

Caribbean Regional Policy Framework for Open and Distance Learning

1.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

Prevailing educational scenario

Public education for children and youth is a very high priority in the Caribbean as a whole and the member states of the Commonwealth Caribbean. All countries have met the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education; almost all countries have compulsory education for children ages five to 16, have achieved universal primary and secondary education, and are making significant progress in universal early childhood education. While primary and secondary education are offered without fees, early childhood education in many countries is offered in partnership with the private sector for a fee. Girls and boys both enter the early childhood and primary cycles of education, apparently survive to the end of primary school, and enter the secondary cycle as part of their age cohort.

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for selected countries in the Caribbean appears in Table 1.

Table 1
Enrolment and completion ratios for selected Caribbean states¹

Country	% Pre-primary gross enrolment ratio 2007-10	% Primary gross enrolment ratio 2007-10	% Secondary net enrolment ratio 2007-10
Antigua & Barbuda	65	100	88
Barbados	108	108	113
Dominica	110	112	89
Grenada	99	107	89
Guyana	87	103	74
Jamaica	86	93	77
St. Kitts & Nevis	83	96	88
St. Lucia	67	97	-
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	79	107	90
Trinidad & Tobago	81	104	87

Traditionally influenced by the British “O” and “A” Level external examinations to identify the “best and brightest” in the academic educational system, and following City and Guilds for technical and vocational education and training, the education systems in the small island states of the Caribbean have stressed achievement based on external examinations at the end of the secondary education cycle, and national examination results on a Grade Six examination to progress to the next level of education. The examination-driven model used in most countries is based on the British model of national Common

¹ UNICEF data 2007-10. All statistical data downloaded from <http://www.childinfo.org> or <http://www.nationmaster.com> on June 27, 2012.

Entrance Examinations at the end of primary school and regional external examinations at the end of secondary school. However, as early as 1972 in some states, the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC), and 1999 for the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) replaced the British overseas examinations with regional examinations administered by subject area by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). These culturally appropriate examinations were intended to improve learner performance and produce more graduates.

The fields of ICT and knowledge management in particular have grown exponentially over the past decade. In 2012, it is not just equipment and resource acquisition and financing, learners' ICT literacy, teachers' competence to use ICTs or the availability of connectivity and networks that are the hallmark of an 21st century education system; it is the existence of ICT policy and the integration and infusion of ICTs into the entire education system – from availability of statistical information in databanks, to MoE record storage, to teachers' use in the classroom and encouragement of learner research and project development using ICTs that mark the advancement of the education system. ICT availability and use to support teaching and learning are hallmarks of a modern education system.

The closing of the gap between academic education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) has meant shifts in focus in the design of school learning experiences, with much more attention being paid to TVET and the need for TVET policies that promote partnerships between the workplace and the classroom or laboratory.

One of the signal successes in the formal school system recently has been the introduction of UNICEF's Child Friendly Schools.² In several countries of the Caribbean, the CFS has been introduced with great success and positive results.

There has also been considerable focus on producing "the ideal Caribbean citizen," through the teaching of values, attitudes and appropriate social behaviours, conflict management and negotiation skills.

A complementary theme that has been emerging in the past decade is that education and training are not only to assist learners to progress through a structured set of learning experiences to successful completion of the formal school cycle and "graduation," but also to prepare them for the world of work, so that those emerging from the education system can obtain meaningful, productive employment that will improve their individual quality of life and contribute to national and regional development.

Recently, the OECS has developed a new education sector strategy that will guide the directions of Member States for the next decade. Its focus includes strengthening literacy and numeracy, improving leadership and management in the school systems, harmonising Member States' efforts to produce economies of scale, strengthening teacher education, improving accountability, improving TVET, early childhood development and tertiary education, and improving teaching and learning and curriculum.

² The elements of the Child Friendly School are: it is learner-centred and uses child friendly and skills-based learning strategies; supports quality learners who are healthy, well-nourished, supported by their family and community, and who come to school ready to learn; uses quality curricula and teaching and materials for literacy, numeracy, knowledge attitudes and skills for life; it uses appropriate technologies; it results in quality outcomes: knowledge, attitudes, skills, suitable assessment, at classroom and national levels. CFS has been used in Africa since the late 1990s. It has been used in the Caribbean for approximately five years.

