
Developed by the Commonwealth of Learning and the VUSSC Government Interlocutors
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Introduction and Background to VUSSC

The Problems of Small States

Small states make up two-thirds of the 53 countries in membership of the Commonwealth. Most of the small states of the Commonwealth are small islands with small populations located in the Caribbean, in the Pacific and in the Indian Ocean. However, there are also landlocked states with small populations such as Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana — although Botswana is not small geographically. There are also coastal states with small populations such as The Gambia and Belize, which are geographically small, and Guyana and Namibia, which are rather large.

Despite their diversity, small states face common challenges. The first is simply being small. A small territory means that natural resources are limited in quantity and variety. A small population makes it difficult for a country to have skilled and qualified people in all the many occupations and trades that underpin a modern economy. Then there is the tyranny of transport. Small landlocked states face difficulty and expense in getting their traded goods to and from ports in neighbouring countries. Island states face the challenges of distance from markets and the cost of sea and air links.

Lastly, small states face special environmental challenges. Recent examples of the effect of the environment on small states include the hurricane in Grenada, the tsunami in the Maldives, and the floods in Guyana, which serve as a reminder that small states are both particularly prone to natural calamities and especially vulnerable to their effects. Big countries like India and the United States of America have the resources and people to help the very small proportion of their total populations that suffer from such calamities. The effect of such on small societies and their economies is thus relatively much greater.

Small states have become increasingly conscious of their common needs and have been asking international bodies to formulate programmes to address them. At the Conference in Halifax which ultimately led to the establishment of VUSSC, the ministers from the small states shared their anxiety that their countries did not have the critical mass, either of expertise or of equipment, to engage with online learning in an autonomous fashion. They feared becoming tributary, as so often in the past, to the technologies, systems and materials developed by the larger states.

However, by working together, small states will be able to nurture an autonomous capacity for online learning that will enable them to harness these new developments for the benefit of their peoples. In order to do this, the participating states of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth believe that it is necessary to create a network of small states with multiple nodes of activity. The desire was to establish a mechanism that would help small states work together to produce, adapt and use courses and learning materials that would be difficult for one state to produce alone. It provided the context for the establishment of VUSSC.
Context of Educational Implementation in Small States

Institutions in small state countries fall into two main categories: indigenous and foreign. In the South Pacific, Caribbean and Indian Ocean regions, the indigenous institutions can be further grouped into regional and national categories. The primary regional institutions are the University of the South Pacific (USP), the University of the West Indies (UWI), and the University of the Indian Ocean (UIO). The University of South Africa can also be deemed a regional institution as it provides programmes to some small state countries in Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean even though it is not located in a small state country.

There are also networks of universities being formed such as the University Consortium for Small and Island States (UCSIS) and the Caribbean Knowledge Learning Network (CKLN). These networks strive to link institutions and form multinational institutions, offering qualifications in their own right.

The national providers in most small states typically include one or more universities, two-year community colleges and professional/technical training institutes. Many of these institutions began through an association with a foreign institution (usually in the United Kingdom or the United States of America), and in several cases the relationships still continue.

The foreign providers are those institutions, usually from the developed economies, that have established a physical presence within a country in order to either offer programmes in a traditional teaching mode or to support the institution’s distance education offerings in the country. However, it is worth noting that there are examples of national providers that act as the ‘front’ for a foreign institution in terms of marketing programmes and providing administrative support.

Among the regional providers, USP and UWI were created and funded by the states they serve. UIO, however, while modelled on the other two, is funded by the European Union. UIO also differs from the other regional providers, being a network of several higher education institutions in the region that collaborate in terms of programme and course offerings as well as research. While USP and UWI are the largest providers of university-level education in their respective regions, many of the states they serve also have national colleges and other institutions, and in some of the larger states a national university exists as well. Some of the latter enrol students from other states in the region either on-campus or via their emerging distance education programmes.

The programme offerings of regional providers tend to be more comprehensive than those of national institutions – the latter being typically more focused and specialised. Regional providers are taking the lead in interdisciplinary study and research through a wide variety of theme centres and institutes. In the African region, the offerings of national universities tend to be more traditionally academic, resulting in some criticism for not offering programmes that are more relevant to labour force needs.

