

# *Building the Capacity to Build*

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*Closing Ceremony*

*Sixth International Training & Materials Development  
Workshop  
Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth  
(VUSSC)*

*26th October to 12th November 2008  
Exuma Islands, The Bahamas*

*Remarks by  
Sir John Daniel (with Paul West)  
Commonwealth of Learning*

Dr Leon Higgs, Director of Higher Education and Lifelong Learning in the Ministry of Education; Dr Pandora Johnson, Vice-President, College of the Bahamas; Workshop Participants; colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to be in the Bahamas again on this happy occasion. Let me begin by asking you, Dr. Higgs, to thank the Minister, The Honourable Carl Bethel, on our behalf for the strong support that he, you and the Government of the Bahamas have given us in holding this important workshop. The Commonwealth of Learning is also most grateful to a number of individuals who have devoted their time and skills to making this event such a success.

First, let me thank Jennifer and Christopher Kettel from the College of the Bahamas here in Exuma, who have done so much to make it all work for you. Second, I express our gratitude to Carlton Watson from the Nassau Campus of the College, and Marcia Musgrove, 'Teacher of the Year' from the C. V. Bethel Senior High School.

Both are veterans of earlier workshops like this one and have played a vital role in making this one a success. Third, I thank the College of the Bahamas as a whole, through its Vice-President for Outreach, Pandora Johnson, for the great institutional support that we have had from the College. Please give them all a hand.

Watching the development of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth has been one of the most satisfying experiences of my time as President of COL. I picked up the threads of the project in 2004, some six months after the Commonwealth Ministers of Education, meeting in Edinburgh for their 15th triennial Conference, had approved a proposal for the project.

The first thing I did was to write to each of the Ministers of the 32 Small States of the Commonwealth asking them whether they wanted to be part of the project and, if so, what topics they wanted the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) to develop and what media and technologies they wanted it to use.

Four years ago 22 countries replied affirmatively. I am delighted to tell you that the number of participating countries has since risen steadily from that figure. As of now all 32 small states are associated with the VUSSC. The last two countries to join in are Kiribati and Nauru. Neither has participated in any events like this so far, but their COL Focal Points were at a meeting of all our Asia and Pacific Focal Points in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia ten days ago. When they heard the other Pacific nations saying how useful the VUSSC was to them in bridging the digital divide and developing tertiary education they said they must join in.

So we now have a full house of participants. The growing interest and participation in our Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth is also demonstrated by this workshop that is just ending.

This is the sixth of our international training and materials development workshops. It has attracted both the largest attendance: 22 participants; and also the largest number of participating countries: 20. I am particularly delighted that this has happened for such practical subjects as the construction industry and building safety.

I say that because, when I wrote out to the Ministers in 2004 and asked them what subjects they wanted the VUSSC to develop, they answered with a list of post-secondary, skills and employment related topics. We have been working through that list in the five workshops held before this one: Mauritius, 2006 - Tourism and Hospitality; Singapore, 2007 - Teacher Development; Trinidad & Tobago, 2007 - Life Skills; Samoa, 2007 - Disaster Management; and Seychelles, 2008 - the Fishing Industry.

All those were successful events but this one has surpassed them in attendance and diversity, and I congratulate you all. Let me add a special word of congratulations and thanks to your team leaders and ask you to give them a hand.

When I wrote to Ministers in 2004 I also asked them about the media and technologies that they wanted the VUSSC to use. I did that because I knew that although Ministers had called it the Virtual University, access to connected computers varied widely among the small states and within each country. I hinted that they might want us to use a range of media, old and new. Ministers replied that they understood my point but that for them training in information technology and bridging the digital divide were key objectives of the project. They wanted us to focus on creating eLearning materials, even if they might

sometimes be used in conventional ways.