Jamaica, too, is addressing many of the same themes: strengthening literacy and numeracy, introducing a management structure for tertiary education, improving educational quality and providing more opportunities for working adults to upgrade their skills, improving opportunities for boys' education and broadening skills development. Regional projects such as CIDA's Education for Employment are focusing on strengthening TVET and skills development and are complementing work underway in the sector through the CDB and the EU.

At the tertiary level, face-to-face opportunities appear diverse and numerous, but in face of the growing demand for tertiary and work-based training, they are comparatively few. The University of the West Indies, established more than 50 years ago, has three campuses: in Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago, and it has now translated its Distance Education facilities into a fourth campus - the Open Campus, which offers programmes in every state by distance. In addition to the UWI Mona Campus, Jamaica has the oldest technological university in the region, 10 colleges that offer teacher education and speciality programmes in Agriculture, the Visual and Performing Arts, and Sports, and a number of private tertiary institutions. Trinidad and Tobago, in addition to UWI St. Augustine, has also established a technological university, and each state in the OECS has at least one national college offering a diversity of tertiary programmes, such as Nursing and Hospitality. Grenada boasts the campus of St. George's University, a private medical school with a growing international reputation. St. Kitts and Nevis, too, has a private medical school, although its reputation is still to be developed. Barbados has a community college with the only Hospitality training school in the Eastern Caribbean, a teachers' college and a UWI campus. Guyana has a technical institute, a teachers' college and a national public university with a long history.

In summary, there has been strong and positive growth in the public education sector with renewed focus on the quality of available education. TVET is growing in importance as a means of educating not only learners in the forma system, but workers in the workplace and adults who want to make a career change or upgrade their qualifications.

There is, then a significant amount of emphasis on strengthening education in the Caribbean region.

Key challenges facing the region

However, despite all of this "good news," the challenges confronting the region are manifold. The educational challenges facing the region include:

- Lack of boys' success in the traditional school system;
- Growing crime and violence in the societies and in schools;
- Marginalisation of the economically challenged families and learners with special needs in the formal school system;
- Paucity of secondary graduates entering the tertiary level (especially boys);
- Shortage of secondary graduates with math and sciences subjects;
- Inappropriate teaching and learning methods used in face-to-face classrooms;
- "Disconnect" between the requirements of employers and the skills of graduates;
- Incursion of offshore tertiary institutions offering certification of questionable quality, and
- Shortage of qualified and skilled teachers, especially at the secondary level and the shortage of places at the tertiary level to train teachers;
- Lack of educational and training opportunities for adults wishing to upgrade and/or switch to another career;

- Need for technically skilled graduates with technical qualifications;
- Shortage of tertiary graduates fitting the profiles of available jobs;
- Absence of “second chance” training opportunities;
- Need for adult literacy and numeracy training, and
- Lack of capacity to produce useful educational data, and shortage of data to support evidence-based decision-making.

The foregoing list is not inclusive; however, it presents a spread of the more urgent issues in the region that governments recognise need addressing as a matter of urgency. Many of these are being addressed through a variety of educational initiatives supported by donor and IFI initiatives.

Unfortunately, the percentage of learners achieving sufficient passes to enter tertiary education (i.e. five CSEC passes including Mathematics and English Language) has not lived up to expectations, and despite efforts to improve and reform the CXC system there are serious challenges:

In the 2009 CSEC exam[s], only 21% of the candidates sitting the examination achieved acceptable grades in five or more subjects; 52% of them either did not pass any subject or received acceptable grades in one subject only. Attention to quality and performance is the most urgent of the imperatives facing us particularly at secondary level.”³

These grim statistics indicate that there is something seriously amiss in the secondary education system.

The problem seems to emerge at the beginning of the secondary cycle. Using the statistics provided by Dr. Jules, more than 70 % of those sitting the CSEC examinations (and these data do not included those who dropped out of school and did not write any examinations) are not equipped to enter tertiary education after the end of secondary education. Table 2 illustrates the depth of the problem using the illustration of three Caribbean states and 2010 data. The table demonstrates the extent of the problem in Mathematics in particular, and the paucity of learners studying those subjects that are considered “difficult” in secondary school. All learners writing CSEC examinations must take English A.

