

LEARNING THE ROPES

Exploring ways of making training appropriate and effective.

This paper is based on the Learning the Ropes event in October 2004. This document is written as a discussion starter, rather than as a description of the event. The aim is that you can use it within your church, organisation or other settings to discuss the issues further. The ultimate aim is that together we would look deeper at the challenges presented by world mission and our response to it in the UK.

Why is there a concern about training?

In the summer of 2004, a number of mission orientated training courses were cancelled due to low bookings. The question “why” was asked by a number of people. This followed a number of comments at Global Interface about training. These included:

- “Seminary approach out of date”
- “Importance of mentoring by experienced mission leaders”
- “People like ownership of their materials”
- “Training for whole church – not just those going”
- “Value of training in the community”

For these reasons, this event was organised. It predominantly brought together staff from Christian colleges, cross-cultural trainers and some agency training personnel. Half of those attending had also been at Global Interface.

What are some of the key questions around training?

The group considered these to be key questions:

- What is the role of local churches in identifying and providing mission training?
- What other forms of training are or could be provided?
- How are colleges changing to adapt to the new environment?
- How do we avoid duplication and competition?
- What are the ethics of promotion and advertising?
- Is global mission on the agenda of most ministerial training? How can pastors be taught a global perspective in their training so that they can teach congregations more adequately – whose responsibility is it to train pastors? [This is an area that Global Connections is aware of and seeking to respond to.]

What else would you add to this list?

What training is available?

There is great diversity of training available in the UK on mission and it ranges from more formal to very informal opportunities, to fit a variety of time frames and specialisms. There are Christian training institutions, some of which specialise in mission. There are a number of mission agencies doing cross-cultural training in short and long term mission. There are also organisations with trainers that teach short courses on specific issues.

What about web-based training?

It was suggested that interactive web-based training could be the future of cross-cultural training. However, one participant highlighted that there is a question around how much information should go on websites because of “loss of intellectual copyright.” Is it practical to explore this further?

How can people access information about training courses?

One of the participants asked, “How do we discover the players?” If the trainers do not know everyone involved in training, then it is not surprising how important this question is!

Christian Vocations, www.christianvocations.org, have a training database on their website known as ‘equip to serve.’ Oscar has training information at www.oscar.org.uk. Also, the Missionary Training Service is working with others to produce a new website with a searchable database of training courses worldwide at www.trainforChrist.org.

How are standards of all the different courses compared and assessed?

The question of assessment follows the issue of access, “How do we know who are the good players? Most of the information on training lists what’s available but how can quality be assessed when courses are so different? Factors affecting this include the need for quality control, the cost of validation, issues of stewardship, cost, and effectiveness of training for equipping people. At the current time, there is no quality control covering all training in cross-cultural ministry and missiology. The Colleges are accredited but many independent courses are not. Is this an area that we need to think more seriously about?

Is diversity in training necessarily unhealthy?

There was some debate about this. We live in a diverse culture where people are used to making choices. Does collaboration remove choice and is this a good thing? However, there are limited resources and there is concern about the seeming competitive nature of Christian ministry. Should we have a vision of the Kingdom of God rather than our own individual group and what impact does this have on collaboration? Lastly, should agencies and denominations need to do their own courses? What do you think?

What next?

A number of suggestions were made at this event about how to take forward training issues in a mission context. Many of the suggestions come from those actively involved in providing training. Are there other suggestions that you would make to these?

- Research the current situation in training.
- Develop a Global Connections’ training forum with tracks for different focuses and specialisms.
- The suggestion was made that before committing to any programmes, members around the table should ask who else is doing it. There was some concern that ideas may be taken and implemented by others. The issue of trust was raised and the suggestion made that the training forum and research run in parallel so as to help challenge this. The forum could start by looking at issues like re-entry debriefing that came out of this event.
- Global Connections’ should explore reintroducing the missiologists forum for a more academic discussion on mission.

Training is an area of concern not just for those leading training institutions and courses but also those wanting to access them. Let the debate continue! If there are issues that you would like to comment on or ideas that you have, email options@globalconnections.co.uk (see the Introduction paper for more information).

