

**Notes – Regional Consultation
Trinidad, February 10, 2005**

Questions posed:

1. Do you believe COL's current Programmes – Policies, Systems, Applications and Knowledge Management – are useful?
2. Are there other areas/programmes that COL should consider adopting in its new three year plan?
3. What are the most pressing educational and training needs in the Caribbean region? Can ODL assist in meeting these?
4. What are your perceptions of COL? Is it seen to be a useful organisation? Why or why not?
5. How can COL improve its services in the work it does in the Caribbean?
6. What type of organisation and initiatives should COL plan for its next three year plan?

The Basic Question:

What should COL do in its next three year plan?

Responses:

Grass-roots (non-formal) versus formal education

Most speakers endorsed the current approach and programmes in which COL has organised its work. They especially endorsed the concept of RBM.

A number of speakers indicated they felt that COL should make more of an attempt to work at the community or grass-roots level, including NGOs. However, there was not a consensus in this regard – others felt that there already are a number of agencies working in this area, and that COL should continue to work primarily in the formal sector.

Quality assurance and related issues

The quality of the programmes offered in the region through ODL is an issue in which many expressed concern. It was suggested that COL should work in this area though raising the level of professional competence (some may not realize that the education being provided is not of acceptable quality) amongst ODL professionals and building knowledge about what constitutes quality within education.

One of the challenges is to build political will so that policy is put into place which will regulate and ensure quality in the education and training provided and a regulatory agency is established within the region.

Literacy and the value of education

There is still a lot of illiteracy within the region, even amongst students completing high school. It was felt that initiatives should try and reach the parents and develop literacy skills where needed as well as encourage them to support their children to get an education. It was viewed as being particularly important to target illiterate mothers, as they have a great influence on their children and their attitudes towards education and training.

It was felt that COL should focus its work on the large numbers (more than 90%) of the population that do not have the opportunity to go to university – should focus on, for example, farmers (not a consensus). In many of the participants' opinion, COL should spend more of its time and resources on informal and non-formal education.

Gender issues in education

There needs to be a focus on reaching the male population in the Caribbean region as this group continues to fall behind their female counterparts in all aspects of education.

Leveraging

COL should continue to collaborate with partners and leverage funds to assist in increasing access to education and training opportunities. Particularly, the technological penetration to marginalized groups should be increased.

Use of technologies

COL needs to continue to work on initiatives that use all types of technologies, not just computers and the Internet. The potential of radios and television should be exploited and used to reach those living in rural areas, as they are used to this type of technology and have these available. Technologies can also be used to educate and train persons in the arts-related areas, such as music, art, etc. There are many young people in the region with these talents, but they often do not have the opportunity to receive training which will enable them to turn these talents into a career.

Redundancy

There are a number of regional agencies carrying out similar initiatives in the education/training areas in the region – there should be an attempt made to communicate and collaborate so that the limited capacity of these agencies can be exploited on a regional basis. COL could be the facilitator in this regard.

Purpose for training

The reasons for providing the education and training needs to be clear – are we training for the status quo or for the changing environment? Is the training to help people get jobs or to develop the lifeskills that are needed to live productively with, and to contribute to our societies?

Target groups

COL should continue to include ministries and government officials when communicating about its work. It was suggested that COL should consider returning to the idea of a COL regional representative.

COL should consider exploring the use of ODL to reach differently-abled learners.

COL should continue to provide support to bring the Caribbean CEOs together on an annual basis for professional development activities in the area of ODL. This group should also include Permanent Secretaries when there are two Ministries responsible for educational and training matters.

Internet discussions

The on-line discussion groups that COL has facilitated in the past are greatly appreciated and we should continue to arrange these.