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THINKING OF THE WORLD

VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR THE SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH

Monitoring & Evaluation Update

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by

Catherine C. Dunlop, Ph.D.
The Research and Evaluation Unit
Simon Fraser University
Vancouver, British Columbia
Canada

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This *Monitoring & Evaluation Update Report* for the Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is intended as a companion document to the *VUSSC Interim Evaluation Report* (June 2008). This report provides an updated summary of VUSSC activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts, organized by country. It also includes some background information on context for each country: population size, languages, and Internet usage. As well, illustrative quotes from interviews conducted at the July 2008 VUSSC Interlocutors Meeting are presented, indicating the range of outcomes and impacts achieved and potential strategies for the future of VUSSC. Finally, the report concludes with an additional set of recommendations.

VUSSC Background and Context

The Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is a growing network committed to the collaborative development of free content resources for education. Specifically, VUSSC countries[1] have chosen to focus on the development of postsecondary, skills-related courses in areas such as tourism, entrepreneurship, use of information and communications technologies (ICTs), life skills, disaster management and fisheries. The VUSSC course materials are non-proprietary and readily adaptable to the specific context of each country. They can be used in the offering of credit-bearing qualifications as well as strengthening educational capacity and access in member countries.

It is important to emphasize that the VUSSC is not a tertiary institution. Rather, it is a collective mechanism for developing, adapting, and sharing courses and learning materials. It is also a forum for institutions to build capacity and expertise in online collaboration, eLearning and ICTs generally.

VUSSC was first conceived by Commonwealth Education Ministers when they met in Halifax, Canada in December 2000. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is facilitating the VUSSC initiative, with funding support from the Government of Singapore, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC).

There are currently 30 countries participating in VUSSC, through interlocuter planning meetings, training and course development workshops, and an international gathering of senior officials for the development of a Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF).

1. Antigua & Barbuda	11. Kiribati	21. Seychelles
2. The Bahamas	12. Jamaica	22. Solomon Islands
3. Barbados	13. Lesotho	23. St Kitts & Nevis
4. Belize	14. Maldives	24. St Lucia
5. Botswana	15. Malta	25. St Vincent & the Grenadines
6. Cyprus	16. Mauritius	26. Swaziland
7. Dominica	17. Namibia	27. Tonga
8. The Gambia	18. Papua New Guinea	28. Trinidad and Tobago
9. Grenada	19. Samoa	29. Tuvalu
10. Guyana	20. Sierra Leone	30. Vanuatu

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[1] A "small state" is usually defined as having a population of fewer than 1.5 million. Of the 52 Commonwealth countries, 32 are small states.

The context for VUSSC is diverse across participating countries. The population sizes of VUSSC countries range from 10,000 (Tuvalu) to 6,331,000 (Papua New Guinea). The average and median population sizes are, respectively, 1,097,964 and 318,500. There are at least 17 different languages spoken among the VUSSC countries (not including the 850 indigenous languages in Papua New Guinea). The number of Internet users per 1,000 people ranges from 29 (Tonga and Papua New Guinea) to 595 (Barbados), with an average of 199 and a median of 162.

There are 29 VUSSC Interlocutors confirmed out of 30 VUSSC member countries. There are two Interlocutors from Trinidad and Tobago, and no Interlocutors yet from Kiribati and Solomon Islands. (A representative from the Solomon Islands participated in the Interlocutors Meeting in London, July 2008).

VUSSC Activities and Outputs

- Thirty-three small states have participated in VUSSC events since 2005. This includes Brunei Darussalam, Fiji and The Comores (Non-Commonwealth). Only Kiribati has not yet participated in any VUSSC events.

- There have been two VUSSC Orientation and Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005, 2006).

- There have been two VUSSC Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008).

- There have been five training and course development workshops, also called "Bootcamps" (Mauritius 2006 -Tourism and Entrepreneurship; Singapore 2007 - Training Educators to Develop Open and Distance Learning Materials; Trinidad & Tobago 2007 - Life Skills; Samoa 2007 - Disaster Management; and Seychelles 2008 - Fisheries).

- The sixth Bootcamp is planned for November 2008 in The Bahamas and will focus on construction management.

- A total of 281 participants (*including* repeat individuals such as Interlocutors) have attended VUSSC events. This also includes non-small states such as: Canada, China, France, and Singapore (a total of 9 people).

- A total of 207 people (*excluding* repeat individuals such as Interlocutors) have attended VUSSC events. This includes 54% women (112) and 46% men (95).

- Many VUSSC participants have conducted training and capacity building workshops in their home countries after returning from the Bootcamp.

- Audiences for the VUSSC follow-up workshops have included high school teachers, college lecturers, instructors, tutors, tourist guides, guidance counselors, ministry personnel, IT managers, and ODL practitioners.

VUSSC Outcomes and Impacts

- VUSSC has achieved outcomes at the individual, institutional and national levels.

- Outcomes at the individual level have included: Bootcamp participants have enhanced global perspectives and increased IT and collaborative leadership skills, and networking, enhanced marketability of participants in VUSSC in-country follow-up workshops, National Teacher of the Year Award given to a VUSSC Bootcamp Team Leader (The Bahamas), and Bootcamp participants have gone on to graduate degrees as a result of increased confidence and motivation through VUSSC experience.

- Outcomes at the institutional level have included: integration of VUSSC materials into guidance counseling and allied health work, into high school fisheries curriculum, into disaster management courses, into teacher training courses, into a Business Management certificate, into courses for regional governments, into National Open Schools curriculum, into rural training centres, and gaining institutional experience in operationalizing an eLearning strategy ("institutional lessons"), development of a roadmap from a certificate to a Master's degree in Environmental Education and Sustainable Development, movement of an institution toward a more blended delivery approach, transformation of application and registration system (now online), and primary teachers have developed websites for their classes through VUSSC follow-up workshops.

- Outcomes at the national level have included: increased networking and collaboration among national stakeholders, the development of an in-country reservoir of resource personnel in needed skill areas, and increased government commitment to ODL.

- Achieved and anticipated impacts have included: increased networking and collaboration on a global scale, acceptance of ODL at the post-secondary level, national movement toward technology-assisted education, and cost-reduction at the national level from sending less students overseas due to increased access through VUSSC.

Conclusion

VUSSC has achieved an impressive array of activities (meetings and Bootcamps), outputs (in-country follow-up workshops, course materials, information sessions), outcomes (integration of course materials into curricula, networking, new linkages, new perspectives, a cadre of skilled personnel) and impacts (increased sector and national commitment to ODL, and a new global community of practice).

VUSSC has also been conducted with a high degree of professionalism. COL staff should be commended on a job extremely well done, both in terms of the overall vision for VUSSC and also with respect to the execution of that vision and the collaborative manner in which it has been achieved.

- *VUSSC has been a great working relationship. Very professional, very enjoyable, and very progressive. (Samoa)*

VUSSC Monitoring & Evaluation Matrix

VUSSC Country	Context		Monitoring and Evaluation Findings	
	Population (2007) & Languages	**Internet Usage**	**VUSSC Activities & Outputs**	**VUSSC Outcomes & Impacts**
Antigua & Barbuda	77,000 English, Creole (Eng)	410 Internet users/1000 (2007)	• Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in two Bootcamps (Singapore and Trinidad & Tobago) • Trained teachers to develop material for ODL in 3-day workshop (22 participants • Plan to train all staff members responsible for a course at Antigua State College in developing materials for ODL	• Workshop participants (teachers) became more "marketable" with skills in developing materials for ODL • Plan to integrate life skills materials into guidance counsellor work
The Bahamas	331,000 English	307 Internet users/1000 (2007)	• Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008) • Participation in three Bootcamps (Singapore, Samoa, Seychelles); all three participants were Team Leaders • Trained teachers (with the Ministry of Education) on disaster management • High School science teachers are collaborating on new modules for fisheries courses	• Bootcamp participant (and Team Leader) entered a Ph.D. program in the UK in part as a result of confidence gained through VUSSC experience • VUSSC material integrated into the high school fisheries curriculum • VUSSC helped move along the whole notion of open and distance education at the post-secondary level • Anticipate that the Transtional Qualifications Framework will help get the National Qualifications Framework funded by government and implemented • Bootcamp participant (and Team

VUSSC Country	CONTEXT		MONITORING AND EVALUATION FINDINGS	
	Population (2007) & Languages	Internet Usage	VUSSC Activities & Outputs	VUSSC Outcomes & Impacts
				Leader) won National Teacher of the Year Award (VUSSC leadership experience contributed to winning the award), April 2008
Barbados	294,000 English	595 Internet users/1000 (2006)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006) • Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008) • Participation in two Bootcamps (Mauritius and Singapore)	
Belize	288,000 English, Spanish, Creole (Eng)	124 Internet users/1000 (2006)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006) • Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in four Bootcamps (Mauritius, Singapore, Trinidad & Tobago, and Samoa) • Orientation sessions conducted on VUSSC and ICTs • Tourist guides trained partly based on (inspired by) VUSSC materials (approximately 150) • Lecturers trained on ODL using VUSSC materials on the WikiEducator (16 participants from	• Life Skills materials shared with Allied Health practitioners • VUSSC materials incorporated into two disaster management courses (f-2-f) • National Emergency Management Organization in dialogue about using VUSSC materials • Developed four courses for teachers on using online resources and course development tools, ready for sharing across VUSSC • Increased networking on a global scale

VUSSC Country	CONTEXT		MONITORING AND EVALUATION FINDINGS	
	Population (2007) & Languages	Internet Usage	VUSSC Activities & Outputs	VUSSC Outcomes & Impacts
			four faculties)	
Botswana	1,882,000 Setswana, English	43 Internet users/1000 (2008)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006) • Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008) • Participation in four Bootcamps (Mauritius, Singapore, Trinidad & Tobago, and Seychelles) • Bootcamp participants increased ICT skills • Market survey conducted leading to plan for development of program in Environmental Education and Sustainable Development	• Insitution gained useful experience for operationalization of elearning • Development of roadmap from Certificate Program to Masters Program in Environmental Education and Sustainable Development based in part on open educational resources, and to be part of VUSSC • Using VUSSC material in Certificate in Business Management
Cyprus	855,000 Greek, Turkish	367 Internet users/1000 (2007)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006) • Participation in one Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006) • Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008)	
Dominica	79,000 (2004) English, Creole (French)	287 Internet users/1000 (2006)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006) • Participation in two Interlocutors	

VUSSC Country	CONTEXT		MONITORING AND EVALUATION FINDINGS	
	Population (2007) & Languages	Internet Usage	VUSSC Activities & Outputs	VUSSC Outcomes & Impacts
			Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008)	
			• Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008)	
			• Participation in one Bootcamp (Singapore)	
The Gambia	1,709,000 English	57 Internet users/1000 (2008)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006)	• Increased networking
			• Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008)	
			• Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008)	
			• Participation in two Bootcamps (Mauritius and Singapore)	
			• Note: There have been three Interlocutors from The Gambia (high turnover)	
Grenada	106,000 English	188 Internet users/1000 (2005)	• Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008)	
			• Participation in two Bootcamps (Singapore and Trinidad & Tobago)	
Guyana	738,000 English	181 Internet users/1000 (2005)	• Participation in one Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005)	
			• Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008)	
Jamaica	2,714,000	396 Internet users/1000	• Participation in two Planning	• Using VUSSC materials in Youth

VUSSC Country	CONTEXT		MONITORING AND EVALUATION FINDINGS	
	Population (2007) & Languages	Internet Usage	VUSSC Activities & Outputs	VUSSC Outcomes & Impacts
	English	(2006)	Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006) • Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008) • Participation in one Interlocutors Meeting (London 2008) • Participation in three Bootcamps (Singapore, Trinidad & Tobago, Samoa) • Conducting training seminar program to cascade VUSSC materials across teaching and guidance program • Working in collaboration with CKLN	Counselling Centre • Developed in-country reservoir of resource personnel in particular skill areas
Lesotho	2,008,000 Sesotho, English	33 Internet users/1000 (2008)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006) • Participation in two Interlocutors Meeting (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008) • Participation in four Bootcamps (Singapore, Trinidad & Tobago, Samoa, Seychelles) • Trained teachers to develop material for ODL	• Increased networking • Aniticipate adapting business and entrepreneurship material
Maldives	306,000 Dhivehi, English	66 Internet users/1000 (2007)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006)	

VUSSC Country	CONTEXT		MONITORING AND EVALUATION FINDINGS	
	Population (2007) & Languages	Internet Usage	VUSSC Activities & Outputs	VUSSC Outcomes & Impacts
			• Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008) • Participation in one Interlocutors Meeting (Jamaica 2006) • Participation in four Bootcamps (Singapore, Trinidad & Tobago, Samoa, Syechelles)	
Malta	407,000 Maltese, English	330 Internet users/1000 (2006)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006) • Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008) • Participation in one Bootcamp (Mauritius)	
Mauritius	1,262,000 English	267 Internet users/1000 (2008)	• Participation in one Planning Meeting (Singapore 2006) • Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008) • Hosted first Bootcamp (Tourism and Entrepreneurship) • Participation in all five Bootcamps • Conducted national "sensitizing seminar" for stakeholders last year	• "Institutional lesson" for the Mauritius Institute of Education, helping them see how to work out a distance education strategy • VUSSC seen as an opportunity to move into technology-assisted education

VUSSC Country	CONTEXT		MONITORING AND EVALUATION FINDINGS	
	Population (2007) & Languages	Internet Usage	VUSSC Activities & Outputs	VUSSC Outcomes & Impacts
			(40 participants); another more focused session planned for this September • Plan to focus on championing institutions (Mauritius Institute of Education and University of Technology of Mauritius) to encourage course devlopment process	
Namibia	2,074,000 English	48 Internet users/1000 (2008)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006) • Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008) • Participation in all five Bootcamps • Planning a meeting with all Bootcamp participants to encourage follow through and use of course materials • Note: there have been three Interlocutors from Namibia (high turnover)	• Anticipate that the University will use the disaster management material in a continuing education course for regional governments
Papua New Guinea	6,331,000 English, 850 indigenous languages	29 Internet users/1000 (2005)	• Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008) • Participation in three Bootcamps	• Increased interest and commitment by PNG government to VUSSC and ODL • Anticipate the University will use VUSSC materials to offer courses in tourism and disaster management in 2009

VUSSC Country	CONTEXT		MONITORING AND EVALUATION FINDINGS	
	Population (2007) & Languages	Internet Usage	VUSSC Activities & Outputs	VUSSC Outcomes & Impacts
			(Singapore, Trinidad & Tobago, Samoa)	
			• Conducted information sessions on VUSSC and ODL	
			• Trained staff on Wilipedia and developing mterials for ODL	
			• Note: PNG is 64k bandwidth; license isued recently for satellite communication	
Samoa	187,000 Samoan, English	32 Internet users/1000 (2005)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006)	• VUSSC participants have enhanced global perspective
			• Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008)	• VUSSC Bootcamp participants have enhanced collaborative leadership skills
			• Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008)	• VUSSC Bootcamp participants have increased IT skills
			• Hosted fourth Bootcamp (Disaster Management)	• New linkages created among institutions on a national level as a result of hosting the Bootcamp
			• Participation in all five Bootcamps	
			• Conducted training sessions in using the VUSSC template	
			• Note: TVET (polytech) and higher education (university) recently merged in Samoa	
Seychelles	87,000 Creole, English and French	389 Internet users/1000 (2008)	• Participation in one Planning Meeting (Singapore 2006)	• Developed cadre of IT professionals to manage IT facilities
			• Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008)	• Established an online community of IT managers and support structure
			• Participation in Transnational	

VUSSC Country	Context		Monitoring and Evaluation Findings	
	Population (2007) & Languages	Internet Usage	VUSSC Activities & Outputs	VUSSC Outcomes & Impacts
			Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008) • Hosted fifth Bootcamp (Fisheries) • Participation in all five Bootcamps • Trained a group of IT managers on the use of open software for supporting local IT infrastructure (17 participants)	
Sierra Leone	5,866,000 English	389 Internet users/1000 (2008)	• Participation in one Interlocutors Meeting (London 2008) • Participation in one Bootcamp (Seychelles)	
St Kitts & Nevis	46,000 English	254 Internet users/1000 (2008)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006) • Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008) • Participation in three Bootcamps (Mauritius, Singapore, Trinidad & Tobago) • Conducted workshop on Moodle (with CKLN) • Informally trained practitioners in ODL and ICT (approximately 30 people)	• Progress achieved in moving College towards more blended delivery • Added Moodle to College website • Started online application and registration system for College • Encourgaed lecturers to get courses online • Bootcamp participant enrolled in Master's degree program (Teaching and Technology) and brought four other students into program also
St Lucia	165,000	328 Internet users/1000	• Participation in one Planning	• Anticipate that the new University

VUSSC Country	CONTEXT		MONITORING AND EVALUATION FINDINGS	
	Population (2007) & Languages	Internet Usage	VUSSC Activities & Outputs	VUSSC Outcomes & Impacts
	English	(2006)	Meeting (Singapore 2005) • Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in one Bootcamp (Trinidad & Tobago) • Note: new Minister and Permanent Secretary	will offer a VUSSC course (maybe on ICT) by Sept 09
St Vincent & the Grenadines	121,000 English, French patois	83 Internet users/1000 (2005)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006) • Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in three Bootcamps (Mauritius, Singapore, Trinidad & Tobago)	
Swaziland	1,141,000 siSwati, English	37 Internet users/1000 (2008)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006) • Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008) • Participation in four Bootcamps (Mauritius, Singapore, Trinidad & Tobago, Seychelles) • Bootcamp participants returned more confident and skilled with using computers	• Anticipate that the University will develop a certificate program for tourist guides

VUSSC Country	CONTEXT		MONITORING AND EVALUATION FINDINGS	
	Population (2007) & Languages	Internet Usage	VUSSC Activities & Outputs	VUSSC Outcomes & Impacts
			• Trained tourist guides using materials from the Mauritius Bootcamps (38 participants in workshop) • Trained ODL practitioners in delivery methods (15 participants in a 2-day workshop)	
Tonga	100,000 Tongan, English	29 Internet users/1000 (2005)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006) • Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008) • Participation in two Bootcamps (Mauritius and Singapore) • Trained staff at Tonga Institute of Higher Education on Wikieducator	• Initial adoption of tourism course materials • Anticpate that the Vocational Training Centre (recently established) will use VUSSC materials to offer courses (disaster management, fisheries)
Trinidad & Tobago	1,333,000 English	121 Internet users/1000 (2006)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006) • Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008) • Hosted third Bootcamp (Life Skills) • Participation in all five Bootcamps	• Opened new realms of subject areas and delivery modes for Bootcamp participants • VUSSC Bootcamp participants acting as ambassadors for web 2 technologies • Incorporated VUSSC tourism and hospitality content in National Open Schools curriculum • Anticipate the Hospitality Institute will also adopt the VUSSC material

VUSSC Country	CONTEXT		MONITORING AND EVALUATION FINDINGS	
	Population (2007) & Languages	Internet Usage	VUSSC Activities & Outputs	VUSSC Outcomes & Impacts
			• Trained tutors to become more web-based (Tutors Online Project Pilot – 8 participants) • Conducted workshop on WikiEducator (160 participants) • Note: There are two interlocutors co-representing T&T (from two different Ministries)	• Cadre of specialists trained to develop content materials for specific sectors • Primary teachers involved in Wiki training all developed websites for their class • Developing Citizen Ambassadors series of courses based on VUSSC content from all five Bootcamps to prepare for hosting national conferences in 2009 (nine "Ambassadors" will be enrolled)
Tuvalu	10,000 Tuvaluan, English	142 Internet users/1000 (2007)	• Participation in two Planning Meetings (Singapore 2005 and 2006) • Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in Transnational Qualifications Framework Meeting (Singapore 2008) • Participation in two Bootcamps (Samoa and Seychelles)	• Anticipate cost reduction (savings) from sending lower numbers of students overseas due to VUSSC
Vanuatu	226,000 Bislama, English, French	34 Internet users/1000 (2005)	• Participation in one Planning Meeting (Singapore 2006) • Participation in two Interlocutors Meetings (Jamaica 2006 and London 2008) • Participation in three Bootcamps (Mauritius, Samoa, Seychelles) • Information session planned with institutions, rural training centres	• Anticipate rural training centres adopting some VUSSC materials

VUSSC Country	CONTEXT		MONITORING AND EVALUATION FINDINGS	
	Population (2007) & Languages	Internet Usage	VUSSC Activities & Outputs	VUSSC Outcomes & Impacts
			and NGOs to share materials	

LONDON 2008 INTERLOCUTORS MEETING INTERVIEWS

Evaluators Jenny Williams and Catherine Dunlop conducted interviews onsite at the London Interlocutors Meeting in July 2008. The interviews were audio-taped (with permission) and transcribed. The purpose of the interviews was to gather monitoring and evaluation data around VUSSC in each country[2]. A selection of illustrative quotes from the interviews is provided below.

- *I see this initiative as one of the best things that has happened in the area of tertiary education in the Commonwealth in a very, very long time. It is opening up opportunities for a lot of people to participate who have not participated before. What VUSSC is doing is very, very important for us in terms of delivering education to the whole Bahamas. So I think it's a wonderful idea. I think it's a wonderful concept. (The Bahamas)*

- *I think up to now I think VUSSC has progressed extremely well. I think Paul has done a marvelous job in terms of pushing forward VUSSC. VUSSC should remain with COL but maybe have more management authority to the countries as well.… We don't have the resources to start all these programs but coming together, and through VUSSC, we can move forward. (Swaziland)*

- *I think VUSSC will help our people in the country access learning materials. As a country, we've got several needs in terms of training. And a university like mine offers what it has offered and continues in that conventional way. We need these other courses because people need variety. People will go that way, others will go that way, and as an institution the university cannot offer all these programs. So through VUSSC we can offer variety, we can offer relevant courses to our people, and people can learn and possibly improve themselves through VUSSC. (Swaziland)*

- *VUSSC is doing a good job - we are networking more now. Since the intro of VUSSC I find small states really actively participate and even go back to their own countries, particularly their institutions, to implement and even teach the content that they would have done in the Bootcamps. So that is helping. I can make an example. We have had started Business and Entrepreneurship – we are supposed to develop material because we want to offer it as distance learning. Because of the VUSSC content developed in Mauritius we can adapt the material without improvement. It is not only that. The very same people who participated in the Bootcamps, they are highly involved within their institutions even outside the institutions in the country as a whole. So that is why I see VUSSC as very, very helpful. (Lesotho)*

- *It was a good experience to have linked up with so many people all over the world. It is a way to expand knowledge, to share knowledge… The idea of being linked to*

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[2] Note: the interview sample captured most but not all participating VUSSC countries, due to scheduling availability and health of meeting attendees.

people all over the world and being able to share experiences is phenomenal. In that way it was very helpful. (Antigua & Barbuda)

- *The concept of developing a virtual university for the benefit of small island states is very crucial to Tuvalu. Particularly because it is quite costly for us to go to other universities out of Tuvalu. Our Minister of Finance is very cautious dealing with students sent overseas in terms of budgetary allocations. (Tuvalu)*

- *The materials will be really good resources available out there. The institutions who do not have the appropriate people with the skills or expertise to develop the materials they can just use the materials. That is one good thing about VUSSC. (Vanuatu)*

- *What has been happening is since about a few years ago there has been a new interest in expanding tertiary education in Mauritius. So VUSSC is fitting nicely. We are trying to see that as a complement to existing face-to-face education in Mauritius. So, one, we see it as a distance education structure which is worth exploring in Mauritius which as a small island state the provision of distance education is limited and expensive. So it is a first step into distance education which will certainly help us to grow in terms of capacity building. (Mauritius)*

- *We see VUSSC first of all as a learning experience. Second, we see it as a contributing experience. For example, my colleague here is from an institution, which is a provider of post-secondary education. For them it is an institutional lesson for them to see how to work out a distance education strategy. (Mauritius)*

- *VUSSC has been good for us enhancing that global perspective idea, which doesn't come easy with isolated states, you know, you're really looking at yourself most of the time and how you're going to survive within. And yet, there's that big world out there but now, it's opened and we're actually saying "Oh yeah, right there in Africa, over there in the Caribbean…" and you know people there. And the interesting thing is when we know people, it makes all the difference. Once you have that good relationship and knowing each other, then you can move to the professional. And the professional becomes so much easier. You're able to help each other more and contribute and share, and that contribution and sharing has been good for VUSSC too. (Samoa)*

- *Another big deal of VUSSC is the leadership. Leadership, again, it has been a really great by-product of the VUSSC … And when the Bootcamp participants went, they came back and had much more confidence, were able to assert themselves more as leaders, and asking people to do this, do that, and hey, this is all for the good – this is not about me being a big boss, it's about leadership, leadership encompassing everyone, enabling the collaboration rather than just top-down kind of strategy saying "Do it". You know, it's not about just having choices, it's about taking choices and making something of it that betters you as well as your institution, community, and so on. So I think for me personally, that's been a great add-on to our own staff. And not only the team leaders, but also, the other people that were part of the*

bootcamp because they too had to go out and spread the word and share the skills that – say, this is another way of doing it. (Samoa)

- *VUSSC has been a great working relationship. Very professional, very enjoyable, and very progressive. (Samoa)*

- *I would like to thank COL for the hard work and I think it is great. Not only do you get to learn a lot of things and work together with the other countries and the experience from the other countries but you learn as well what they have done in their country. What works and what doesn't work. Something that we can take on as a very small state and would hope that it does continue, but of course everything depends on money and funding. (Tonga)*

- *I just so appreciate what the Commonwealth of Learning is doing to increase access to learning material and the way they have brought us all together from different parts of the world and it makes you see that in our own countries we can expand. The concerns are the same wherever you live and we are all involved in empowering people through education. (Antigua & Barbuda)*

- *Hearing about the challenges that other people experience and how they work through them is a very empowering experience. (Antigua & Barbuda)*

- *For me the meeting was very, very useful. Having met different people from different regions with different skills and different experiences is something you cannot really buy. If you listened to my presentation I talked about integration of tertiary education and people came and said they had similar experiences. It is the beginning of a very good kind of relationship as far as education is concerned. (The Gambia)*

- *People are seeing the TQF as a business opportunity to have the branding of TQF on their qualifications. If we develop a program and mention having it on the TQF, they would say yes, we want it. It is because of the credibility. And they will be seen as an international training provider. (Mauritius)*

- *We have benefited from the ICT skills that can be used for program development. We are also benefiting in the sense that the entrepreneurship program has had a lot of input from other small states and we are now taking what has been developed and we are adopting it as a bridge in our business management curriculum. And that material is being used to develop a certificate in business management. So we are getting what I actually said to the Minister we should get: skills and access to a wide variety of programs. (Botswana)*

- *I think VUSSC is the way to go for small states. I don't have a problem with the big nations of the Commonwealth participating in the process but I think they should understand the history of VUSSC. It was small states feeling totally disenfranchised. Feeling that they were not playing a significant role in the trading of knowledge, creation of knowledge and exportation of knowledge from they countries. They decided they should come together and contribute as equal partners to the expansion*

of the frontiers of knowledge…. Ultimately other countries that are members of the Commonwealth will benefit from that which we have created. And that is what you want to do – you really want to feel you are contributing to the development of humanity generally and across the world. VUSSC is the springboard. (Botswana)

- *What VUSSC has enabled us to do – because of the collaboration it has helped us to develop a kind of reservoir of resource personnel in particular skill areas within the country, persons we can draw on from time to deliver the training. (Jamaica)*

- *VUSSC is a good approach because given the scarcity of resources and because most of us are poor countries, no one country could do it individually, but with the pooling of resources I am pleased that countries are getting from this kind of a program the kind of help that will assist in moving forward in human capacity building. It might seem small now but it is a ripple effect and one person will have an effect on the other and it keeps going. (Jamaica)*

- *I wish VUSSC well and that we continue to support its endeavors and that countries will continue to work together. It is a global village now so the needs are similar, with some idiosyncrasies. The more we share, the better it is in the long run. (Jamaica)*

- *VUSSC has inspired me to explore further how we proceed from here. I have started thinking that if we want to increase access to training and expansion of opportunities, then we will need a different model, like a blended approach. We can explore how VUSSC can move in trying to encourage institutions to start looking at blended approach. (Seychelles)*

- *The value of VUSSC for us is that it drives the whole development of ODL in Trinidad & Tobago. If we didn't have that sort of catalyst, it would have been difficult. It would have happened, but it would have been a longer process. (Trinidad & Tobago)*

- *It's bigger than ODL. It's the whole notion of ICTs in education. So as we are now moving into implementation phase, we can use all of the participants in the VUSSC Bootcamps as ambassadors, really, to sell the whole notion of web 2 technologies, wiki – people now speak about Wikieducator, people speak to some of the things that we learnt in VUSSC. (Trinidad & Tobago)*

- *VUSSC has shone a light on the work that we had wanted to do and more than we had thought we would be able to do. It has kind of facilitated us, increased our capabilities and capacities, and the work that we are doing now is moving forward and we're spreading it among the key stakeholders in our ministries and hopefully beyond, regionally. (Trinidad & Tobago)*

- *VUSSC has given us leverage which we would not have had if it didn't exist. And I think that is a platform in which we now feel confident to move forward to do the things that we were hoping to do but with the, sort of, wider Commonwealth support,*

we feel we have that confidence to do it and have the initiative recognized and accepted. (Trinidad & Tobago)

- *As a result of VUSSC, people are much more exposed and appreciative of the possibilities that are there for online teaching, if you will – educating people. (Belize)*

- *VUSSC is the best opportunity we have ever had to be able to come together as a Commonwealth. A lot of these countries, I would never have known – not even by name – if it hadn't been for VUSSC….VUSSC has brought together people in a new way and not just any people, but people who are involved in education and people who have a drive to see their people become better. I'm listening to things at VUSSC from people who are in education who are having the same troubles I'm having even though we are so many miles apart. I'm listening to people speak in a language I know. Different accent, but the same language. And I'm hearing that there are things that they can do or have done that I have even not thought of or have thought of and thought it couldn't happen. So, I see every reason now to attempt it again. Even if it had failed once before, it worked somewhere in the world, so it can work for me. So the whole idea of VUSSC gives one a sense that you can. So it is very positive. (Belize)*

- *TQF for me is an exciting venture. I just get real excited about it actually because I want to see the whole gamut of things. I want to see national and regional. I feel that it is still a little bit early to really say just how well this will work. But I am really very positive about it. I really feel that having it come from this angle, where there is a sort of an umbrella framework, we will be able to approach the government and we're saying "Come on now, if it's done at this level, can we not do it? Can we not do something regional?". So I'm – that excites me. (Belize)*

- *The Bootcamp made a tremendous difference to me. Just knowing that I'm not fighting out there alone. And when I think that I'm really at the very bottom, somebody's out there who can tell me, "listen, this is what you do now to move on". (Belize)*

- *VUSSC is a good thing because it will mean increased access and increased participation. It will help engage the students at more levels. (St Kitts & Nevis)*

- *I think VUSSC has helped me to focus. And not only me. Without VUSSC we would not have had that influence at the College level. With VUSSC, we have realized the place of technology in education. VUSSC has pushed us in that direction. (St Kitts & Nevis)*

- *I am feeling very positive about VUSSC. I think it is a wonderful opportunity for us to collaborate and bring education where it is in other parts of the world and make it more accessible and really help our people to develop. VUSSC is something we should really push as a Commonwealth region. If we get it right in the next couple of*

years we will be amazed at the results. I think we are on the right track. (St Kitts & Nevis)

- *Possibilities. That is the word to describe what I have got out of this. There are so many possibilities from VUSSC. For me personally, for my school, for my country, for my region, globally. The perspective has gone from the classroom to global now. (The Bahamas)*

Suggestions & Concerns

- *My recommendation is don't let go so soon. You know, we're just getting on our feet. We need the funding to keep meeting and sorting ourselves out. Basecamp has been really great, it could become even better in whatever way, but … It's the first time I've actually seen something work well on a virtual sense where everybody is really in tune even though they're physically apart. And we could continue that and improve that more. Especially when it is definite that we can't continue to get funding to meet all the time. So my recommendation would be that I think it's a worthwhile project to keep supporting for a little bit longer just so that we can get that executive stabilized and sorted and get our communication lines strengthened so that we don't get lost in cyberspace. (Samoa)*

- *How else can we strengthen the work of VUSSC? I think I just need to focus a little bit more and let it be very much a part of our work plan and I need have this very clear in my mind that this is a very definite responsibility. I need to take this on as a personal responsibility and share the vision with other persons in Antigua. (Antigua & Barbuda)*

- *The WikiEducator is one tool that people find very frustrating in the sense that they have to have access to Internet. Even in the university it is hard to have access let alone the smaller institutions. (Lesotho)*

- *The other thing is we need to develop the capacity to develop courses in a short space of time. We have persons who have been working 25 years and they can't go any higher and they are almost like white elephants in companies and because of strong labour code you are really stuck with them. And agencies come to us and ask could you run a course on XYZ and we would like to be a little bit more versatile and to be in a state of readiness to handle those situations. (Antigua & Barbuda)*

- *I really think that the way forward for our little group is to ensure that all the people from the Bootcamps are fully engaged. And we have said how we can arrange that. But the truth is some of that is easier said than done. They are the best people to go to the Bootcamp but there is a lot of difficulty in reducing the workload. That is also a challenge I have. I would have control over those working in the college but I would have less control over those working in other agencies. So far I have not been able to get the other agencies to send somebody. Small can be beautiful but small can be challenging. (Antigua & Barbuda)*

- *Because you know for doing the VUSSC work, you need to have some time to do the other VUSSC activities. And for us, we have a full-time job which takes most of your time and you really cannot build in the VUSSC activities. So something else has to go or else you have to work after hours to make sure that you catch up. So it's been hard work for the people that have to, who are doing extra hours to try and cope with their job and also try to cover the VUSSC activities.…The solution would be … well, you know, with limited funds in our countries, it's extremely difficult to put just a post for VUSSC. It's difficult. So, one would hope you would get additional posts and for each post, build a VUSSC task. (Swaziland)*

- *Running a workshop back home you need some finance. You invite people from different regions and there has to be transport fare and you have to give them lunch. I don't think these costs have been budgeted for them. That is one area VUSSC would have to look into – to make available some small budget for this kind of thing. (The Gambia)*

- *We have changed Interlocutors about three times. I think there is a need for us to have continuity. Even if one person is leaving, the person who is coming over needs continuity. (The Gambia)*

- *I think VUSSC is moving in the right direction. There is no doubt about it. But there is a variation of the small states. Some states are advanced in terms of technology and some are backward so it is very difficult to generalize in terms of support. Sometimes think how we can do some variations in our support. While other places can train people in Wikipedia and immediately they can see it and start working. In our case, the infrastructure is not at that level. (Papua New Guinea)*

- *What about what we are doing individually? If we can post them on Basecamp and that will encourage others. I can see what Samoa is doing and Samoa can see what I am doing. Maybe from that I can pick up something. Or I can send an email and ask for how they doing something and maybe I can do it here. So that is the way we can learn from each other. So we should use more Basecamp posting our activities and what we are doing from time to time. That would be very helpful. (Papua New Guinea)*

- *I think in general, we have to work real hard in trying to get the institutions integrated into the whole VUSSC concept and program. What I've noticed here, from the meetings we attend, where there are people who are in VUSSC that are also either in leadership positions in those institutions, those institutions are moving, they're involved, they're getting their courses developed and … because there is somebody from the institution that is an integral part of what's going on here. I would suggest that we start inviting the institution representative, whoever that may be, as an integral part of these meetings. [When the interlocutor is a ministry person, there should be another person involved from an institution.] (The Bahamas)*

- *There is one thing that is worrying me about VUSSC: the rate at which we are developing new programs. We have to find ways of expediting program development. Institutions should come with programs that they have in place such that Basecamp could be then be used to contextualize programs that exist towards meeting whatever criteria we decide because it would be part of TQF. We need a wide variety of programs because then fledging institutions will have the opportunity to go in there and work on programs. This could open up opportunities for cross border education provision among the small states. There are so many benefits and the benefits outweigh the costs by far. If we each one of us could commit to donating more courses, we would have a wide variety of programs. The Management Committee should form a sub-committee that deals with program development. I am not in any way undermining the progress we have achieved so far. (Botswana)*

- *We have talked about VUSSC management. I am not 100% convinced that this will ensure the sustainability of VUSSC. COL has to do something to make sure what we started doesn't dissolve. The management of VUSSC is a good idea but we need something even more proactive. Different strategies at a higher level will also be needed. Paul has been doing a wonderful job in getting this happening and working. We know that soon there will be turnover and that could change everything. Paul has been really instrumental in getting VUSSC going. (Seychelles)*

- *Before we came to this session, we met with Bootcampers and some of the issues that were being raised concerned how do they manage their workloads within their existing jobs, and also do more work for the open-content sort of environment. And that's something that we have to address doing VUSSC because these people still have to do their work plans and their work activities, and still see how they can build communities of practice and develop online content. So those are some of the challenges that we do face in Trinidad & Tobago, especially small states in particular, as we go forward. (Trinidad & Tobago)*

- *There is, through VUSSC though, a sort of a nagging question about ownership because VUSSC promotes the open source type of thing. You know, whatever you've created becomes everybody else's property to use – at least to use, maybe not to duplicate and maybe not whatever, but they can have it. And the question that keeps on returning is "what does that mean for me since I worked so hard on it?" (Belize)*

- *I would like to suggest that COL does not ever allow it's new role - with the management team and COL being sort of facilitator - that they would never allow their new role to keep them in any way less visible. Not just associated – I want to say visible - because I think that it is one of the few opportunities when we have seen people from developed countries working in tandem with people from developing countries and underdeveloped countries. It is one of the few times when all of these people are common. And so if COL does not keep that focus, see because, we could lose that totally. (Belize)*

- *I think we are going in the right direction with the Management Board. I think it would be good if we were to develop some sort of regional forum. It is good to have a general Basecamp but it would work better for us if we could have an online forum for the interlocutors of the region to interact. Be a little more proactive regionally. (St Kitts & Nevis)*

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are presented for consideration as an additional set to those in the *Interim Report* (June 2008).

1. Make the VUSSC materials more visible through different media (not just in an embedded online environment).

2. Articulate a unified communications strategy for VUSSC.

3. Encourage participating institutions to include targets for VUSSC course development in their business plans.

4. Encourage more sharing of experiences and strategies through Basecamp.

5. Continue to track in-country activities and related VUSSC outcomes and impacts, possibly through an online system of data collection.