Table 2
CSEC: Achievement in subjects sat relative to English A in 2010 in Anguilla, Dominica and Grenada⁴

Subjects	Anguilla			Dominica			Grenada		
	# sat	% sat relative to Eng	% passed	# sat	% sat relative to Eng	% passed	# sat	% sat Relative to Eng	% passed
English A	103	100	90	991	100	77.9	1780	100	64
Maths	88	85	41	874	88	38.6	1289	72	38
Biology	27	26	85	194	20	85.1	317	18	75
Chemistry	10	10	100	127	13	80.3	218	12	63
Physics	19	18	84	112	10.2	85.7	188	19	80
French	20	19	70	245	25	55.9	138	8	52
Spanish	32	31	84	165	17	57.6	297	17	167

³ D. Jules, “Rethinking Education in the Caribbean,” Registrar’s Blog, December 13, 2010. Downloaded June 23, 2012 from http://www.cxc.org/media-centre/registrars_blog.

⁴ L. A. Armstrong, “Issues in Education: What the Data Reveal,” World Bank: Washington, 2011.

Many employers are reported to complain about the fact that those they hire out of school lack the basic “employability skills” necessary to function effectively in the workplace.

Nevertheless, there is a pervasive feeling that education itself has to change to be able to meet the socio-economic challenges of the region and develop the next generation to be able to take the lead in national and regional development while improving their own quality of life.

ODL in the region

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is an obvious means of broadening educational access in the Caribbean, comprised as it is of so many small island states. While ODL has been operating in the region for more than 30 years (through the UWI and its distance education programmes, UWIDITE, UWIDEC and now the Open Campus), there have also been other initiatives that have been undertaken. A cross-section of those initiatives are: the IADB-funded Principals’ Training Programme conducted by UTech and Mount St. Vincent University that trained more than 120 principals in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in leadership and management through blended learning; the COL Virtual University of Small States of the Commonwealth in which many Caribbean states have participated; the Jamaican Consortium of Institutions for Teacher Education (CITE) that have attempted to offer a single B. Ed. degree through the teachers’ colleges’ collaboration and use of distance modalities; the CKLN institutional strengthening initiative that supported the development of strategic plans for tertiary institutions in five countries to support the use distance education in colleges across the Caribbean; Guyana’s project-based development of distance education through the radio programmes developed under the BEAMS project; the development of teacher education materials under the CIDA-funded GBET project, and the development of a distance education policy. However, there has been no coordinated integration of distance education initiatives across the region.

An important player in the development of distance education in the Caribbean is the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network (CKLN). Established in 2003 as a project funded by World Bank, the EU and CIDA, CKLN has assisted colleges in five states to develop strategic plans to introduce and use distance education for expanding their reach and combining resources across the Caribbean, and has as its goal the strengthening of the Caribbean economic union through expanded technology-supported educational opportunities. Most recently, it has been focused on strengthening C@RIBNET, and network that will facilitate better communication and collaboration among the CARICOM Member states, and create better communication between the states and the Open Campus. CKLN is currently establishing national Research and Education Networks (RENs) that will be linked through C@RIBNET to build partnerships and collaborations among researchers and institutions offering educational programmes. Other initiatives CKLN has supported include the funding of regional workshops to improve collaboration in quality assurance and accreditation.

The Commonwealth of Learning has undertaken a number of activities to strengthen the capacity of Caribbean countries to use ODL: COL supported capacity-building workshops in OERs and the development of Open Schooling and provided support for strategic planning to develop distance education policy in Trinidad and Tobago.

ODL is a two-edged sword, however. Educational businesses, which are setting up online operations throughout the world, see the shortage of tertiary and training opportunities in the Caribbean as an opportunity to set up storefronts and sell their distance programmes to aspiring learners in the various

states. Since there is no policy or structure to prohibit or control such operations, there is a potential risk of learners being duped or cheated through these offshore providers. The necessity to watch these businesses carefully and ensure that potential learners are aware of the risks of enrolling in their courses and programmes is vital to the continuing perception of ODL programmes as valuable in the region.

