

BARBADOS VOCATIONAL TRAINING BOARD

REMARKS AT PROGRAMME LAUNCH

STRENGTHENING SECOND CHANCE EDUCATION

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Human civilization cannot exist without vocational education and training as it is the basis for the goods and services that make our societies modern. Vocational education and training is specialized competence-based preparation for life, for work, and for contribution to national development. It emphasizes enhancing **what learners can do** with the knowledge that they are acquiring; the value of the knowledge rests largely in how it enhances the individual's ability to "do". Further, vocational education and training has clearly defined fields or skill sets and trains individuals to integrate related knowledge with compatible skills development, in pursuit of skill mastery. This is what we are continuously striving for at the Barbados Vocational Training Board, hereafter called BVTB in these remarks.

If we understand the comparison of a society as a living organism made up of interdependent and interrelated parts, then vocational education is essentially in each part, and is the blood that runs through and nourishes the entire organism. What does this mean by definition – that the vocation of the doctor is as important as the vocation of the nurse; the vocation of the plumber is as important as the vocation of the accountant; the vocation of the cosmetologist is as important as the vocation of the lawyer... They are all interdependent roles for which we must train our people. Therefore we must quickly have a cultural shift in the way we think about vocational training in Barbados so that we understand how to prepare our young people to assume these critical roles through vocational preparation.

Our societies traditionally acknowledge the importance of these specialized areas, and the fact that the “specializing” occurs at different levels, and that institutions themselves aspire to be centers of excellence in whatever areas are put under their purview. You would have heard that the Barbados Vocational Training Board continues to strive for the best in the preparation of our trainees, as evidenced by our winning the Barbados World Skills Championship 2012, and placing second in the prestigious World Skills Americas Championships in Brazil in 2012. We are taking the concept of second chance to another level, where it is not simply a matter of being afforded a chance to rebuild and review, but it is also seizing the opportunity to rebrand and excel.

Any policy maker that can capture the essence of the vocational education and training thrust will certainly realize that vocational education is vital to economic development, growth and wealth... We must help young people to find decent work; the International Labour Organization reminds us that our aspirations for development “hinge on” being able to provide decent work for our populations. Second Chance education is an important vehicle in this regard...

However, Second Chance cannot be limited to the “**same old, same old**”. We have to look at new and exciting programmes that create the right synergies within our national policy and priorities. This means that we, training agencies/educators, must work closely with policy makers who are at the forefront of identifying national priorities, and work in tandem with them. For example, if we are talking about tapping into offshore oil and gas in a serious way, we must start now to develop curricula and train or retrain our teachers, trainers and trainees to cope with the new demands. Textbooks may not be as relevant when there are electronic sources and simulators; training may need to be short, intensive and very specific, so that a long programme may not be the most responsive approach.

If we look at some of what is available in the region (including Latin America), simulator training in some areas is redefining how we propose to deliver training at the BVTB. What takes us about six months of full time training can now be done in 80 hours, with comparable levels of effectiveness. Barbados has the dubious distinction of being called the amputation capital of the world – while we try through other means to reduce this trend, how are we preparing our young people to work with and create basic prostheses? **On a recent visit to Columbia**, I was surprised to see that what I thought was bags of white cement in one room, was really the fabricating material for producing prosthetic legs for the government and people of Columbia, a country rocked by civil war. This is all part of the idea and reality of second chance. Trainees get a second chance to learn new skills and develop essential tools. In so doing, the trainees give amputees in society a second chance to be more independent.

We at BVTB are about second chances, and we would wish to identify with the Caribbean Examinations Council in advancing the Second Chance initiative. The idea of second chance does not only relate to “at risk” groups; second chance is not a punishment – it is an opportunity. We have worked closely with the judiciary and social services to address the stereotypes that are sometimes attached to how some persons get into vocational training. Years ago, you would read in the print media that the sentence was “Glendairy or go and learn a skill”. For such persons, though the intention of the system was honourable, the underlying assumption was flawed and worked against the true spirit of Second Chance – young people were presented with Skills Training as a punishment only. Today, our partners in the judiciary take the approach of working through the Probation Department and approaching skills acquisition as providing “at risk” persons with better/alternative avenues and better life chances.

Second chance for whom – I was speaking about the many young people who are not first past the post. Our traditional educational system has historically catered more to traditional learners than to persons with high entrepreneurial bents, or students with more curiosity than calmness, or to students who would rather break it apart to see how it works first, than to use it only as we instruct them. In addition, second chances are for persons who went on a different course but not a better course, whose paths deny their potential and the contribution that they can make to our national stability at the critical time in our history. Some may even have been incarcerated, most visibly in blue-collar crime, but there is always white collar crime as well. Further, second chances are for all of us, to the extent that they give us the opportunity to change career paths or to add new productive avenues. Author Shannon L. Alder summarized the concept of second chances: *“What defines a person with good character is not a spotless life of constant kindness, smiles and even temperament. But rather, it’s the yearning to learn from your mistakes, applying it, making amends for them and choosing not to repeat them that defines good character. These are the friends to keep in your life because they have stared adversity in the face and became a better person because of it.”* Shannon L. Alder

I wish to commend the Caribbean Examinations Council and USAID for this initiative, which is estimated to benefit over 400 participants from Barbados. Your focus on developing a sustainable framework is one that we identify with and encourage. We thank you for this first opportunity to speak about Second Chance in this forum, and look forward to continued collaboration as we seek to add more value to our greatest asset - our human capital in Barbados and the Region.