

UNIVERSITY NEWS

The future of entrepreneurship and innovation in higher education was the focus of participants at the opening session of the recent “HEInnovate and Labour Market Relevance and Outcomes (LMRO) Initiatives” event.

UWI administrators, government ministry officials, donor agencies, representatives of CARICOM English-speaking universities, and industry partners gathered on April 3 for the beginning of the action planning and knowledge exchange workshop, a preliminary event with two days of discourse scheduled to follow.

HEInnovate was born of a collaboration between the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport, and Culture). This partnership was an initiative of the Campus Office of Planning and Institutional Research (COPIR) at UWI St Augustine. The workshop itself was made possible through support from the Delegation of the European Union to Trinidad and Tobago, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), and CARICOM/CARIFORUM.

Its aim is to inform and guide strategies and practices towards relevance in educational offerings and innovation and entrepreneurship for regional higher education institutions (HEIs) with free self-assessment tools and resources like case studies, guidance notes, training materials, country reviews, and webinars which are regularly offered worldwide.

Prior to the workshop, regional university representatives were asked to complete the self-assessment. The tool guides participants through a process of identification, prioritisation, and action planning in eight key areas. The participants were invited to discuss the findings in-depth and explore strategies.

Forty-four assessments were completed across six regional universities including The UWI. The HEInnovate team expected more submissions would come in with time but observed that the number they had received was a good foundation to begin discussions.

KEEPING PACE WITH AN EVOLVING WORLD

Summing up the goals of the session in an online address, Deputy Head of Unit Innovation and EIT, European Commission, Ingrid Rigler explained, “We are all united to reach a joint goal, making higher education institutions more innovative and entrepreneurial, so that they can keep pace with a constantly evolving world, and that they can better connect with the labour market.”

Presenters Andrea-Rosaline Hofer, analyst and project lead, OECD; Zuzsa Javorka, managing consultant, Technopolis Group; and Bárbara Gabriel, Manager of Science and Technology at Research Unit TEMA briefly presented their findings and some of the insights discovered through the thousands of self-assessments taken over the years.

Gabriel outlined the questions which they hoped to cover in the discussions: “What does it mean to be entrepreneurial? As a higher education institution, what are the defined characteristics? And are there already entrepreneurial universities from whom lessons can be learned?”

She noted that the sharing of experiences and practices were relevant to help institutions understand potential and translate the knowledge to suit each one’s reality.

The data showed the key areas of strengths across the regional institutions. Under entrepreneurial teaching and learning, the HEIs scored highly when it came to designing and delivering curriculum in conjunction with external stakeholders, when it came to providing diverse formal learning opportunities, and when administering a wide range of informal learning opportunities and experiences to stimulate the development of entrepreneurial mindsets and competences. The institutions also scored

UWI Explores the Landscape of ENTREPRENEURIAL AND INNOVATIVE EDUCATION

BY DIXIE-ANN BELLE



Participants of the workshop on April 3 at the Institute of Critical Thinking, UWI St Augustine. PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM



well in areas of leadership and governance, as well as organisational capacity.

The areas with the lowest scores, and therefore the need for improvement, were the impact of the entrepreneurial HEIs; the level of the institutions’ contribution to global and social cohesion, mitigation of climate change and the HEI carbon neutrality; and the institutions’ links to entrepreneurial ecosystem and networks.

HIGHER ED CONNECTING WITH SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Among some of the discoveries based on the data was the importance of HEIs connecting with secondary school students at an early age.

“I think in higher education, there is a very important role for informing learners at 15-years-old what are the opportunities for them later on,” suggested Hofer. “And that doesn’t mean that these learners have to be oriented towards higher education, but oriented towards existing and emerging occupations.”

The importance of aligning higher education with the emerging needs of the economy was also a theme of the day.

During his welcome address, Pro Vice-Chancellor for The UWI Board for Undergraduate Studies, Prof

Derek Chadee observed that the workshop was useful in refreshing the four R’s – reinforce, remind, redirect, and re-evaluate.

In his remarks, Dr Paulo Santiago, Head of the Policy Advice and Implementation Division, Directorate for Education and Skills, OECD, outlined some questions that would be of great interest to HEIs.

“How to use labour marketing information to monitor relevance?” he observed. “How to adapt education offering itself to more advanced skill needs. A third main question would be how to promote continuous development of teaching and learning. A fourth key question is what works in incentivising students to become involved in study programmes with higher labour demand. And finally, how to support students to succeed in their studies and at work.”

St Augustine Campus Deputy Principal Prof Indar Ramnarine declared, “It is important to recognise the challenges that this changing environment presents, and move towards ensuring that tertiary learning institutions remain relevant and adaptable.”

During his greetings from the Ministry of Education, Dr Peter Smith, Chief Education Officer, affirmed, “The goal can no longer be about ensuring young people get jobs after they graduate. It is about sustainability and entrepreneurship, and a constantly evolving job market and educational system in a symbiotic relationship.”

He added, “Diverse ambitions require diverse roots, and it is the duty of the ministry to establish inclusive avenues that level the playing field for all individuals to achieve their aspirations.”

Dixie-Ann Belle is a freelance writer, editor and proofreader.