Intended learner populations impacted by programmes and courses offered through ODL

Intended learner populations for programmes and courses offered through ODL include but are not limited to:

- ECD (learners and caregivers)
- Primary level learners
- Secondary level learners
- Tertiary learners
- Parents
- Home schooling advocates and practitioners
- Pre-service and in-service teachers for all educational levels
- Professionals needing upgrading and refresher training (e.g. accountants, lawyers, engineers, doctors)
- Adult learners
- Second chance learners
- Special Educational Needs (SEN) learners
- Nurses (in training and post-graduation) and other health care professionals
- Farmers
- Workers in the tourist and leisure industries
- Prisoners and prison workers
- Seniors
- Office workers
- Health workers supporting the health care system

Guiding principles

The guiding principles for ODL provision in the region will include:

- Flexibility
- Quality in a variety of modalities
- Equity and inclusivity
- Relevance to the societal and cultural realities of the region
- Cost effectiveness
- Ease of availability
- Efficiency and sustainability
- Openness
- Learner centredness
- Collaboration and partnership
- Harmonisation and standardisation

Vision

Everyone connected – everyone learning through ODL

Mission

Seamless and equitable access to quality education and lifelong learning through ODL

Goal

To increase access to quality education by integrating, harmonising and maximising the use of resources for ODL to enhance regional development.

Objectives

The Objectives of the Regional ODL Framework are to:

- Improve educational access and equity
- Improve learner achievement
- Encourage cost effective, affordable quality education and training
- Foster regional collaboration for maximisation of resources
- Facilitate learner mobility
- Promote sustainable development in ODL provision and use
- Create mechanisms/systems for monitoring and evaluating ODL provision, its outcomes and impact

Anticipated Outcomes

- A more literate and numerate population across the region
- Increased access to quality education
- Maximum use made of integrated, harmonised resources for ODL
- Leveraged potential of education for development of the region
- Increased unity through regional identity

Parity with the conventional system

The outcomes/certification of education and training administered through ODL will be considered equivalent or superior to those achieved through the conventional system.

Regulatory framework and ODL

ODL offerings of programmes must meet the standards established for any recognised regulatory framework in the Caribbean. Any Regional Qualifications Framework developed for the Caribbean will include and acknowledge standards for programmes delivered through ODL and outcomes meeting the standards established in the regulatory framework will be considered equivalent to those in the conventional face-to-face system.

Adaptable to the qualifications framework (e.g. VUSSC)

Qualifications achieved through ODL offerings of programmes that meet established standards will be adaptable to other international ODL qualifications frameworks e.g. the framework established for the Virtual University of Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC).

2.0 POLICY ISSUES

1. Collaboration, Partnership and Networking

Issue:

There is insufficient collaboration, partnership and networking within countries and across the region in promoting and leveraging ODL.

Issue Justification:

A low level of collaboration, partnership and networking among small states in the Caribbean has resulted in the inefficient use of existing resources and hampered the mainstreaming of ODL in the region. The potential of ODL to develop the region's competitive advantage has not been sufficiently harnessed to achieve the human development objectives of the CSME. The insufficient development of ODL in the region reduces the ability of the region to compete with foreign providers and to advance its own educational agenda.

Policy Statement:

Countries shall collaborate, partner and network to mainstream ODL and harness its full potential in the region.

Objectives:

- i. To develop communities of practice devoted to advancing ODL within countries and across the region by sharing information and best practice.
- ii. To encourage funding agencies to support projects which are being implemented collaboratively within the region.

2. Funding, Budgeting and Resource Mobilization

Issue:

There is inadequate funding and resource mobilisation for ODL in the Caribbean region.

Issue Justification:

There are no separate budget lines for the provision of programmes offered through ODL in the Caribbean. Quite often, institutional managers are unaware of the financial needs and the hidden cost of programmes offered through ODL. Policy makers are not aware of the funding implication of ODL systems.

Policy:

Member States shall allocate and help mobilise funds for the sustainable development and delivery of programmes offered through ODL and facilitate that resource mobilisation.

