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**“ACTIVITIES ON STRENGTHENING
PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICES IN TRINIDAD
AND TOBAGO”**

Activity Report



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*The opinions expressed in this document represent the authors' points of view
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Section 1: Parliament Workshop/Training Event on Financial Scrutiny (June 2013)

Introduction

A Parliamentary Workshop/training programme took place on Wednesday 5 June 2013 at the Hyatt Grand Regency Hotel, Port-of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. The exercise formed the final part of a project designed to strengthen the function of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago in two main areas of scrutiny (i) the budget and its implementation and (ii) administration of government departments. The project included the following key elements:

1. A field mission in January 2012 leading to an assessment report identifying the current role played by Parliament in ensuring oversight of the executive through an assessment of the Joint Select Committee (JSCs) and an assessment of Parliament's current role in the budget cycle;
2. A parliamentary workshop in Tobago to debate and discuss the assessment report (July 2012);
3. A staff training workshop on Public Financial Management and Committee Inquiries/Reporting (January 2013).
4. A Study Tour to London, Cardiff and Dublin attended by 9 parliamentarians and 2 parliamentary staff (February 2013).

Wednesday was selected as a convenient day for the June Workshop by the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago because of the lack of parliamentary business on this day. Nataki Atiba-Dilchan, Clerk of the Senate, was responsible for coordinating local arrangements with the Consultant.

Attendance and Participation

It was anticipated that attendance would not reach the levels of the Tobago July Parliamentary Workshop which was attended by 32 of the 40 Members (plus the Speaker) and 23 of the 31 Senators (the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition were also in attendance). The June 2013 Workshop was more focused on practical scrutiny work and there are about 46 different members on oversight committees. Sixteen of the 41 Members and 21 of the 31 senators indicated that they would attend the workshop. In the event 11 Members and nine Senators signed the attendance sheet; a disappointing number but a critical mass was achieved. Regrettably, very few Parliamentarians remained after lunch for the practical training exercise on financial scrutiny in practice.

In addition to parliamentarians there were 30 further attendees, mostly parliamentary staff as well as representatives from the EU delegation and the OAG. It was very useful to have such good attendance from the committee office of Parliament, being the persons who prepare the inquiry proposals and issue papers.

Objectives of the Workshop

The objectives of the event were to provide a status report on the work being done to strengthen Parliament and the OAG since the Assessment Report was circulated; to report back on the lessons learnt from the Study Tour to the United Kingdom and Ireland; and to

provide training on the importance of financial scrutiny both through workshop presentations and a practical training exercise on financial scrutiny.

The programme included opening remarks by the President of the Senate, Charge d'Affaires of the Delegation of the European Union and the National Authorizing Officer. The Speaker provided a keynote address on Strengthening Parliament. The media were present for the official opening and the Speaker's session, but all subsequent sessions took place *in camera*. The working sessions included a report back from the Study tour from Sen. Corinne Baptiste-McKnight and a session on strengthening the Supreme Audit Institution by Gary Peters, Project Liaison Office, OAG. The remaining sessions were led and/or facilitated by the consultant and Larry Honeysett, Head of Finance at the Scrutiny unit.

Mr Peters' participation was obtained through the assistance of the UK National Audit Office which is currently providing support to the Office of the Auditor-General. The Consultant met with representatives of the NAO in London to discuss synergies between the two projects and further discussions took place between the UK NAO and the EU delegation in Port-of-Spain. The UK NAO was invited to organize a briefing to Members to update them on the work being done to strengthen the OAG and the potential impact on Parliament. The UK NAO liaised with the OAG and Gary Peters' presence was confirmed shortly before the workshop

The February 2013 Study Tour included discussions with representatives of the House of Commons Scrutiny Unit. The Unit was established in 2002 to strengthen the scrutiny role of the House (including scrutiny of spending and performance). As a follow-up to the Study Tour, the Consultant met with the Head of the Scrutiny Unit to ask that a representative from the Unit attend the June Workshop as a resource person. Mr Larry Honeysett, Head of Financial Scrutiny, was selected to represent the Unit and his attendance was arranged by the Consultant and funded by the EU delegation (airfare and per diem).

