

# Good news for early childhood education [JM] <sup>[1]</sup>

Editorial

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## EXCERPTS

The University of the West Indies (UWI) has introduced a post-graduate course in Early Childhood Development leading to a master's degree.

This project is good news for education and will help to dispel some of the tension which now exists between the Government's funding of tertiary education and funding for the early childhood sector, which receives pitifully little support and is left to an unregulated private sector to cope as best it can.

Spurred by criticism of its education priorities, the Government has established an Early Childhood Commission which is expected to set and enforce proper standards for this vital foundation sector of the education chain.

In delivering the main address at the launching of the new degree programme, State Minister in the Ministry of Education, Dr. Donald Rhodd, was refreshingly candid in pointing out the shortcomings of the existing system, stressing the need to ensure that our "children's very first teachers are among the best in the business as no longer can we continue to apologise for shortcomings. We must now move to correct what is wrong and not compromise the future development of our children."

There are now about 4,000 teachers in the privately-run community basic school system catering to about 150,000 youngsters. Most of these teachers are untrained. Many experts in the field see this poor educational foundation as the main cause for existing poor performance in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors.

Dr. Rhodd has stated that the Government intends to attract the brightest and best teachers to serve at the early childhood level yet the allocation in the last national Budget for early childhood education was only 4.5 per cent compared with 17 per cent for tertiary education.

The Early Childhood Commission is going to have its work cut out for it in setting acceptable standards for teachers in basic schools and licensing them accordingly. Many of the existing early childhood teachers will have to remain in place until they can be properly trained. Such a transition period, known as 'grandfathering', is a common feature of many systems in the process of change. But a start must be made or the status quo will overwhelm all good intentions.

We recommend that new private sector community basic schools coming on stream after passage of the Early Childhood legislation must employ properly-trained teachers, at least to diploma level, in order to get their licences to operate. The new programme at the UWI will go a long way in helping a transition from mediocrity to true professionalism.

Let us stay the course; let us build a strong early education foundation for the good of this nation.

- reprinted from the Jamaica Gleaner

**Region:** Latin America and the Caribbean <sup>[2]</sup>

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