

6. Regional Approach to Training in the English-speaking Caribbean

This section briefly summarizes the on-going work within the Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies, CANTA. Further, the paper presents and evaluates the possibilities for future collaboration and national qualification frameworks in the Caribbean, including considerations regarding the feasibility and desirability of a common, open market for provision of training in the region. It concludes with a discussion of information, research, planning and human resource development for the region.

6.1 The Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies

As introduced earlier, several countries in the English-speaking Caribbean including Barbados, Jamaica, the OECS/OERU, and Trinidad and Tobago have entered into a Memorandum of Association that establishes the Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies, CANTA. This association is intended to be a platform to share occupational standards, and to provide for mutual recognition of technical and vocational certificates. Implicit in this mutual recognition is the common approach to organizing training programs based on occupational standards pegged to employment at five levels of responsibility, accountability and autonomy, and based on the use of “authentic assessment” methods. This is intended to facilitate the implementation of the free movement of skilled labor provisions within the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME). A working committee of CARICOM is presently trying to solve the questions related to the free movement of skilled workers, having already established provisions for professional, entertainment, and sport personnel.

At present, each country has its own National Vocational Qualification Framework, and an attempt in 2003 to harmonize them resulted in a proposed Caribbean Regional Qualifications Framework. These different frameworks are included in the Appendix.

Jamaica, as the most advanced and well-resourced NTA, is taking on the responsibility to operate a Secretariat for CANTA. A Conference in Jamaica is planned for early December 2004 entitled *Workforce Competitiveness for Regional Integration*. This is intended as a CANTA platform for promoting the workforce education and training concepts espoused by the different national training agencies and TVET councils, i.e. the framework for training based on occupational standards, organized into five levels of employment, assessed according to competency-based principles, and intended to provide an articulated pathway from level to level.

HEART Trust/NTA and NCTVET have provided a considerable amount of technical assistance to Bahamas, St. Lucia, Guyana, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada. The NCTVET actively certifies personnel, mostly in Early Childhood Care, Education & Development, to the Bahamas, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. There is a plan now being implemented to assess and certify 378 persons in a variety of skill areas in six OECS countries.

Jamaica has instituted important changes in the way it structures standards and provides assessment, moving toward the Australian and New Zealand models. The NCTVET's National Qualification Register (www.nqrjamaica.org) contains the standards, and how the different unit competencies are built into qualifications. There are currently 1071 unit competency standards and 128 qualification pathways listed on the site, as well as information on Accredited Training Organizations (ATOs) and Registered Assessors. The number of standards and qualifications should almost double by next year. The NCTVET is decentralizing the process of assessment in Jamaica, with its own agents now functioning as quality assurance personnel, this after seven years of operating a centralized system. To continue certifying individuals from other countries, however, the capacity of NCTVET to coordinate and provide these services, despite its centralization in Jamaica, needs to be considered. After all, it is not likely to be efficient for every OECS country to have its own certification apparatus.

6.2 National Qualification Frameworks and a Regional Qualification Framework

Countries taking lifelong learning and the recognition of skills development seriously including the U.K., Australia and New Zealand have adopted the concept of a national qualifications framework (NQF) in efforts to create a more

Box 2: What is a National Qualifications Framework?

The development of national qualification frameworks (NQFs) represents one of the main initiatives in addressing the challenges of qualification reforms. An NQF is essentially a framework which classifies and registers qualifications, according to a set of nationally agreed standards/criteria for levels of learning/skills obtained.

An NQF needs to be distinguished from a national qualification system which broadly encompasses the combination of all qualifications available in the country and the institutions, processes and mechanisms which support the provision of qualifications. An NQF should not be regarded, however, simply as a matrix that indicates how different qualifications relate to each other. An NQF is defined also by distinctive ways of developing, organising and providing qualifications. In an NQF, qualifications consist of a set of nationally agreed standards/criteria which are classified at different levels. Qualifications are provided on the basis of obtaining competencies (or expected learning outcomes) stipulated by these standards.

This means that gaining a qualification is no longer associated with “what goes into the learning” whether it is a specific learning time, place, or instructions of particular education or training institutions. An NQF yields a pattern of learning that is not bounded by time or location but which can better support learning across different learning pathways (i.e. academic and vocational), or integrate formal and non-formal learning, notably learning in the workplace.

In Focus Program on Skills, Knowledge and Employability, ILO, 2004 at <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/skills/recogn/4.htm>

seamless connection between learning in school, learning at work, learning skills at different levels, and learning across industries. There is evidence that the reforms to Australia's training system have increased the number of persons with qualifications and increased the number of qualifications per person, while bringing a significant number of older workers, rural individuals and members of minority groups (Karmel and Nguyen, 2003).

Within an NQF, the most important feature is that the way programs are developed ensures the relevance of training to labor market needs.

At present, Jamaica has launched its concept of an NQF for Jamaica (see Appendix), but this is quite new, and it faces challenges in gaining acceptance for the framework, especially within tertiary education. Tertiary institutions have resisted the NQF in Australia and New Zealand, as they tend to object to the prescriptive assessment procedures.

The certification frameworks of the NTATT and the TVET Council are essentially similar to Jamaica's NQF. There are minor variations in how the levels are described, and minor variations in the naming of qualifications at different levels. This can readily be sorted out, and a preliminary effort was made to achieve this via CARICOM last year (see Appendix).