Some international agencies also act as providers. One example is the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) virtual university that works through national agencies to provide ICT-related training.
All regional and national institutions serving small states began as campus-based teaching institutions. In the case of regional institutions, satellite campuses and learning centres have been created in some larger states in the region. The exception is the UIO, which began as a network of existing institutions, none of which offer any off-campus courses via distance education. The USP and UWI have adopted a bi-modal mandate with distance education delivery models featuring prominently in their operations. In fact, USP has adopted a strong multimodal policy that is enabled by its ICT infrastructure capacity. These two institutions are the largest distance education providers among the Commonwealth small states. All institutions are faced with demands for increased access to their programmes with the result that several national institutions, even some in the states served by USP and UWI, are becoming bi-modal and are incorporating distance education into their overall teaching strategies.

In all of the aforementioned institutions, distance education began as it has in most other places, with correspondence courses. In most instances, the model is still one of print-based courses supplemented by face-to-face tutorials and occasional visits from home campus faculty. A notable exception is USP, which has been using satellite-based course delivery for some time and has upgraded its network to enable two-way digital interactivity among their campuses and centres. The use of outreach centres is almost universal among the institutions involved in distance education. These centres provide a place where students and tutors can interact and, increasingly, where access to ICT equipment and connectivity can be provided.

The workplace is also becoming an important point of access to learning – obviously most often for employee training. However, while the ICT infrastructure is likely to be more available in the workplace, the policies that enable and encourage employees to use it for educational purposes are often lacking. Another strategy for the enhancement of access, not related to course delivery, is the creation of mechanisms whereby students can gain recognition for prior learning. The UWI has taken some interesting initiatives in this regard by creating transfer arrangements with some national colleges that provide advanced placement for students who have completed a college programme. As well, it also has agreements with other institutions that allow articulation of course work (for example, in the area of teacher training) and the awarding of qualifications in conjunction with the cooperating institution.

While there is some evidence that the convergence of distance and campus-based teaching models is starting to happen in small state institutions, it is not progressing as rapidly as in other parts of the world. There are examples of this convergence at USP and UWI, however it is most evident at the University of Mauritius where distance education materials are used regularly to complement on-campus teaching. There, nearly 50% of all modules offered in the first year are taken through distance education methods. The number of programmes offered by foreign providers entirely by virtual means is increasing.

The Origins and History of VUSSC

The origins of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) go back to the triennial meeting of Commonwealth Ministers of Education that was held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada in 2000. At that Conference ministers from small states shared their anxiety that their countries did not have the critical mass, either of expertise or of equipment, to engage with online learning in an autonomous fashion. Ministers from small
states thought that, by working together, they might be able to nurture an autonomous capacity for online learning that would enable them to harness these new developments for the benefit of their peoples. The mechanism would be a Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth. They asked the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to flesh out a formal proposal.

COL did so, bringing some of the ministers together for a meeting in Seychelles in 2003. They sent forward a plan for the VUSSC that was approved by the next Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, which was held in Edinburgh at the end of that year. Finally, COL and the Government of Singapore hosted an orientation and planning meeting in Singapore in September, 2005 with representatives from the Ministries of Education of 21 small states of the Commonwealth.¹

The participants at this meeting agreed to form a consortium to develop capacity, develop and share learning content and courses, and work toward establishing a standards and credit transfer mechanism. At the closure of the meeting in Singapore, representatives from all 22 participating countries signed a statement which included the following agreement:

Having taken note of the core principles of the VUSSC and the recommendations made by the ministers of education during the 15th CCEM held in Scotland in October 2003, we the undersigned agree that:

a) Our countries and institutions will work together, by sharing resources, experiences and expertise in order to meet the educational and training needs of our learners by providing quality education and training in a cost-effective manner.

b) We support COL’s commitment to undertake the necessary coordination and quality control, to provide or secure access to the necessary external expertise, and to facilitate networking.

c) We will have regular consultations in the process of developing and implementing the program(s).

d) We commit to participate in the program(s) by making available, within the capacities of each of our countries and institutions, the resources necessary to provide a quality-learning environment for our students.

Since that time, membership has now expanded to 28 countries. A full list of participating small states is contained in Appendix One.

VUSSC has made significant progress since this establishment of commitment. To cover several of the costs of cooperation, funding has been mobilized from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and, via the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CfTC), from the Commonwealth Secretariat, which have enabled participants to meet and plan the future of VUSSC, as well as to make progress with collaborative development of courses. Finances from the Commonwealth Secretariat, in particular, will facilitate achievement of the following outcomes by VUSSC:

1. Enlightened education policies in countries and institutions that support the development, use and reuse of educational resources, leading to a growth in the numbers of citizens educated.

2. Educators who apply their new skills in making more and richer educational resources available to learners in developing countries leading to an increase in the quality of systems of education.