Workshop Summary

The Minister of Planning and the Economy, Sen. the Hon. Bhoendradatt Tewarie, was unable to attend the workshop because of a clash of events, but his opening remarks were delivered by the Mrs. Arlene McComie, Permanent Secretary (PS) at the Ministry.

The PS pointed out that the government has been pursuing other interventions to strengthen the entire budgetary process. The Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development has introduced a National Performance Framework (NPF) 2012-2015 which incorporates measurement and provides a framework to assess progress of the policy agenda. This agenda is articulated in the Medium Term Policy Framework (MTPF) 2011-2014: Innovation for Lasting Prosperity. The PS said this framework will allow individual Ministries and Agencies, the Government as a whole and even Parliament to measure and assess internal and external effectiveness. The First Annual Report on Performance **2012 – Building the Foundation for Results** gives an account of Government's performance on the implementation of specific targets and national outcomes, identified in both the MTPF and the NPF respectively.

A further shift in the approach to executing the development framework is the reintroduction of the Three Year Public Sector Investment Programme for the period 2013-2015. It outlines a three-year investment portfolio of capital projects aligned to the MTPF 2011-2014 and will be the key mechanism for coordinating the implementation of medium-term socio-economic policy objectives. It was also stated that the medium-term outlook to budgeting seeks to effectively link policy, planning budgeting and measurement of performance.

In his keynote address, the Speaker informed participants of wider projects being undertaken by the Parliament toward overall institutional strengthening. The focus of a project with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are the production of a Strategic Plan; the drafting of legislation for the establishment of a new corporate management structure (which has been approved by the Cabinet but is awaiting implementation); the development of strategies for enhanced constituency outreach and interaction with civil society; an assessment of the legislative process itself; and consideration of ways in which the procedures can include wider public consultation and consensus building in law making. Alongside these partnerships efforts are also being made to address matters internal to the Parliament; most significantly a comprehensive revision of the Standing Orders (SO).

Sen. Corinne Baptiste-McKnight, chairperson of JSC 1, gave an excellent summary of the lessons learnt from the Study Tour. She placed particular importance on the following areas:

- The statutory provisions restricting the size of the executive in both Wales and Ireland and the need for a smaller Cabinet to ensure a larger parliamentary component for the oversight committees in Trinidad and Tobago.
- The degree of scrutiny on the Welsh First Minister through First Minister's Questions and the Scrutiny of the First Minister Committee.
- The work of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Public Service Oversight and Petitions.
- The structure and role of the corporate bodies recently established in both jurisdictions as an example for Trinidad and Tobago.
- The stringent financial oversight taking place in both countries, particularly through the Finance Committee in Wales which considers the use of resources by the Assembly Commission or Welsh Ministers, including reporting during the annual budget round.
- The role of the Scrutiny Unit in the UK when undertaking financial scrutiny.
- Far shorter speaking limits in Wales and Ireland compared to Trinidad and Tobago (currently 45 minutes plus a possible 30 minute extension).
- The job of a member is treated as a full-time occupation in all the countries visited. This, she argued, is the fundamental issue facing Trinidad and Tobago.

Gary Peters, OAG, provided an update on the progress made in pursuing its strategic objectives through collaboration with the IDB and UK National Audit Office (NAO). The project involves a new Financial Audit Manual, a new Value for Money Manual, a functional Quality Assurance Unit to provide guidance across the AGD and ensure compliance with new manuals and INTOSAI standards. In terms of strengthening the legislative framework, issues to be addressed by the programme include the need for a clear mandate to conduct VFM audits in state controlled entities and audits in parliamentary and public interest. Deficiencies within the existing Exchequer and Audit Act were cited as a problem in this regard. Mr Peters

also argued that there has to be similar efforts to improve financial management from the ministries and other public bodies. There was some scepticism expressed from Parliamentarians at the speed of change within the OAG and its capacity to achieve the required outputs and also deliver real outcomes.

