to achieve and document the strategies. The institution may use different methodologies in arriving at its strategies including Appreciative Enquiry, SWOT/PESTLE Analysis, Porter's Five Forces, Blue Ocean, Risk Analysis, etc. The plan may have a cascading mechanism using Balanced Score Card (BSC), Waterfall methods e.g. Logframe/Gantt, Agile Development or Quality Management/Excellence models.
- 4- The institution should focus on the most important and few strategies that make sense for its survival in the current setting.
- 5- The institution may want to ensure that the strategies review or provide for coverage of every gamut of the institution's operations and are clearly connected and articulated. Refer to point 3 above regarding the cascading method such as BSC.
- 6- The institution should ensure the staff and faculty are engaged/aware of the short-term plans and how they are likely to change beyond the period.
- 7- The institution should ensure that the strategies will be accomplished and have achievable measurable indicators and targets. Targets should be realistic given the current scenarios.

## 2.0. PREPARING RESPONSES TO STANDARDS

### 2.1. FOR REGISTERED INSTITUTIONS

**Applicable Standards:** Standards 2.2 and 2.3 ensure that institutions to be registered must have a vision and mission statement and accompanying goals. Standard 5.1. provides for a registered institution having a quality plan that articulates to its quality management system.

**ACTT's Recommendation:** A registered institution's plan should identify a vision statement, mission statement, goals and a quality plan which indicates how it will plan, develop, approve and review its programme(s) and course(s). In short, any plan that addresses these components should satisfy the standards. It is possible for an institution to develop and provide a short-term plan for a minimum of one year, e.g. operational/annual/business plan which also connects to its mission, vision and quality plan. The case must be made clearly in the institution's documentation.

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<sup>1</sup> Critical reflection refers to data gathering and analysis using surveys, consultations and other means. The analysis should involve strategic leaders at the institution including Board or Council members

## 2.2. FOR ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS

**Applicable Standards:** Standards 1.1 to 1.4. ensure that accredited institutions have established their vision, mission and goals. Standard 3.1. refers to the institution having a strategic plan that considers academic planning and evaluation. Standards 4.1 and 5.1- 5.4 are clear that the institution should have a strategic planning process, documents and engagement with staff and faculty. In terms of standard 5.3, the strategic planning process may be short (e.g. 1 year), medium (e.g. 2-3 years) or long (e.g. 5+ years) term.

**ACTT's Recommendation:** Considering the current ACTT accreditation standards, an accredited institution may develop short-term strategic plans (1 year) given the current scenario but these are to reflect longer term vision statements, mission statements, purpose statements and goals. The short-term strategic plan could be anchored within an existing 3-5 year strategic plan. Short-term strategic plans are possible within any emergency situation. This is especially the case, when an institution's current strategic plan is being reviewed during a mid-term or end-of-cycle strategic plan review period<sup>2</sup> in preparation for its next year when the situation is uncertain. Referring to the guidelines provided, the short-term strategic planning considers major changes that are to occur in a projected annual period. In exceptional circumstances, an accredited institution may opt to continue to use its current strategic plan or develop another strategic plan and have an interim business continuity or related short-term strategy to cover the period.

ACTT appreciates the efforts of its institutions as they continue to navigate the difficult circumstances in this period.

We wish you the very best.



Dr Eduardo Ali  
Executive Director

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<sup>2</sup> In typical planning scenarios the institution may utilize a review period at mid-point in the implementation of its strategic plan or at the very end of the strategic plan implementation period