6.3 Information, Research and Planning

Conducting this overview of training in the region has highlighted the information gaps that exist in the region and the challenges of information management, storage, retrieval and sharing. In Trinidad and Tobago and in Barbados there is no central repository of information on training. This is related to the independent operation of training programs by the Ministry of Labor and Ministry of Education in Barbados and the positioning of the NTATT in Trinidad and Tobago to deal with skills training, but not skills training in the tertiary sector, even though all of this is concentrated in the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education where NTATT is also placed. St. Lucia is less fragmented because the training is concentrated in the Ministry of Education.

The labor market information that is available is usually inadequate for the effective planning of training programs. In general, national labor market surveys are conducted using sample sizes that only allow for disaggregating the data down to the level of employment by sectors and broad occupational groups. In other words, one can see changes in labor demand in construction or tourism,

or in technicians or clerical workers, but one cannot tell how many computer programmers there are, or how many electricians. A number of initiatives to establish effective and useful labor market information systems have fallen short of expectations in Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago.

Key targets for growth, e.g. information technology and tourism, are not effectively isolated in the data. Only a limited amount of the data collected is actually published, and it is not generally possible to obtain the raw data from the statistical agencies. The statistical data emphasis, in general, is on macroeconomics, education and poverty, not on labor markets and training.

Training agencies conduct sector studies, tracer studies and employer surveys, but the frequency and timeliness of these studies is variable and limited by resource constraints. Trinidad & Tobago's NTATT is currently conducting a tracer study of secondary school leavers, a training providers' survey and an employer survey on training needs, the National Skills Needs Assessment. HEART Trust/NTA conducts tracer studies, sector studies and employer surveys regularly, but continues to struggle with matching offerings to labor market trends, because it simply cannot compensate adequately for a national labor data collection deficiency. There is no systematic research on the impact of training programs on productivity.

The amount, kind and level of research is also an issue as is the dissemination of research findings and their use to generate needed changes. This appears especially true in Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago and the OECS. INFOTEP and HEART Trust/NTA have some research capability, but the availability of the research is limited, there is not all that much of it, and much of it is more descriptive. Good training needs analysis in terms of sector studies is scarce, and the tracer studies have problems with response rates and the amount of explanatory analysis conducted on outcomes of training. Economies of scale of a regional approach might be indicated here as well as in provision of training.

Planning of training is a specialized field, and there is not much in the region that would prepare professionals in this field. The actual planning experiences suggest, however, that more formal planning processes, including developing consistent measures of the performance of training programs and their support services, has a substantial effect in improving the metrics of the training organizations. Introduction of Logical Framework methodology or the Balanced Scorecard approach shows potential to improve the year-to-year performance of the systems.

6.4 Development of Human Resources for the Training System

The human resources of the training systems are a vital element in ensuring their relevance and effectiveness. Finding instructors who both possess a skill and know how to impart that skill is a challenge, especially in some of the more traditional areas, as the basic academic achievement of instructors is low and is an impediment to the professionalization of these instructors. Most instructors, until a few years ago, had a diploma related both to the skill and to providing instruction. Many began as craft-persons and took a relatively short course on providing instruction. Now the prevailing view is that instructors or trainers need a bachelor's degree, but many of the trainers with the actual job skills lack the educational prerequisites to be regarded as tertiary material and therefore have difficulty matriculating into degree programs, and sometimes those with the degree lack the industry experience and exposure to know the skill and the industry sufficiently. Because of this, the systems have to put in place mechanisms to treat the problems and qualify instructors with non-traditional recognition (such as an NVQ and recognition of prior learning). Strong programs of periodic industrial attachment are a necessity, especially for the cadre of trainers that work in institutions and centers in the region.

As the technical demands on training systems have grown, the need to develop technical specialists with skills in standards development, designing assessments, developing training materials, planning, cost accounting, job placement, career guidance, etc. has become an important part of the work of the training agencies and certainly has provided scope for regional collaborative efforts. Several influential initiatives were undertaken by GTZ, for example in 2002-03 to expose the region to planning and training needs analysis methodologies, among other skills.

For managers, the VTDI in Jamaica has developed both a Management Development Program and a Leadership Development Program for TVET. Scope for regional participation is intended in the design and roll-out of these relatively new programs.

The biggest challenge of HRD for vocational training is that many of the staff have non-professional origins in the trades or as low level instructors, but also suffer from a lack of recent industry exposure.

6.5 Scope for a Regional Training Market

There is already a regional market for training, but it is quite small and often based on bi-lateral arrangements rather than upon students and learners looking for regional opportunities. The problem is that most of the institutions are not very large and all of their capacity is filled with local learners, and the cost structure is not conducive to participants from abroad.

The discussion of unit costs in Jamaica, however, shows how larger institutions may be more efficient and that larger institutions might provide more scope for regional participation, especially since specialized institutions may be more viable with a regional element from a financing point of view.

CANTA could be a platform for providing a set of consistent programs aimed at the professional cadres, possibly by establishing centers of excellence for particular areas. Exchange of personnel could also be particularly useful. For example, Trinidad and Tobago has some strong institutions related to manufacturing and industrial maintenance (MIC and NESI) that could strengthen the NTEI in Jamaica, while the Runaway Bay training hotel in Jamaica might assist other countries in how to operate an effective training hotel.