¹ http://www.col.org/news/connections/html/0510.htm#news
3. Increased numbers of learners undertaking educational programmes of greater quality; that enhance their capacity to contribute productively to society leading to sustainable economic development.

4. Increased acceptance and international use of sharable learning objects (stored in accessible databases of learning content).

At a meeting in Singapore in April, 2006, the following areas were identified as priorities for collaboration: Teacher Education; Information and Communications Technology; Information Systems; Tourism and Hospitality; Nursing and Health Care; Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET); Life Skills; Management and Public Administration; and Agriculture and Fisheries.

Subsequently, a first collaborative materials development workshop took place in Mauritius in August, 2006. It involved nominated participants from VUSSC member countries, who focused on producing materials in the fields of Tourism and Hospitality and Entrepreneurship. The results of their collaborative work, both during and since the workshop are available for review and additional contributions at www.wikieducator.org/vussc.

Finally, at the fourth Pan-Commonwealth Forum held in Ocho Rios, Jamaica in November, 2006, the government interlocutors of VUSSC member countries met to develop a high-level business strategy to plan the future and long-term sustainability of the Initiative. This document presents the results of that deliberation, and is intended to provide a platform for future fundraising, as well as for in-kind contributions and investments by VUSSC member countries. As part of that process, a detailed SWOT Analysis of VUSSC was completed, which has helped to inform the development of this business strategy. It is presented in Appendix Five.

The Potential of ICT

A recent review and critique of more than 100 research studies on evidence of learning and the learning potential of educational software found evidence that:²

• Using the Internet has far-reaching effects. As well as facilitating communication, it develops skills of searching, interpreting and organizing information often defined as ‘network literacy’. Communication through email improves students, writing skills as they take more care in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and conveying meaning to an audience which is not their educator.

• ICT enables learners with reading difficulties to find different ways in to the curriculum, and raises the status of visual and aural literacies to the level of literacy acquisition through text.

• ICT makes the invisible visible, and, for example, shows chemical reactions not possible in the school laboratory. Dynamic images and animation aid understanding of abstract concepts and enables visualisation of processes either too small or too fast to be seen in real life.

• ICT supports differentiation providing enrichment and extension for able learners, and support and motivation for weaker learners. Additionally it allows independent learning at an individual pace, facilitates repetition, and can improve educator/learner interaction, and better ‘learner contact’.

• ICT provides motivation and variety, generating enthusiasm, interest and involvement, maintaining attention and enjoyment, and supports the development of novel ways to present difficult ideas.
• Thinking skills and problem solving strategies are enhanced when using ICT, and challenging tasks and a responsive environment enhances students’ sense of competence.
• ICT, particularly the so-called ‘Web 2.0’ platforms, enable participants in small states, irrespective of their remoteness, to become full participants in global initiatives such as VUSSC and many others.
Thus, all forms of learning can be enhanced by ICT and online learning, suggesting clearly that the imperative identified by Ministers of small states in Halifax are justified.^{3}

In developing small states, where large segments of the population are living in extreme poverty, it is often asked whether it is reasonable to invest money in technology for the education system, instead of using the same money to improve the living conditions of those in dire need. In response to such questions, Osin (1998) states, ‘I believe that these interests are not contradictory and that the only way to reach a long-term solution for the economic problems of the population is to raise the educational level, particularly for the low socio-economic groups’. He then continues to argue that the introduction of computers into education in developing countries is also financially feasible. The increasing importance of ICT in a global context requires an appropriate response from small states, which are not immune from the effects of globalization. These states cannot avoid the impact of ICT: the challenge becomes that of how to respond to these new global pressures in ways that will lead to their greatest benefit.^{4} What should be of concern, however, is the tendency of some to assume that ICT is the panacea to all educational problems. This is certainly not so, either in developing or developed countries (large and small). However, as a UNOWA report notes:

New information and communication technologies (ICT) offer significant opportunities for job creation since they allow young people to receive the information they require to increase their education, as well as knowledge of how and where to find income- and employment-generating opportunities.^{5}

In addition to viewing ICT in the context of educational processes more generally, it is important to consider its potential role in terms of contextual strengths and weaknesses, which will then enable decisions to be made about the most appropriate technology to be used. All education involves processes of communication between an educator and a learner. Different communication media will be suitable under different conditions, and there is a variety of technologies that can be used to enhance this communication process. Mapp notes that:

Evaluation studies show that educationally successful systems are not necessarily the most technically advanced: success lies in the balancing of the technical, the educational, the institutional and the personal.^{6}

Thus, teaching and learning consist of combinations of different modes of communication. It is important to note the wide range of educational applications that continue to make use of print resources. Although ICT does provide additional and important educational applications, the value of print options should not be overlooked, for pedagogical as well as

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^{3} Selinger, M (2004): Information and Communication Technology in Schools: Prepared for Imfundo
^{4} Butcher, N: (2002) Technological Infrastructure and use of ICT in Education: An Overview
^{6} Butcher, N: (2002) Technological Infrastructure and use of ICT in Education: An Overview. Working Group on Open Learning and Distance Education: Mauritius
practical reasons, particularly in the context of limited technological resources, as is the case in most small states that are members of VUSSC.