Objectives:-

- i. To create separate budget lines for adequate funding of programmes offered through ODL in keeping with strategic objectives.
- ii. To develop a funding formula that takes into consideration the role of ODL in the provision of education services in a cost effective way.
- iii. To create alliances with local, regional and international agencies to provide financial and other resources for the delivery of programmes offered through ODL.
- iv. To develop and implement mechanisms for resource mobilization at national and regional levels.
- v. To promote the use of OER and other assets to enhance sustainability.

3. Institutional Capacity

Issue:

Institutions/providers in the region offering programmes through ODL are unable to adequately meet the growing demand for programmes and services due to limited capacity.

Issue Justification:

Institutions/providers offering/wishing to offer programmes through ODL in the region have limited physical, instructional and human resources and are unable to adequately meet the growing demand for education and training.

Policy:

Caribbean countries shall provide capacity building support to institutions/providers offering and/or wishing to offer programmes through ODL in order to meet the increasing demands for education, training and services nationally and regionally.

Objectives:

- i. To provide assistance for the development/enhancement of appropriate physical facilities and human resources for delivery of programmes through ODL.
- ii. To promote sustainable public and private partnerships for expanding ODL provision.
- iii. To promote the use and collaboration in the use of appropriate media and instructional resources in ODL.

4. Choice of Instructional Mode

Issue:

Only a limited number of educational institutions in the region are dual mode; even fewer operate exclusively as ODL institutions.

Issue Justification:

To become competitive, Caribbean countries must expand opportunities for quality education to broaden their base of skilled, well-educated workers and citizens. The countries of the Caribbean

region recognise the need to harness ODL to resolve access issues and enhance development of the region's human resources.

Institutions must employ modalities besides or in addition to face-to-face for programme delivery, because the conventional system is unable to respond to the demand for education, lifelong learning and second-chance education.

However, at present, educational institutions provide only limited access to ODL modalities for programme delivery.

The lack of acceptance of ODL as a viable method for broadening access to education in Caribbean institutions undermines the intent of the Caribbean countries to offer education broadly and to all citizens equally.

Policy Statement:

Caribbean states shall promote and support the transition of educational institutions and/or providers to dual mode teaching and learning.

Objectives:

- i. To have institutions develop ODL policies aligned with regional and national policies.
- ii. To establish criteria for Caribbean states to identify suitable institutions for delivery of programmes/courses through ODL.
- iii. To provide support for the development and implementation of national and/or institutional strategic plans to develop the use of ODL.
- iv. To train staff to be able to use ODL effectively for delivery of programmes and short courses.
- v. To enable public sensitisation about and stakeholder buy-in to the importance and value of ODL in broadening educational opportunities in the Caribbean.

5. Leadership in ODL

Issue:

There is limited capacity for or coordination of leadership for ODL in the region.

Issue Justification:

Earlier efforts to forge a unified leadership body (CARADOL) for ODL in the region have not been sustained. While competent leadership exists in some institutions/countries, the efforts have not been coordinated regionally. Regional initiatives to facilitate ODL, such as CKLN, have not been coordinated for efficiencies and synergies.

Policy:

The region shall ensure that there exists effective and sustained leadership to champion improvement and expansion of ODL at institutional, national and regional levels.

Objectives:

- i. To establish a body to provide leadership for ODL across the region.
- ii. To establish mechanisms to develop leadership capacity in ODL across the region.
- iii. To catalyse action by governments of states in the region to support the development of ODL.
- iv. To encourage and recognise champions in various facets of development and delivery of programmes and courses through ODL.

6. Management Structures in ODL

Issue:

There is a lack of an appropriate management structure for ODL across the region.

Issue Justification:

The absence of a comprehensive, harmonised management framework that can be used at the national/regional levels to oversee ODL development and use is impeding ODL expansion, growth and development in the region.

Policy:

A regional body shall oversee the development and implementation of regional policy and harmonisation of national policies within a regional framework.

Specific Objectives:

- i. To establish a broad based regional committee of experts drawn from the different member countries
- ii. To mandate relevant national Ministries to use the regional framework as a guide to define and implement their national ODL policy framework consistent with national priorities.

