

The Evolving Landscape of Data Privacy: Implications for Caribbean Higher Education in the Digital Age

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In an era of rapid digital transformation, data privacy has become a critical concern for higher education institutions worldwide. Caribbean higher education institutions, in particular, face unique challenges as they navigate an evolving regulatory landscape shaped by both global and regional data protection frameworks, such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Jamaican Data Protection Act, 2020. These institutions must also grapple with the growing adoption of cloud-based systems, online learning platforms, and artificial intelligence-driven educational tools, all of which raise significant concerns in respect of the collection, storage, processing, and sharing of personal data.

This paper examines how the evolving nature of data privacy is reshaping Caribbean higher education, focusing on key areas such as institutional data governance, compliance obligations, cross-border data transfers, and the ethical management of student and staff data. As educational institutions increasingly digitise their operations, they must address risks associated with cybersecurity threats, data breaches, and unauthorised access to sensitive information. Additionally, institutions must ensure that their data privacy policies align with legal requirements while fostering trust among students, staff, and external stakeholders.

A major challenge lies in balancing regulatory compliance with the demand for digital innovation. Many Caribbean higher educational institutions rely on global technology providers for cloud storage, video conferencing, and learning management systems, often resulting in the transfer of personal data beyond national borders. This raises questions about data sovereignty, jurisdictional conflicts, and the role of institutional autonomy in determining how data is managed. Moreover, students and staff expect seamless access to digital resources, personalised learning experiences, and data-driven academic support, requiring institutions to implement robust privacy frameworks without stifling innovation.

To address these challenges, this paper proposes a multi-faceted approach that includes privacy-by-design principles, staff and student training programmes, transparent data processing policies, and strategic partnerships with regulatory authorities and technology providers. By embedding

data privacy into institutional culture and technological infrastructure, Caribbean higher education institutions can manage risks, uphold ethical data management practices, and ensure that they remain at the forefront of academic excellence in an increasingly digital world.