In his opening presentation, Larry Honeysett explained the purpose of financial scrutiny was far broader than commonly found and closely related to scrutiny of policies, programmes and their implementation. The primary question, he argued, is about delivering value for money for citizens.

Mr Honeysett argued that obtaining good information is important, but if unavailable it should not be used as an excuse not to undertake financial scrutiny. He said it is often easy to reduce Parliament's financial role to one of simply approving the funds, and looking after the event at how the money has been spent. Key questions for the different stages of financial scrutiny include the following:

- At the outset, what are the policy aims - how is the policy determined, and was cost a consideration?
- What is the strategy for delivering on that policy? Is it clear what it is trying to achieve?
- When it comes down to delivery, are the delivery mechanisms chosen likely to be effective, and do they offer value for money?
- When it comes to implementation - has this been well planned? Is it implemented on time and budget and in a cost effective way?
- Is what you are trying to achieve being monitored? Has the spending actually altered outcomes, or would it have happened anyway?
- And when completed, was the outcome a success? How could it be improved in the future? Could this feed back into future similar delivery and implementation plans?

The Consultant then summarised some of the key points from the Assessment Report which linked into the need to improve and mainstream financial scrutiny throughout the work of Parliament. Deficiencies in the current budget process were highlighted and the Consultant argued that financial scrutiny in Trinidad and Tobago fitted the description articulated by Mr Honeysett of being largely retrospective and focusing on government policies and decisions already made (ex post). He suggested that the current practice for the JSCs to provide oversight on the non-financial aspects of the operations of government department and other entities should be re-examined. Further comments from this session are included in Section II of this report.

The afternoon session was devoted to looking at how financial scrutiny can work in practice. The session started with Larry Honeysett setting out some examples of the type of areas and lines of questioning and analysis that can be helpful in bringing out issues. He then applied this analysis to some overarching issues within the Trinidad and Tobago Public Sector Investment Programme 2013.

- Decision making process
- Risks

- Value for Money
- Asset Management
- Liabilities
- Project Management
- Audit
- Outcomes and performance.

Participants then split into a number of groups to take a look at one or more of the strategic priority areas of the programme before reporting back to the entire group. The session was facilitated by Mr Honeysett and the Consultant.

Section 11: Results and Progress since January 2012

One issue – which has been repeated by several stakeholders over the last 18 months – is that real sustained change may require constitutional, statutory or societal changes, for example by ensuring a smaller Cabinet and treating the job of a Parliamentarian as a full-time activity. Yet some results and progress are evident since this project started although specific outcomes are mixed.

At a general level, the report has served to meet the required outputs of upgrading know-how on relevant parliamentary procedures and precedents and best practices within the region and elsewhere. The four events that have taken place since the preparation of the Assessment Report have ensured that a good number of Members and Senators, as well as other interested stakeholders such as the OAG, have read the report and considered the information pertaining to good practices and techniques in achieving accountability whether through budgetary monitoring/scrutiny of budget accounts or through committee inquiries. The report is also available on the parliamentary website and it has been quoted in the media and in other parliamentary publications (such as Crosstalk). It is anticipated that the information contained in the report will inform the Strategic Plan and review of the SOs.

The terms of reference of the assignment include the output of strengthening the capacity of serving Clerks. The participation and cooperation of parliamentary staff has been excellent throughout the programme, noticeably in the staff training exercise in January 2012 and also in the practical financial scrutiny training exercise undertaken at the recent workshop. Efforts being made by clerks to use elements of the Assessment Report and the project's activities to improve the operations of the JSCs and the PAC/PAEC deserve special mention (examples are given below). Four clerks are currently taking part in an executive staff training programme, an exclusive learning programme involving a one week residency at McGill University and expert moderated e-learning courses on democratic development and parliaments, institutional accountability, corporate management, and legislation. The programme is offered by the World Bank Institute (WBI) and McGill University in collaboration with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Parliamentary Centre.