7. Media Choices and ICT Support

The Issue:

The region is not making full use of available, appropriate modern technologies for the provision of programmes through ODL.

Justification:

While there is ample availability of technology options in the region, they are not being leveraged widely enough to increase access to programmes, improve the quality of education, and reduce the cost of delivery.

Lack of last mile connectivity, political will, and funding limits the leveraging of the technologies for ODL.

Policy Statement:

Caribbean countries shall maximise the use of existing publicly-funded technology infrastructure and promote emerging technologies for ODL in the region.

Objectives:

- i. To advocate for the optimal use of existing ICT infrastructure to support the delivery of ODL programmes and services across the region.
- ii. To facilitate the development of national/institutional ODL policies for promoting effective and efficient use of a variety of appropriate technologies.
- iii. To advocate for the use of appropriate technologies to cater for needs of diverse categories of learners.

- iv. To establish a working group within a regional body to promote collaboration in leveraging technology infrastructure and resources for ODL.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation

Issue:

Most institutions/providers using ODL to offer programmes do not have a comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and reporting system with clearly defined indicators.

Issue Justification:

There are no coordinated reporting, monitoring and evaluation systems for ODL with clearly defined indicators at the national and regional levels.

There is a lack of systematic documentation and research data for analysing the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery of programmes through ODL.

Policy statement: Caribbean countries shall establish a regional monitoring and evaluation framework with clearly defined indicators for tracking, evaluating and reporting ODL systems' performance.

Objectives:

- i. To develop a regional monitoring and evaluation framework.
- ii. To align national and institutional monitoring and evaluation frameworks to the regional ODL monitoring and evaluation framework.
- iii. To monitor and evaluate progress and achievement in the offering of programmes through ODL at all levels of the education system.
- iv. To facilitate information-sharing among states in the region for the coordination and development of ODL and benefit of ODL systems in the region.

9. Learner Support Systems

Issue:

Learner support services in most institutions which use ODL for programme delivery are limited and inadequately resourced.

Issue Justification:

Learners pursuing studies through ODL have special needs and experience a variety of problems. Most institutions offering programmes and courses through ODL do not provide adequate and consistent learner support services to improve quality and enhance learner success.

Barriers such as inadequate and/or ineffective communication and interaction between learners and the institution in which they are enrolled create feelings of isolation and frequently lead to learner disaffection and drop out without completion.

Policy Statement:

States in the region shall ensure that appropriate and relevant learner support systems are established and maintained by institutions offering programmes through ODL.

Objectives:

- i. To establish appropriate institutional structures for providing learner support.
- ii. To establish and maintain effective and efficient learner support systems.
- iii. To build human resource capacity to provide effective learner support systems.
- iv. To adopt innovative approaches including appropriate use of available technologies in providing effective learner support.

10. Quality Assurance Processes

Issue

Many institutions in the region offering programmes through ODL do not have quality assurance systems and mechanisms for facilitating recognition of qualifications.

Justification

Many institutions offering programmes via ODL in the region operate without quality assurance frameworks. Where they exist, the quality assurance frameworks are not synchronised. The absence of a Regional Qualifications Framework impedes the systematic evaluation of quality, comparability and equivalence of programmes offered through ODL.

Policy Statement

Countries in the region shall support the development of Institutional, National and Regional Quality Assurance Frameworks to promote recognition and delivery of quality programmes offered through ODL.

Objectives

- i. To develop a Regional Quality Assurance Framework, to facilitate harmonisation of ODL delivery across Caribbean states.
- ii. To facilitate the development of national quality assurance frameworks in harmony with the Regional Quality Assurance Framework.
- iii. To facilitate the development of institutional quality assurance frameworks aligned with the national quality assurance framework to guide development and delivery of quality programmes offered through ODL.
- iv. To support the development and implementation of a Regional Qualifications Framework.

11. Research Development and Results Dissemination

Issue:

There is limited research development, research and dissemination of findings on ODL within the region.

Issue Justification:

The culture of using research to inform practice and the sharing of research work in ODL is underdeveloped. There is limited access to documented information, where it exists, on the use of ODL within the region. Most research is institutionalised and has not been adequately disseminated across the region.

