REGIONAL INTEGRATION OF TVET SYSTEMS AMONG SMALL ISLAND STATES: CARIBBEAN INITIATIVES

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Index: Regional integration, vocational qualifications, developing countries, trends

Abstract: States in the Caribbean Community (Caricom) are exploring regional integration of TVET as a means of improving the quality of training to enable improved worker performance and labour market mobility of workers in the region. This involves reaching a consensus on (1) the basis for design of training programmes, e.g. the approach to standards, use of competency-based approaches, etc., and (2) the framework for recognition and certification of trainees/workers that facilitates upward mobility and lifelong learning. Current efforts to achieve regional integration are discussed with issues and problems highlighted for discussion.

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation has illuminated the need for countries to improve their VET systems as one ingredient for competitive, high performance firms and more competitive economies. Workers need to be trained to employer-defined standards, with more emphasis on flexibility, on working in teams and on problem analysis and problem solving. VET systems have responded with industry-led standards, new curricula that emphasize the new skill profiles, and recognition systems that certify competencies and articulate movement among levels and kinds of education and training experiences.

The Need for Integration

The members of the Caribbean Community (Caricom) adopted a common strategy in 1990 to improve Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in all the member states along common lines. The more advanced states, Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, and Barbados are now integrating their recognition systems within a common framework and the other members are being invited to participate in this regional recognition framework. In addition to recognition of competence there is a need for greater integration of TVET provisions to avoid duplication of effort and achieve economies of scale in areas like instructor training and production of training materials.

Along with the changes required by globalisation, within the Caribbean region the need for freer movement of labour among neighbouring and similar states collectively known as Caricom has emerged as a means to improve the flexibility of the labour market and widen job opportunities for Caricom nationals. Member countries have signed agreements allowing freer movement of skilled labour under new provisions for a Single Market and Economy (SM&E), but these agreements require a shared framework for recognition of occupations. At present, graduates of the regional university, the University of the West Indies, journalists, recognised professionals, professional athletes and entertainers enjoy such freedom of movement. These initiatives in TVET have potential to allow much greater scope for movement of skilled labour across boundaries.
Possibilities for Integration

The occupational competence recognition systems in various stages of development in Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago and Barbados are similar with each using the British and especially the Scottish approach to recognition in the form of National Vocational Qualifications. In the nine Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) countries there is interest in reforming TVET along lines consistent with the current regional integration. Furthermore, the 1990s have seen the emergence of National Training Agencies or National TVET Councils in five Caribbean countries (Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados, St. Lucia, and Antigua, with the last two in formative stages). All the countries express a desire for a standards-driven, competency-based approach already underway in three countries. The award of National Vocational Qualification in three countries can be converted into a Caribbean Vocational Qualification given sufficient co-operation by these countries. OECS countries would participate under an umbrella established jointly by the OECS Secretariat and the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC).

The Framework for Regional Integration

The framework for regional integration includes a consensus as to (1) a Technical Operating Model, (2) agreement about the definition of Levels of Employment, and (3) agreement as to an overall Certification or Recognition Framework. The three charts attached as Appendices show the proposed framework now under consideration by the various countries. The framework includes a common approach to:

- Developing Occupational Standards based on input from employers;
- Developing Curricula: instructional design, curriculum guides, training materials, assessment methodologies;
- Defining Occupational Levels and corresponding recognition levels using a five level framework;
- Defining a Certification Framework that relates these levels to formal education and, loosely, to timeframes for work experience;
- Execution of a Memorandum of Understanding, and
- Establishment of a Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies (CANTA).

Issues and Problems in Regional Integration

The discussion of various issues and problems pertinent to the particular region can be generalised to other systems seeking to integrate recognition of qualifications. The main issues include:

- The dilemma of integrating Technical Education in secondary education into the vocational framework: there are barriers to articulation with a vocational training system with multiple and advanced levels and work experience requirements. Technical Education articulates well with the tertiary level via CXC, an academic qualification that includes a number of technical subjects, but these subjects are not defined based on employer standards and they terminate as secondary education qualifications without connection to actual occupations in the workplace.

- The problems of articulation between advanced levels of vocational training and tertiary education, and especially professional education: VET participants are not now recognised by the tertiary system and their academic qualifications revert to secondary-level experiences despite additional academic attainment from VET.
Appreciation for certification among employers: Caribbean employers orientation tends to be traditional and academic. The hiring preference for entry-level jobs is biased in favour of traditional high schools and CXC subject passes. The currency of vocational training is rising, but not in all sectors.

National approval and adaptation of extra-national standards: each state needs to have its own apparatus to adopt or adapt extra-national material to its specific requirements; this is a function of the training agency or council in each territory. Whether the Industry Lead Groups will be replicated in each country remains an open question, likely determined by the importance of a particular area of employment to member states.

Means to resolve conflicting or inadequate standards: each country finds itself continually updating and improving standards. If a standard is shared that is viewed as inadequate by the receiving country, the idea is that all countries may benefit from improvements undertaken.

Openness to other English-speaking and CARICOM countries to participate in the regional integration: there is a range of interest and readiness among the smaller territories to participate, but resources and political will are not always in place. The dominance of the academic and professional model in the region is a constraint to real understanding and acceptance of the VET model.

Information sharing, Internet and website linkages: sharing of material is one of the most important features of the co-operation. Jamaica has launched a website that will eventually be a repository for sharing information and the envisioned CANTA will build upon this experience.

Labour Market Information Systems: planning within the region is hampered by inadequate LMI systems. This problem will become more noticeable as freer movement of labour is facilitated by the new arrangements.