In addition to the one week residency and moderated eLearning courses, participants are provided with one-on-one professional mentoring to help participants address the most developmentally critical thematic areas for your parliament. All participants are also required to complete a practical research project based on their own parliament. The Consultant has

been asked by the WBI to act as the supervisor for the 4 clerks from Trinidad and Tobago and projects are being devised to follow-up the key areas from the Assessment Report.

In terms of the committees in operation, tangible improvements are evident in the work of the three JSCs with less positive outcomes evident within the PAC, PAEC and in financial oversight generally.

JSCs

The Assessment Report highlights some of the discrepancies in the SOs of the Senate and the SOs of the House of Representatives in relation to the JSCs. The current review of the SOs of the House offers an opportunity for these inconsistencies to be rectified. While the SOs of the Senate are not currently under review, the Speaker of the House told the workshop that he is “certain that the Senate will be doing the same [reviewing the SOs] in the near future”.

The review of the SOs may also ensure the weaknesses identified in Parliament’s scrutiny of the budget and estimates can be addressed by ensuring the JSCs – or a new committee – give appropriate emphasis on financial aspects and the value for money of government departments.

One of the options which could be considered is a new SO which prevents Ministers from being members of Departmental Joint Select Committees. While this may be difficult in all cases (because of the size of the Parliament and the size of the Cabinet), it should be possible to state in the SOs that any such appointment should avoid occurrences of conflict of interest (i.e. a Minister should not be appointed to a Committee that oversees his/her Ministry). Ensuring that Ministers are members of the JSCs in limited numbers would be a sensible step until as such a time that it is possible to reduce the size of the executive (by statute or by agreement). The governing party could also be encouraged by the Presiding Officers to restrict membership of committees to Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries rather than Ministers.

The Assessment Report also states that the practice of including rules about party membership may indicate a lack of confidence in the committee system (strict rules about party participation may prevent the committee from operating by giving a veto power to any group and proceedings may be suspended at any time by a walkout). The draft SOs could address this issue by ensuring that there are no further qualifications to a numerical quorum.

The Assessment Report also suggests that the size of the JSCs could be reduced from 12 to 10 Members to reflect the size of the Parliament and to alleviate some of the pressures on parliamentarians and perhaps enable the creation of further committees. This suggestion has received little support within Parliament. A number of new committees have been suggested in the draft Strategic Plan and the Parliament may wish to reflect whether this increase is sustainable under current rules and practices. There is also a danger that the progress made by the JSCs in the Tenth Parliament could be jeopardized if a number of new committees are formed causing further pressures on the workload of the members of the JSCs.

Current SO 79 states that a JSC shall elect its own chairman which, in effect, allows the government to determine the Chair. The current executive has taken the approach that the JSCs should be chaired from one of the nine independent senators and this has been

universally welcomed as assisting the work of the committees. This practice should be formalized in the revised rules of procedure.

There has been little progress in the engagement of civil society in the work of Parliament, but this forms part of the draft strategic plan as well as the support programme with UNDP.

Members and Senators remain very appreciative of the work carried out by parliamentary staff. The Assessment Report suggests that the committees may have to be more proactive in demanding the annual reports to ensure proper oversight on that particular entity performance in its roles and responsibilities. There is now a rigorous procedure within the Committees Unit for tracking outstanding reports (although the number of outstanding reports from entities remains a concern). The Committee Unit has also produced some an excellent Inquiry Proposal and subsequent issue paper for JSC 2 on the administration and operations of the Ministry of National Security with special interest on efforts at maintaining law and order.

The JSCs continue to meet regularly. The Assessment report reported that the JSCs met on 7 or 8 occasions in the First Session (June 2010 – June 2011). The table below updates this information by showing the number of meetings held during the period June 2011 to June 2013.

