

Chapter 10: Trinidad & Tobago

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Population (1993): 1,282,000

Population Growth Rate (1960-93): 1.3% per annum

Land Area: 5,128 square kilometres

GNP per Capita (1993): US\$3,730

Year of Independence: 1962

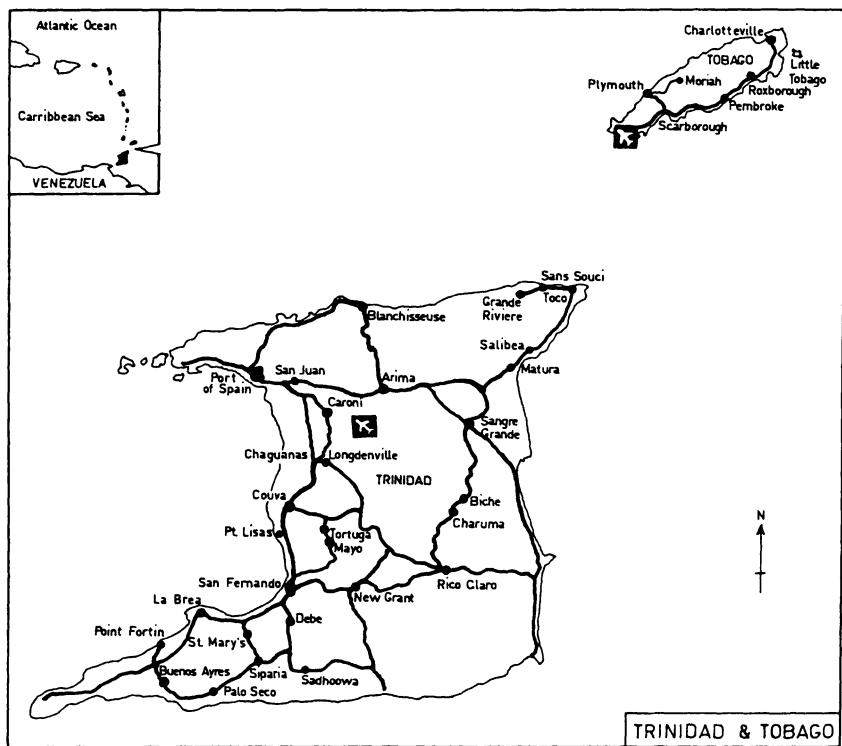
UNDP Human Development Index (1994): 0.880

The Republic of Trinidad & Tobago comprises two islands. Trinidad is by far the greater, with 4,828 square kilometres, while Tobago has 300 square kilometres. With a population of nearly 1.3 million, Trinidad & Tobago is one of the larger countries in the English-speaking Caribbean.

The islands of Trinidad and Tobago were discovered by Columbus and claimed for Spain on his third voyage in 1498. Whether he named Trinidad after the day of the Holy Trinity or after the group of three hills that he saw from the sea is disputed. Tobago's name is said to be a corruption of the word 'tobacco', which used to be grown there. British rule began in Trinidad in 1797 and in Tobago in 1802, and the two islands were united for administrative purposes in 1888.

In 1958, Trinidad & Tobago joined with nine other Caribbean countries to form the Federation of the West Indies. The Federation collapsed three years later, following Jamaica's withdrawal. Dr. Eric Williams, Prime Minister of Trinidad & Tobago, responded negatively to the request from the remaining leaders to keep Trinidad & Tobago in the union, making his now-famous reply: "One from ten leaves nought". Trinidad & Tobago proceeded to independent sovereign status in 1962.

The country was once considered one of the more prosperous in the Eastern Caribbean because of its oil resources. However, being by world standards an insignificant producer of oil, Trinidad & Tobago has been unable to influence the commodity's price. As a result, the national economy has been strongly affected by the price of oil on the world market. During the period 1974-82, the country benefitted from the increased price of oil that the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries was able to



demand. This allowed the government to embark on significant investment in heavy industry and in economic and social infrastructure including education. However, the decade from 1982 was characterised by slump and the need for considerable readjustment, and only in the 1990s did Gross Domestic Product again begin to rise. The economy remains dominated by oil, but also has substantial components from manufacturing, agriculture, tourism and other services.

The Education and Examination Systems

The education system comprises (i) two years of early childhood care and education for about 40 per cent of children aged three and four; (ii) seven years of primary schooling, divided into two Infant and five Standard levels, for children aged five to 11; (iii) two post-primary grades for those who fail to gain access to secondary school; (iv) five secondary grades for successful candidates in the Common Entrance Examination; and (v) two years of Sixth Form leading to the Advanced ('A') Level examinations.

In addition, the National Training Board, which was established in 1970, has facilitated the development of technical/vocational education. Craft and technician courses are conducted in technical institutes, junior secondary schools, senior comprehensive schools, senior secondary schools, composite schools, and one vocational centre. Courses have also been developed for trade centres and youth camps.

Table 10.1 shows the principal examinations and the numbers of candidates in 1996. Trinidad has long links with the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), and was the location of the Syndicate's first overseas centre. UCLES examinations were taken in Trinidad in 1863, just five years after the establishment of the Syndicate itself, and are still taken in Trinidad today. However, they operate alongside other examinations set by national and regional bodies. The Secondary Education Certificate examination, operated by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) and launched in 1979, has displaced the UCLES examination as the major assessment at the fifth forms of secondary schools. The CXC examinations are tailored to local and regional needs, and also have high international standards. Trinidad & Tobago has commonly presented the largest number of candidates in CXC examinations, frequently exceeding even the numbers from Jamaica (which has twice the population size). Private candidates usually take the examinations of the University of London rather than UCLES since the London regulations are better suited to their circumstances.