There is limited scope for research development in the use of ODL, and there are limited opportunities for publication and other methods of dissemination of research findings on the use of ODL in the region.

There are limited resources including grant funds for ODL.

There is no central repository/body for research on ODL with responsibility to:

- Call for papers on specific areas/topics on ODL;
- Facilitate peer review of existing papers;
- Facilitate the development of a pool of trained editors;
- Disseminate research results.

Policy:

Countries in the region shall ensure that there is a strong culture of research adequately supported by funding and dissemination of findings on the use of ODL methods in education.

Objectives:

- i. To support national and regional ODL research.
- ii. To develop a collaborative ODL research agenda at national and regional levels.
- iii. To develop a strong research culture and build ODL research capacity.
- iv. To set up national and regional national repositories of research in ODL.
- v. To enable publication of research journals.

12. Special Uses of ODL

Issue:

There are several underserved groups whose needs are not being addressed by conventional education and for whom ODL may be valuable as a means of meeting their educational needs.

Justification:

The region still possesses a relatively large number of untrained teachers as well as potential learners marginalised by geography, gender, levels of educational achievement, literacy and numeracy skills, language and special needs. The conventional system appears unable to address these diverse needs adequately.

Policy:

Courses and programmes shall be designed or customised to meet the diverse needs of under-represented and underserved groups and offered by ODL in the Caribbean.

Specific objectives:

- i. To promote the design and customisation of materials to reach groups who are outside or underserved by mainstream education in the Caribbean.
- ii. To support the effort of institutions/providers of programmes through ODL in providing access to underserved and under-represented groups in the region.
- iii. To promote the development of ODL initiatives that address special development issues in the region.

13. Staffing and Staff training

Issue:

Educational institutions/providers in most of the Caribbean countries have inadequate personnel trained to develop, deliver and support programmes and courses offered through ODL.

Justification:

There has been limited dedicated training for either existing or potential staff to teach through ODL methodologies. There appears to be limited institutional capacity to offer ODL as a viable mode of education delivery despite the increasing demand for ODL across the region.

Policy statement:

Caribbean countries shall ensure staff are trained appropriately in ODL methods and that recruitment matches scale of operations.

Policy Objectives:

- i. To provide training and continuing professional development opportunities for staff delivering ODL programmes.
- ii. To recruit and retain staff to match scale of operations.

14. Materials development: Alternatives and Choices

Issue: Content for some courses that could be offered through ODL in the region, is not available. Some course materials are irrelevant and inappropriate for the diversity of needs of current and potential learners.

Justification:

A repository of content in the public domain does not exist. Available materials often do not seem to reflect the contexts and realities of the Caribbean region, or meet the diverse needs of current and potential learners.

Policy Statement:

Caribbean countries shall promote the customization and development of materials appropriate and relevant to the diverse needs of learners and reflective of national priorities.

Specific Objectives:

- i. To ensure course materials are customized and developed to meet the diverse needs of learners pursuing programmes via ODL.
- ii. To ensure that content for use in programmes/courses offered through ODL is developed/acquired in ways that facilitate sharing, adaptation and reuse.
- iii. To enable the creation of a regional repository of content.

- iv. To provide appropriate instructional strategies for the diverse needs of learners pursuing programmes via ODL.
- v. To review and revise ODL programmes and curricula to ensure their responsiveness to the national/regional needs.

15. Public Perception and Awareness of ODL

Issue:

ODL in the region has an overall perception that is negative/inaccurate

Issue Justification:

There is an inability to attract desired target learners because of negative public perception of ODL in the region, resulting from prospective learners' fears about ODL being difficult, fears of technology, rumours of low or inconsistent quality of offerings, lack of support for learners, exploitative pricing by some online providers, insufficient information to authenticate information about online programmes, and lack of awareness about the nature and advantages of ODL.

Policy Statement:

Caribbean states shall promote advocacy of ODL to address the prevailing inaccurate public perceptions.

Objectives:

- i. To increase public awareness about the realities of ODL as an alternative mode of providing learning.
- ii. To provide a regulatory framework to obviate unacceptable practices.
- iii. To share best regional and global practices in the ODL sector.