Table 1: Total number of Meetings held by JSCs, PAC & PAEC for the Tenth Parliament in Trinidad and Tobago

COMMITTEE	JSC GROUP ONE	JSC GROUP TWO	JSC MCSC	PAC	PAEC
First Session (18 June 2010 – 17 June 2011)	7	8	8	8	7
Second Session to date (July 2011 – June 2013)	12	13	12	6	13
Total (June 2010 – 20 Jan2012)	19	21	20	14	20
Number of Reports Laid	6 (2 by Jan 2012)	9 (2 by Jan 2012)	8 (0 by Jan 2012)	0	0
Ministerial Reponses Received	0	7	1	N/A	N/A
Draft Reports Pending	2	4	3	5	3

The Assessment Report states that the major issue facing the three JSCs concern the outputs and outcomes from the work of the committees. Outputs from committees are usually defined as the product of activity caused by that committee. The main formal output is the report and their recommendations, but wider activity will include parliamentary debates and media coverage, as well as the government response.

The number of reports produced by the JSCs is increasing and as outputs increase, it should be possible to track outcomes although this will necessitate a response by the relevant

government ministry or entity to the report's recommendations. The establishment of a Committee of Government Assurances could be considered as such committees scrutinize the assurances, promises and undertakings given by Ministers. If operational, this Committee could become a useful device for following up Ministerial responses to JSC reports and recommendations. However, there is still a need to clarify the responsibilities of the Service Commissions in terms of responding to reports and recommendations. It may also be necessary for the JSCs to call back those ministries/entities that have not responded to JSC recommendations.

Moving forward, the JSCs provide an opportunity for a closer link between budgetary allocations and departmental performance. There are published documents available which should be used by the Parliament and JSCs to scrutinize the performance of government. These include the National Performance Framework 2012-2015; Annual Report on Performance 2012; the Medium Term Policy Framework 2011-2014; and the Public Sector Investment Programme 2013. At present these documents are under-scrutinized and under-utilized. Committee clerks/researchers should draw on this material in their briefings to Members so they can be used as part of general committee Inquiries/Hearings. Such documents will also be an important resource for the new financial scrutiny officer (see proposal below).

The chairpersons of the JSC 1 and JSC 2 may wish to meet with the Monitoring and Evaluation Units (M/E) of some of the key ministries that are working with the EU Delegation (Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment and Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development) as well as the National Transformation Unit (NTU) at the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development which is in charge of coordinating the effort of establishing the M/E units across all ministries as well as producing the annual performance reports for the national strategy. Such a meeting could share ideas and expectations and the NTU could present to the JSC where they stand in introducing the M/E units and improving reporting on national performance and the M/E units could tell how this translates into action in the ministries. One strategy would be for the two chairpersons to meet informally with the relevant individuals for a private briefing to be followed by a joint meeting of the JSCs (permissible under the SOs) with the NTU (given the relevance to both JSCs) and then separate meetings/Inquiries (Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development falls under the JSC Group I and Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment falls under JSC 2) to review the work being carried out by the executive to link policy, budgeting and measurement of performance.

PARLIAMENT AND THE BUDGET

Progress has been slow in the area of parliamentary oversight of the budget and financial scrutiny more generally. Sustained changes may require revision of the Exchequer and Audit Act which details the functions of the Ministry of Finance and OAG.

The Minister of Finance accepted at the Parliamentary Workshop in Tobago (July 2012) that ex-ante review is difficult because of the timing for the laying for the documents in Parliament as well as the volume of documents to be laid. He also agreed the presentation of estimates based on 'items of expenditure' limits the comparison between statements made in other documents and the estimates of expenditure. He proposed that some documents such as

the ‘Estimates of Expenditure’, ‘Review of the Economy’ and the ‘Medium-Term Policy Framework’ could be laid 2 weeks prior to the Budget Presentation and Debate. This is some progress, but there is no timetable for implementation.

The Speaker wrote to the Minister of Finance and the Economy in September 2012 asking for further discussion in the following areas.

- Preparation and laying in Parliament of Pre-budget reports
- Laying of Draft Estimates of Expenditure two weeks prior to the Budget Statement
- Preparation and laying in Parliament of Mid-year financial reports
- Ensuring the timely submission of financial reports by State Enterprises
- Review of legislation governing the operation of the Office of Auditor General

No further progress has been made to date and the onus is likely to be on Parliament to arrange a meeting to take these matters forward.

Parliament is not being used as a means of injecting an element of public opinion into the formulation of the budget. As well as the lack of formal inputs, the Parliament does not appear to exercise any *informal* influence over the pre-budget process. Until such a time that the executive agrees to produce and release a pre-budget report to be debated in plenary and examined by a parliamentary committee or committees in line with international good practice, the only option available is for the JSCs, or perhaps a new Joint Committee, to hold a hearing and/or Inquiry on some of the relevant ministries’ plans for the forthcoming year. This would ensure increased interaction between the Parliament and ministers or departmental officials and allow parliamentary committee to give advice and provide suggestions on the future direction of services and programs.

In terms of scrutiny of the annual budget, only 5 of the 11 days available for debate and scrutiny are used. This is largely because the Finance Committee only uses a small fraction of the 7 days allocated to it. The Assessment Report suggested options to bridge this gap, including holding the Finance Committee meeting in public, the presiding officer chairing the meeting (instead of the Minister of Finance) with the aid of a parliamentary clerk (rather than an official from the Minister of Finance). There does not seem to be any political will to change the chairmanship and servicing of the Finance Committee. However, the revised SOs could include other measures to empower the Committee, such as giving it the right to send for relevant Accounting Officers and technocrats to provide information to the Committee. The Opposition could also be given the right, in the case of debate on the Estimates of Expenditure, to determine the order in which the heads of expenditure shall be considered. If no reform of the finance committee is possible, a new committee or the JSCs could use this period to conduct a hearing under their purview to report back to the Finance Committee.

The Assessment Report points out that monitoring of government spending is limited to approval of the supplementary Appropriation Bill and the lack of and late information can make it difficult to work out the significance or reasons for the changes. Again this responsibility could be entrusted to the JSCs or a new committee if the Finance Committee is unable to perform this scrutiny role satisfactorily (it does not seem unreasonable for the

existing JSCs to dedicate one meeting at each of the pre-budget, budget approval and budget implementation stages to examine financial aspects of a ministry/entity under their purview).

The creation of a new JSC on Public Administration and Appropriation is a further option which could be considered to examine and monitor the budgetary expenditure of Government Agencies and enquire into their administration in order to make recommendations to the Government for improvement of public administration. A new committee could be a welcome addition if the political will exists to make it operational and if practice and procedure would allow it to report to the Standing Finance Committee at the time of the Main Budget and any supplementary Appropriation Bill.

The Parliament still lacks technical capacity for financial scrutiny and a financial officer/officer would be required to provide analysis and support on financial issues to the JSCs, Finance Committee and the proposed JSC on Public Administration and Appropriation¹. This would be in keeping with the global trend to establish budget units and/or financial expertise within legislatures. It is encouraging that such a position is included in the draft strategic plan. Until the Parliament obtains financial and administrative autonomy from the executive, such a post will require the support of the executive.

There has been little progress in showing any direct impact on the ex-post review of expenditure on the wider budgetary process/financial system. The PAC and PAEC have made some attempt to review the entities which fail to submit financial reports in accordance with the Exchequer and Audit Act by writing and asking for status updates from audited entities and it makes practical sense to group financial statements even further to clear the backlog (such grouping should ignore election dates/changes of government). The new SOs should remove the discrepancy whereby there is no requirement on the executive to respond to the PAC/PAEC. Yet the AG's Office remains under-utilized: it is rather on the periphery of the PAC and has very little involvement in the PAEC. A request was made to the AG by the Clerk of the House in September 2012 for discussion on supporting action to the following:

- Oversight of State Enterprises by Office of Auditor General to ensure timely submission to Parliament of financial reports
- Support of the operations of the Public Accounts and Public Accounts Enterprises Committees through the provision of audit and budget review services.

To date no further progress has been made. The PAC/PAEC may wish to take up these matters with the Auditor-General in a public session at a later date.

There has been little progress in improving the outputs of the two committees, despite a satisfactory number of meetings (see table 1). The PAEC has had 20 meetings in the tenth Parliament and examined five entities (the committee has 75 entities under its purview). This is relative to the JSCs although the number of PAC meetings is below average. However, neither the PAC nor the PAEC have produced a report although there are draft reports

¹ The PAC has acquired the services of a financial analyst to assist its work when the committee so wishes. Consideration should be given to extending this support to the PAEC. It is also normal to expect these committees to have the support of the Audit Office at their disposal.

awaiting approval. There does not appear any other explanation for this lack of output other than a lack of political will amongst the committee members themselves. Motivation may be lacking because there is no requirement under current practice for the executive to respond to PAC/PAEC reports/recommendations.

The Assessment report suggested that the committees should consider the merits of a more strategic and needs-based approach. It is therefore encouraging that the PAEC has recently approved a new work programme as follows:

- i. At the end of the session, Members of the Committee should identify and agree to twenty entities for examination in the next session;
- ii. The Secretary will prepare a work schedule showing possible dates for meetings and proposed timelines for the completion of each inquiry;
- iii. The Secretary to the Committee will write to the entities to obtain management letters for the period to be examined;
- iv. The Secretary will also write to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy to obtain the notes to the financial statements²
- v. The PAEC Secretariat will review the audited financial statements, notes to the financial statements and management letters and prepare an Inquiry Proposal for the Committee's consideration;
- vi. The Inquiry Proposal will outline the following areas:
 - a. Focus of Inquiry
 - b. Background
 - c. Company Profile
 - d. Objective of Inquiry
 - e. Proposed Questions
 - f. Possible Sources of Oral Evidence
 - g. Other Possible Sources of Date
 - h. Timeline for Inquiry; and
 - i. Possible sources of Public submissions
- vii. Once the committee agrees on the Inquiry Proposal the objective of the inquiry and the questions can be forwarded to the entity for written responses to be provided;
- viii. Once received the PAEC Secretariat will prepare an Issue Paper for the Committee's consideration. This Issue Paper will identify and summarize any issues in the responses provided by the entity;
- ix. The Issue Paper will identify concerns that can be raised in such areas such as:
 - a. Decision making process
 - b. Risks
 - c. Value for Money
 - d. Asset Management
 - e. Liabilities
 - f. Project Management
 - g. Audit Issues; and
 - h. Outcomes and Performance

² The PAEC may also want to write to the AG and ask for her comments on the information and the Issues Paper that is later prepared by the PAEC Secretariat.

- x. When written submissions are returned by the entity, the Committee will review the responses and determine whether there is a need to have a public hearing with the entity or whether it would be more productive to report its findings and recommendations to Parliament based solely on this “written” examination of the entity.

The PAEC believe the benefits of the New Work Programme are that it would allow the Committee to plan its work schedule for each session more effectively; identify trends across entities and sectors with the increased number of entities being examined; a well-defined focus to Inquiries; a reduction in the number of times the Committee is required to meet with an entity in public; and allow interested persons and stakeholders to submit evidence.

The PAEC is to be congratulated for this decision and it is hoped that the PAC will also follow this example and re-examine its own work programme. It should be noticed that the AG welcomed the Assessment Report’s suggestion that an annual review of the performance of the office of the AG with the budget and business plan of the AG being presented to the PAC. Another key consideration could be an Inquiry into the Exchequer and Audit Act in order to highlight problems, propose changes and develop some momentum for reform. For example the mechanism to compel entities to submit their financial reports on time (a fine of just T\$150) is hardly a significant sum to act as a convincing deterrence. It is also unclear whether appropriate procedures are in place for enforcing this provision and whether it is the accounting officer in the line ministry or the accounting officers in the statutory boards, municipalities and Commissions who are accountable. Indeed, the Service Commissions do not currently have Accounting Officers which makes accountability difficult to pin down in practice. This could be dealt with under the aforementioned review.

The Consultant would like to thank the Parliament and Government of Trinidad and Tobago for the support provided throughout the duration of the project. The Consultant is very grateful to staff at Parliament for their assistance and would like to acknowledge the excellent support provided by the Clerk of the Senate and her project team over the course of the programme. In addition to this progress report, the Consultant will put together a road-map to support the Parliament move forward and implement some of the project’s findings.