Table 10.1: Major Examinations, Trinidad & Tobago, 1996

<i>Level</i>	<i>Examination</i>	<i>Candidates</i>
Primary	Common Entrance Examination	29,700
Post-primary classes (for 11 plus)	Primary School Leaving Examination	7,055
Adult education	Primary School Leaving Examination	487
Junior secondary	Junior Secondary School Examination	11,461
Senior secondary	Secondary Education Certificate	36,832
Sixth form	Cambridge Ordinary	7,500
	Cambridge Advanced-Ordinary	2,494
	Cambridge Advanced	3,150
Private candidates	London Advanced	344
	London Ordinary	931
Technical Institute, Vocational Centre, Trade School	National Examinations Council Craft-level	5,261
	Technician-level	1,936
Teachers' College	Teachers' College Examination	409
Private schools/ tutors	University of London LLB Years 1 and 2	493

The Programme of Free Education

During the 1970s, the government of Trinidad & Tobago embarked on an ambitious programme of free education for all citizens at both primary and secondary levels. This scheme was financed by oil revenues, and covered teachers' salaries in assisted primary and secondary schools, and refund to the management of assisted schools of two thirds of the annual costs of maintenance and repairs. It also included an additional allocation to the budget of government senior and comprehensive schools, calculated on the basis of the number of students registered for craft and technical programmes. Today, however, the flow of such resources is much diminished. Principals have to supplement their school funds through various projects.

As part of the programme of free education, the government undertook to pay the examination fees of all graduating students in fifth and sixth forms in government and assisted secondary schools. In due course, students

in private secondary schools were also included. However, in 1980 the fall in oil revenues forced the government to cut the education budget. Since 1985, fees for fifth form students have only been paid if those students have attended 75 per cent of classes in their chosen courses by the end of the Easter term, and passed a qualifying examination proving their successful preparation for the external examination. Also, since 1991 students in all newly-registered private secondary schools have been required to pay their own examination fees.

While some provisions have been cut, however, others have been expanded. Since 1980 the government has operated a scholarship programme for university students who are successful in the 'A' Level examination. In 1996 the number of scholarships was increased from 50 to 60, and plans were announced for further expansion. Scholarship holders are contracted to return after completion of their studies, to serve the country for a period equal in length to the duration of their course of studies funded by the government. This provision is part of the attempt to stem the 'brain drain' of professionals who have migrated to North America and the United Kingdom in increasing numbers since the late 1970s.

Mechanics of the System

With the exception of the examinations of the National Examinations Council (NEC), all the tests named in Table 10.1 are administered by the Examinations Section of the Ministry of Education. In 1996, the section had 33 permanent staff and four temporary assistants. The Secretariat of the NEC deals with all national examinations at the craft and technician levels. The Chief Examiner is responsible for all aspects of these examinations, from the development of tests to the issue and publication of results.

The Supervisor of Examinations, in addition to other duties, is Local Secretary or Registrar for several regional and international bodies including the CXC, UCLES and the University of London. In these duties the Supervisor of Examinations is responsible for the administration of examinations, but not for test construction or measurement and evaluation processes.

Expertise to conduct examinations is available at all levels: national, regional and international. However, a distinction must be made between the ability to construct and develop tests along with the necessary measurement and evaluation skills, and the expertise needed to administer tests under conditions that are fair to all. Insufficient expertise is available for the development of tests and for measurement and evaluation services in the national level. The Secretariat of the National Examinations Council and the Division of Educational Research & Evaluation need strengthening in this respect. The Chief Examiner, and to a lesser extent the Supervisor of

Examinations, coopt personnel from other sections of the Ministry of Education and the Faculty of Education of the University of the West Indies, which has a campus in Trinidad, for help in these areas.

The Common Entrance Examination is set by the CXC. In this respect, the regional organisation is meeting national needs. Before the CXC took over this task, the examination was set by the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey, USA. As already noted, the CXC has also replaced UCLES as the main examining agency at the secondary fifth form. However, although the CXC is much closer to home in respect of geographical location, and has a better understanding of local needs, it still does not and cannot perform as a local organisation.

Nevertheless, the CXC has done extremely well in gaining the confidence of a large number of clients during its comparatively short history. It also has advantages in financial terms, especially since the rate of exchange to purchase Barbados dollars is much more favourable than that for pounds sterling.

In the mid-1990s, the CXC decided to launch as a pilot project from 1998 a Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE). If successful, this examination will make further in-roads into the number of candidates sitting the Cambridge and London examinations. In the first instance, CAPE is being made available in seven subjects at 'A' Level: Communication Studies, Caribbean Studies, Functional Spanish, History, Information Technology, Mathematics, and Statistical Analysis. The processes of developing the examination have been complex. However, the positive aspects of CXC's operations over the short period of its existence far outweigh the negative ones and CXC should therefore be given encouragement to proceed with CAPE.

Conclusion

In Trinidad & Tobago, national, regional and international examinations operate side by side. Each plays a role, and the authorities have built a structure geared to harmonise the activities of the various bodies. National examinations dominate the lower levels of the education system, while regional and metropolitan examinations are more evident at the upper level.

This arrangement has evolved over a long period of time. The history of UCLES examinations in Trinidad is well over a century old; and Trinidad & Tobago has been an active partner in CXC affairs from the very beginning, over a quarter of a century ago. National examinations also have a long history. This long history provides stability, though of course

patterns will continue to evolve as broader circumstances change. The main issue likely to dominate debate during the next few years will be the role and status of the CXC Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination.