



INSIDE TVET

Developing workforce competence

A FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE that can 'think' and 'do' is the goal of the modern Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. As a result, VET systems around the world, driven by ongoing research and a need for change, have spent the last three decades being restructured and upgraded to narrow the distance that often exists between the teaching of theoretical knowledge and practical skills.

This change has also led to increased stress on the need for broad-based learning and skills, and for the development of core skills or key competencies such as team working, communicating effectively, problem solving and being willing to learn.

Internationally, VET teachers have supported the view that competence-based education, because of its practical relevance, can motivate students to finish their school education to a much larger extent than traditional education can. Furthermore, it is believed that through their direct contact with work organisations, VET institutions are in a better position to notice immediately how modern companies, occupations and jobs are changing and therefore urge schools to deliver graduates with broad skills on top of specified knowledge.

It has been suggested that the main reason why competence-based education has grown in popularity internationally, within the VET policy arena, is its alleged capacity to reduce the gap between the school system and the labour market. It is believed among policy makers that graduates educated under a competence system will be better able to perform the jobs required by modern companies and organisations than those with traditional qualifications.

Here in Barbados, as part of efforts to promote a competence-based technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system, the TVET Council has embarked on a programme of



MANAGER, Technical Services, Wendy McClean, delivering a presentation on 'NVQs: Changing The Way We Certify Students' to teachers of the St Lucy Secondary School. At the head table are principal, Anthony Austin (left), and deputy principal, Stephen Jackman. (GP)

sensitising and training educators/trainers about competence-based training and assessment using the National Occupational Standards (NOS).

In recent presentations to teachers of the St Lucy Secondary School and the Barbados Business Studies Teachers' Association, respectively, the Council spoke of the need for an innovative TVET system that emphasised lifelong learning and promoted occupational standards as the basis for training, assessment and certification.

Principal of St Lucy Secondary School, Anthony Austin, during his welcome address for **Teachers' Professional Day**, drew to his teachers' attention the importance of competence-based certification such as the National Vocational Qualification Barbados (NVQB) and its regional counterpart, the Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) – of which Level 1 will be made available to secondary schools by the Caribbean Examinations

Council (CXC).

Speaking about the potential impact of the CVQ on the students' interest in learning and continuing



TEACHERS of the St Lucy Secondary School participating in a discussion during a Teachers' Professional Day presentation by the TVET Council on 'NVQs: Changing The Way We Certify Students'. (GP)

– the focus of modern VET systems

their educational development, Austin disclosed that St Lucy Secondary had been able to see for itself the possible effect on students.

He noted that over the past two years the school had used national occupational standards to develop a competence-based curriculum for the areas of hospitality, masonry, tiling, carpentry and electrical installation.

"Since that programme was introduced two years ago, we have

noticed a marked improvement in terms of student attendance and attitude to learning. These are boys who would have left because there would have been no programme to prepare them for work," Austin acknowledged.

He said that normally there were more girls than boys in the upper school and now that the senior boys were staying in school, they were able to make a contribution in other areas such as the school's extra curricula programme.

"I have always found that students are more engaged by industrial arts courses, not because of academic inability, but because it has more meaning knowing that they are being prepared for work."

The principal said that the school would soon be introducing a day release programme. Students would spend one day a week in a work placement corresponding to the area in which they were being trained. He stressed that this would be for training purposes only.

During her presentation to the teachers, TVET Council's Manager, Technical Services, Wendy McClean, said that Trinidad and Tobago had also reported seeing good results in schools that were involved in the piloting of the CVQ, especially in the areas of student behaviour and academics.



MEMBERS of the Barbados Business Studies Teachers Association listening to the TVET Council's presentation on *The Importance Of Technical Vocational Studies To Entrepreneurship In The 21st Century*. (GP)