So we have tried to do that. Training in modern IT skills has been a key part of each workshop. I am sure that some of you participating in this workshop here struggled with that at first, but I hope that you are all returning home proud and confident of the new skills that you have acquired. The Chinese have a saying that if you give someone a fish they will eat for a day, but if you teach them to fish they will eat for a lifetime. In this workshop we have tried to do a bit of both. We have taught you to fish in the world of eLearning but we have also helped you to prepare some fish - in the form of materials on construction safety - for immediate consumption.

So what is my charge to you as you head for home to the four corners of the world? The Caribbean is known for the power and eloquence of its preachers. I cannot hope to match their oratory but I urge you to do three things when you return to your countries.

First, I ask you to share your new skills by training others in your institution or workplace. Start doing that immediately before the skills get rusty. You are teachers and you know that there is no better way of really learning things than teaching them to others. Do that and you will sustain and improve the skills that you are taking away from the Bahamas. A major aim of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth is to bridge the digital divide. The best way of doing that is to multiply the number of computer savvy people in each of the small states. Our hope is that each participant in one of these boot camps will train at least five others.

So far over 100 people have taken part in one or other of these workshops. One hundred multiplied by five is five hundred, which is very significant given the small populations in many of your countries. So please start sharing your training as soon as you get back and get those whom you train to share the skills with others in their turn. You might also want to hone your own skills further by enrolling as a student in an online course. I shall come back to that in a moment.

Second, continue to be part of the network that has been created here so that you sustain a vibrant and growing network of teachers of building and construction across the small states of the Commonwealth - people who not only know their subject but also know about instructional design, eLearning and online collaboration. You mentioned in the final session this morning that you wanted to stay in touch and continue the friendships developed here. People at previous workshops have found these ongoing networks of colleagues and friends a tremendous legacy and support. I encourage you to continue developing materials together. We shall be delighted to add more people to the Basecamp as the network grows.

Third, please press your institutions to take the VUSSC seriously by getting them to offer courses that are fully accredited by the institution and your national qualifications authority. It does not matter whether the courses are offered face-to-face or fully online. They can still carry full accreditation and attract students. We at COL have been delighted that the Transnational Qualifications Framework that has been developed as part of the VUSSC has been so widely welcomed in the countries.

This is a pace-setting development globally. You should be proud of it and use it. While you have been here in Exuma the VUSSC has announced its first fully online course, which is a course in Managing and Facilitating Online Instruction from the University of the West Indies. The first offering, which starts in a few days, is already full and COL has sponsored a number of participants in it from across the Commonwealth. We shall continue to do so in future. Meanwhile, please aim to add your courses to the VUSSC/TQF website. This will highlight the quality of the programmes offered in the small states, which is in the interests of everyone.

So please go home and press your national institutions to put forward programmes that they are ready to offer internationally, so that they can be co-branded on the VUSSC website.

Finally, now that you are converts to IT you may be frustrated by the lack of bandwidth in your countries. I ask you so make a fuss so that governments and telecoms authorities wake up and join the worlds of work and education in seeing IT as an essential tool. Fortunately the positive link between connectivity and faster development is now well established, so the case is easy to make.

Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, that is the end of my little sermon. The Commonwealth of Learning is thrilled that the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth has succeeded in catching the imagination of the small states through the involvement of people like you. I am sure that you will carry the memories of your three weeks of hard work in the Bahamas with you for a lifetime.

On behalf my colleagues from COL who have made this workshop happen I thank you all for your dedication and commitment. I refer to Paul West, to whom the VUSSC owes its strategic vision; Joshua Mallet who is such a friendly facilitator; Helena Fehr who has run the last lap with you, and Helen Askounis, back in Vancouver, who made sure that you all got here - she has been taking a very close interest throughout the workshop. Let's put our hands together for them. Their greatest satisfaction comes from knowing that you took full advantage of this workshop and that its benefits to you will continue long after you are back home.

Finally, I thank the Government and people of the Bahamas, and especially the College of the Bahamas, for the wonderful hospitality that the Bahamas has shown to us. For everyone here this has been a cultural experience as well as an IT experience. Your welcome and generosity has made that possible. Thank you.

Bon voyage to all of you it has been a privilege to share the last days of the workshop with you.