

FEATURE ARTICLE
COMPARING BARBADOS' WORKFORCE DIVERSITY TO THOSE OF DEVELOPED
COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES – AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

The development and empowerment of the workforce is one of the primary goals being pursued in Barbados' quest to attain developed country status over the coming years. Indeed, policy and decision makers are generally of the view that a highly skilled and diversified workforce will enhance the future ability of the country to improve productivity and effectively compete in a dynamic international environment.

In taking the vital workforce development objective under consideration, the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Human Resource Development embarked on a brief research exercise to:

- (i) compare the diversity of Barbados' workforce with the workforces advanced industrialised nations; and
- (ii) assess the distribution of highly skilled workers, vis-à-vis other occupational groups.

Upon reviewing other developed countries such as Canada, the United States and Singapore, the countries ultimately chosen for this exercise were Australia and New Zealand. These were chosen based on the following criteria:

1. Both countries are members of the Commonwealth, as is the case with Barbados;
2. Both countries have adopted a Westminster system of Government, as has Barbados; and
3. The international classification systems¹ used to classify their workforces are similar to the classification systems used by Barbados.

¹ Both countries utilise (i) The Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZCO) and (ii) the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZIC). The categories of each system are quite similar to the (i) International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) and the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) used by Barbados.

A three-step exercise was then pursued to compare the Barbados workforce with those of the two chosen models. The modus operandi of the exercise is now outlined below.

Step 1:- Obtain Relevant Economic Indicators to Facilitate Comparison

Statistics were first obtained that sought to provide evidence as to the developed status of these two countries, using indicators such as per capita GDP and country rankings on the Human Development Index and Global Competitiveness Index.

Table 1

SELECT INDICATORS - BARBADOS, NEW ZEALAND & AUSTRALIA				
Indicator	Source	Australia	New Zealand	Barbados
G.D.P per capita (U.S\$) 2012	World Bank Database	67,436	38,680	13,250
Human Development Index 2012	United Nations	2	6	38
Unemployment Rate (%) 2012	World Bank Database	5.2	6.9	11.6
Global Competitiveness Index 2013-2014	World Economic Forum	21	18	47

From **table 1** above, it can be determined from the listed indicators that both Australia and New Zealand possess the traits of developed countries.

Step 2:- Devise High-Skilled and Elementary Occupational Groupings

The workforces of each of the developed countries were then reviewed and analysed according to Occupational Grouping. For the purpose of the exercise, “*Professionals*” and “*Technicians & Associate Professionals*” groupings were combined, to form one “High-skilled” grouping. For Australia and New Zealand, the latter grouping is labeled “Technicians and Trades Workers”.

At the other end of the skills spectrum, the “*Elementary Occupations*” grouping for Barbados was juxtaposed against the “*Labourers*” grouping for Australia and New Zealand. Here again, though the labels were different, both groupings contained similar types of occupations. The distribution of the two workforces was then compared to that for Barbados.

Step 3:- Formulate Amalgamated Tables showing Relevant Occupational Groupings

The following table was devised:

Table 2

WORKFORCE COMPARISON: BARBADOS TO SELECT DEVELOPED COUNTRIES FOR THE YEAR 2010

BARBADOS (2010)		AUSTRALIA (2010-2011)		NEW ZEALAND (2010)	
OCCUPATIONAL GROUP	%	OCCUPATIONAL GROUP	%	OCCUPATIONAL GROUP	%
Legislators, Senior Officials	8.8	Managers	12.8	Managers	18.5
Professionals	12.4	Professionals	21.6	Professionals	21.5
Technicians & Assoc. Profs	10.9	Technicians & Trades Workers	14.9	Technicians & Trades Workers	12.4
Clerks	13.4	Community & Personal Services Workers	9.4	Community & Personal Services Workers	8.9
Service Workers/ Shop Workers	17.6	Clerical & Administrative Workers	14.6	Clerical & Administrative Workers	12.1
Skilled Agricultural Workers	2.5	Sales Workers	9.8	Sales Workers	9.5
Craft & Related Workers	12.3	Machinery Operators & Drivers	6.4	Machinery Operators & Drivers	5.9
Elementary Occupations	17.2	Labourers	10.4	Labourers	11.3
Plant & Machine Operators & Assemblers	4.8				
Not Stated	0.1				
TOTAL	100	TOTAL	100	TOTAL	100
OCCUPATIONAL GROUPINGS AS A PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYED LABOUR FORCE					
	Barbados	Australia	New Zealand		
High Skilled Grouping	23.3	36.5	33.9		
Elementary Occupations/Labourers	17.2	10.4	11.3		

From a review of the statistics, two observations could be made:

- For each of the two developed countries under review, ***workers in high skilled occupations constituted over a third of the employed labour force***, whilst for Barbados, persons in high skilled occupations accounted for 23%.
- In contrast, workers employed in elementary-type occupations in both Australia and New Zealand made up just 10-11% of the employed labour force, ***significantly less than the 17% calculated for Barbados***.

Against the backdrop of the first observation, it may be reasonably deduced that policies and programmes would therefore have to be implemented, to significantly increase the current percentage of high-skilled workers to be more in line with those of developed countries. Such an action could augur well for a small developing country, seeking to grow its economy and attain competitiveness in the global arena.

It may also be advantageous over the short-to-medium term, to embark on retraining programmes and initiatives aimed at persons working in elementary type occupations. Such actions should ultimately be devised to (i) enhance their skills sets and (ii) encourage them to diversify outwards into other occupational groupings that require higher level skills sets.

The Size of the Public Sector

Table 3

Size of the Public Sector as a (%) of Total Employed Labour Force (2013)				
	Australia	New Zealand	Barbados	OECD²
Size of Public Sector	16.5	11.7 (2008)	22	15 (2008)

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Barbados Statistical Service & OECD
Online Library

²OECD is the acronym for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, primarily composed of advanced countries, but with membership from emerging countries such as Chile and Mexico. For additional information, please see www.oecd.org

The Ministry finally sought to review the size of the public sectors of Australia and New Zealand, **relative to** the total employed labour force of each country.

For Australia, the percentage was 16.5%, whilst the latest available figure for New Zealand (for the year 2008) was recorded at some 11.7%. It was further discovered that in OECD countries on average, the average size of Government as a percentage of the employed labour force was 15% up to the year 2008.

With Barbados however, the size of government is over one fifth of the total employed labour force. This is significantly more than the proportions recorded for the two countries under review, along with the percentage recorded for the OECD countries as a group.