
St Vincent and the Grenadines

In the teaching service there is scope and incentive to move from an untrained teacher to a graduate professional teacher, but having reached that level, there is no promotional outlet except at the administrative level as principal. Consequently many trained teachers complain about stagnation and it is at this point that they try desperately to get out of the system. However, the service cannot really afford to lose this expertise and the original investment.

(Foundation for the Future: OECS Education Reform Strategy, 1991, p. 88)

Background

The Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines has teacher training as one of the top priorities in its Development Plan. With this in mind the Ministry of Education in its Planning Document of May 1994 acknowledges that the education system can only be effective and efficient if it can attract 'a well qualified and motivated teaching force in adequate numbers' and outlines the Government's strategy to provide such a force.

At present there are 1302 primary school teachers. Of this number, 1018 are in schools, 197 are on study leave and 284 are seconded to other departments of government. Of the 197 on study leave, there are 157 at teachers' college receiving professional training; and 40 in tertiary institutions abroad.

Of the 1018 primary school teachers, 45.5 per cent are professionally trained, 36.6 per cent possess the minimum academic qualifications – four CXC passes at General Proficiency I or II including English language – to be employed as teachers, while 22 per cent do not possess the minimum qualifications. These minimum qualifications became government policy in 1991 and since then the Government

has not employed anyone without the minimum qualifications. This policy is to ensure that all primary school teachers meet the academic requirements for admission to the Teachers' College and therefore can exploit the opportunity for training. The Government is now faced with the challenge presented by these teachers who do not meet the College's requirements and who, as noted earlier, constitute 22 per cent of primary school teachers. Since 1990, however, the percentage of trained teachers in the primary school system has risen sharply: from 28 in 1990 to 46 in 1994.

The Teachers' College is not autonomous; it operates under the control of the Ministry of Education and University of the West Indies, Cave Hill. The Ministry takes care of the College's administrative arrangements, staffing, financing and setting the quota of students to be admitted. The University, on the other hand, authorises the admissions requirements, curriculum, examinations and assessment procedures.

The College is staffed by a principal, deputy principal and 11 lecturers. Staff members all meet the Commonwealth Caribbean minimum standard for appointment to teachers' colleges: a bachelor's degree, professional training and five years teaching experience. Seven hold postgraduate degrees – six have Masters and one a Ph.D. The Caribbean standard is 1:15.

Programmes

The St Vincent Teachers' College offers three types of programmes:

- An induction programme – for new recruits into the teaching profession
- A primary programme – for teachers in primary education who will be trained in the teaching of the 5-11 age group
- A secondary programme – for teachers in secondary education who will be trained in the teaching of the 12-15 age group.

The induction programme

The induction programme is usually of one week's duration. It focuses mainly on child development, lesson planning, and methodology in the core areas: mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies. There is no certification for this programme.

The primary programme

The primary programme is of two years' duration and is conducted full-time at the College. The programme includes content and methodology in the core areas (mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies), and educational psychology, research methods, twelve weeks practicum in the schools and the locally examined subjects: home economics, art and craft, music, physical education, industrial arts, family life education and agriculture.

During the first nine weeks of practicum which is spread over the two years and conducted in blocks of three weeks, each student is supervised by two lecturers drawn from two different subject areas. During the final three-week session, students are supervised by lecturers from the Faculty of Education, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill; representatives from the Ministry of Education; and lecturers from the Teachers' College.

At the end of the second year students sit the Eastern Caribbean Teachers' College Examination, a regional examination set by the Faculty of Education, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, for moderation.

The secondary programme

The secondary non-graduate teacher education programme was launched in January 1994.

The content is presented in modules prepared by the University of the West Indies and the pedagogy and practicum are presented and supervised by clinical supervisors who are graduate lecturers with professional training and curriculum organisers from the Ministry of Education.

The programme is certified by the University of the West Indies.

Issues and concerns

These are the issues that are currently being addressed:

- The Government, along with other OECS governments, in collaboration with Organisation for Co-operation in Overseas Development, has begun a Comprehensive Teacher Training Project Phase Two, intended to provide academic upgrading to those teachers who do not meet the College's admission requirements. It is a distance teaching programme, the materials developed and pilot-tested in Phase One.
- The OECS governments and the UWI, Faculty of Education, assisted by the British Development Division Caribbean, are currently working on a project to determine how the backlog of untrained teachers can be eliminated.
- The Faculty of Education, Cave Hill is presently gathering information on changes that should be made in teacher education in the Eastern Caribbean.

Future directions

The St Vincent Teachers' College is endeavouring:

- to work towards a fully trained teaching staff at the primary level by year 2000
- to increase and improve teacher effectiveness at the primary and secondary levels
- to significantly increase the percentage of trained teachers at the secondary level
- to provide training and become more meaningfully involved in the preparation of teachers/instructors at the non-formal level.

The Ministry of Education in its Planning Document May, 1994, states the Government's plan to:

- provide training programmes for teachers at the initial and in-service levels
- make compulsory the participation of new recruits and practising teachers in induction and on-the-job training programmes
- enhance the working conditions of teachers
- provide incentives for outstanding performance
- introduce opportunities for advancement and promotion through training awards and bursaries
- conduct reviews to ensure that salaries are in keeping with the demands of the job.