Research and evaluation: an slowly increasing amount of co-operation is planned in this area, especially in terms of evaluation of newly implemented curricula.

Bi-lateral and multi-lateral co-operation initiatives: “donor assistance” is a main driver of initiatives in the OECS and influences activities in Jamaica. The German (GTZ) projects in the OECS and Jamaica, in particular, facilitate integration. The Inter-American Development Bank also assists several regional initiatives with training, HRD or VET components. European Union funds are being channelled into the OECS countries and being targeted at VET to help these economies diversify away from dependence on bananas. These financing streams support strengthening of national VET mechanisms consistent with the integration framework and establishing a CANTA.

Finally, the integration of the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) into the recognition scheme presents both a significant challenge as well as an opportunity. CXC is an academic qualification that includes technical and vocational subjects. The TVET subjects do not relate to the standards-driven, competency-based model promoted by the VET-oriented entities, nor do they involve work experience. CXC expresses interest in merging these two kinds of qualifications, but this remains a major challenge to effect these changes within schools. Furthermore, the eventual merging of all qualifications pertaining to education and training into a single, unified framework is a longer-term objective. Such a framework is needed to establish a seamless, articulated education and training system that ultimately combines academic and vocational and technical education for the region. The framework also needs to integrate institutional and work-based learning experiences.
LEVEL I: ENTRY-LEVEL: SEMI-SKILLED, APPRENTICE, SUPERVISED WORKER

Recognises competence in a significant range of varied work activities performed in a variety of contexts. Work activities range from simple and routine to more complex and non-routine involving some individual responsibility and autonomy. Collaboration with others through work groups or teams may often be a requirement. Substantial supervision is required especially during the early months evolving into more autonomy with time.

LEVEL 2: SKILLED WORKER: TECHNICAL/SPECIALIZED INDEPENDENT WORKER (LICENCED, ETC)

Recognises competence in a broad range of varied work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts, most of which are complex and non-routine. Considerable responsibility, autonomy, control, teamwork and guidance of others are required.

LEVEL 3: TECHNICIAN, SUPERVISOR, TRAINER / INSTRUCTOR

Recognises competence in a broad range of complex, technical or professional work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts and with a substantial degree of personal responsibility and autonomy. Responsibility for the work of others and the allocation of resources are often a requirement. The individual is capable of self-directed application, exhibits problem solving, planning, designing, and supervisory capabilities. With additional specialised training can provide basic instruction.

LEVEL 4: MASTER CRAFTSMAN, MANAGERIAL, ENTREPRENEUR, INSTRUCTOR TRAINER

Recognises competence involving the application of a significant range of fundamental principles and complex techniques across a wide and unpredictable variety of contexts. Very substantial personal autonomy and often significant responsibility for the work of others and for the allocation of substantial resources, as well as personal accountabilities for analysis, diagnosis, design, planning, execution, and evaluation.

LEVEL 5: CHARTERED PROFESSIONAL AND/OR MANAGERIAL

Recognises the ability to exercise personal professional responsibility for the design, development, or improvement of a product, process, system or service. The award recognises technical and managerial competencies at the highest level and may be confined to those who have occupied positions of the highest professional responsibility and made outstanding contribution to the promotion and practice of their profession.

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<tr>
<th>OCCUPATIONAL LEVEL &amp; CVQ LEVEL</th>
<th>EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS TO ENTER TRAINING(^1)</th>
<th>DURATION OF TYPICAL PROGRAMME(^2)</th>
<th>JOB EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENT FOR CERTIFICATION</th>
<th>EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENT FOR CERTIFICATION</th>
<th>TYPICAL TRAINING MODALITIES</th>
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| Level 1  
Semi-Skilled Worker, Apprentice, Entry Level Worker | Grade 9 equivalence\(^3\), or 2 CXC ‘O’ levels or equivalent for some skills | 3 months to 1 year full-time | 160 hours in an approved Work Experience site | Grade 9 equivalence | Institutionally-based or on-the-job or via co-operative training (firms and institutions) |
| Level 2  
Skilled Worker | Grade 10 equivalence or 2 CXC ‘O’ levels | 1 year part time while employed in skill | Usually 2 years | Grade 10 equivalence | Co-operative training |
| Level 3  
Technician, Supervisory, Trainer/Instructor, Entrepreneur | Grade 11 equivalence or 2 CXC ‘O’ levels | 1 year part time while employed in skill; Trainer requires specialised study. | Usually 3 years | Grade 11 equivalence (Preferably 3 ‘O’ levels) | Co-operative training |
| Level 4  
Master Craftsman, Instructor Trainer, Entrepreneur | 3 CXC ‘O’ levels or equivalent | 1 year part time while employed in skill; specialised training for Instructor Trainer | Usually 4 years | Not specified, but amount of training viewed as equivalent to a tertiary matriculation standard | Co-operative training |
| Level 5  
Professional | Tertiary or university admissions requirements | 1-2 years of full time study with articulation agreements in place | Usually 4 years or more\(^4\) | A university degree with professional courses | Set by professional bodies |

\(^1\) “Educational Requirements” refers to the level of actual academic achievement of candidates (rather than grades completed) as evidenced by achievement tests. These are viewed as minimum requirements to benefit from the training and to function effectively on the job.

\(^2\) Programme duration is based on the standards and the competencies, as well as target group characteristics, and is, therefore, flexible.

\(^3\) “Equivalence” recognises various clearly understood educational qualifications as agreed by the parties based on national recognition schemes.

\(^4\) Various professional bodies may have different requirements.