



Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller on Wednesday (January 9) challenged the country's community colleges to change their role to better serve the nation.

Speaking at the 17th staging of the Council of Community Colleges of Jamaica (CCJ) Conference 2013 in St. Ann, the Prime Minister said community colleges must reinvent themselves to remain relevant to students, local industry and the international labour market system.

"The Council of Community Colleges of Jamaica and the colleges must work together to re-brand the whole community college system. The community college has been viewed by some as a "lesser" educational alternative. Therefore, the internal reforms you employ must help to change your philosophy; change your academic offerings; change your teaching methods; change your partnership arrangements and change your image, where necessary. Remember the focus of your brand must always be community-oriented," Mrs. Simpson Miller said.

The Prime Minister said innovative ways must be found to deal with the prevailing competition among community colleges noting that "more and more private businesses are getting in on the college game". She said it was critical for community colleges to take international benchmarking more seriously.

"No revolutionary change or impact can be achieved within the community college sector without new modes of thinking. You must think and rethink about every aspect of your enterprise and in radically different ways," she said.

"There is a need to engage habits of critical thinking towards creating the educational capital or product that is skilled, motivated, relevant, and sought after," Mrs. Simpson Miller added.

The Prime Minister told the group that Jamaica is depending on them to achieve those revolutionary outcomes, which they should not only view as possible but as an obligation.

This year's conference was held under the theme, "Shaping the Future: Changing Roles for Community Colleges". The annual event provides an opportunity for educators and other stakeholders to celebrate the achievements of the community colleges network in Jamaica and also begin the process of reshaping the community college sector as it moves into 2013 and beyond.