The Contribution of Collaboration

In a context of scarce resource, well-planned collaboration becomes a requirement to help to resolve some of the challenges that small states face. By working together, small states will be able to overcome many of their material constraints without participating in processes where their collective voice is drowned out by the competing demands of bigger, richer, and often more powerful countries and lobbies. This theme is clearly reflected in the Agreement that was signed by participating states in Singapore in 2005.

Much collaboration historically has focused on collaboration between small states and organizations from the developed world. While many of these collaborative ventures have led to high quality work, it is important to note that many of these international bodies operate within a paradigm that pays scant attention to the peculiar needs of small states. International best practices can only be of assistance up to a point, and can even run the risk of creating new forms of cultural imperialism, particularly in sectors as influential on the intellectual climate of a country as higher education. For this reason, VUSSC and its focus on collaborative development of educational materials for distance education and online learning presents a unique opportunity to harness the power of collaboration to improve the quality, broaden the diversity, and increase the scale of educational programmes in small states. This is because the quality of programmes using distance education and online learning is dependent on the quality and availability of education materials and relevant resources to support teaching and learning.

Extensive collaborative work has already been done in the area of programme and materials development around the world, but much of this work has been plagued by key limitations:

1. Often, such projects have been significantly under-resourced, impairing the production of the high quality materials needed to drive effective distance education.
2. In some instances, contractual commitments from participating organizations and individuals have been weak, resulting in people working on collaborative projects who continue to work on other fulltime jobs. This tends to result in the collaborative materials development ventures losing priority to other work commitments.
3. Many collaborative programmes tend to accumulate groups of academics, each of whom continues to develop materials in isolation. This removes one of the key benefits of good distance education materials design, and that is the improvement in quality from creating diverse teams containing experts with a range of skills.
4. An assumption is often made that the academics already possess the necessary skills to develop good quality learning materials, although many have no prior knowledge or experience of how to do this.
5. Many such projects – even when inter-institutional – operate in relative isolation, and their results are quickly dispersed once the project is complete. In these instances, there are no structural mechanisms to ensure that the products of collaboration become more accessible across the continent as a whole.

Thus, in order to succeed, collaborative materials development ventures in distance education and the production of computer-based multimedia resources require:

• A significant emphasis on design during planning;
• Proper budgeting and resourcing;
• Tighter contractual commitments to secure expertise;
• Access to a range of organizations broader than educational institutions, to secure a wider range of necessary expertise;
• Structural capacity-building processes integrated into the materials development process;
• Realistic time-frames;
• Clear links with an appropriate, online knowledge base to ensure that the results of collaboration are shared across the continent.

If this is achieved, then collaborative materials development ventures can provide an excellent mechanism for sharing knowledge and experience, building the capacity of educators in small states, producing materials of the highest quality, and reducing the overall cost of delivery of education in key areas.
The Business Strategy

Broad Developmental Objective

The broad developmental objective of VUSSC is to develop the human resource capacity that small states of the Commonwealth require to ensure that they are able to participate effectively in global economies and thrive as equal members of the world community. It will do this by creating a collaborative network called the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth that will support higher education institutions to provide learners with innovative, locally and globally relevant teaching and learning resources required to improve the quality of higher education in participating states.

Project Purpose

Within the above broad development objective, the purpose of VUSSC is to use collaborative networks of participants from small states of the Commonwealth to build high quality educational courses and programmes, comparable with the best of their kind from anywhere else in the world. It will also seek to provide support to participating states in order to ensure that appropriate policy frameworks, technological platforms, and human capacity are developed to facilitate effective participation in VUSSC’s activities, as well as the necessary institutional capability to harness the results of the initiative to the benefit of learners.

Guiding Principles

The following key principles have underpinned the creation of VUSSC’s business strategy:

1. The purpose of this business strategy is not to create a new institution with its own brand name, but to find ways to reinforce existing institutions and developments that are already taking place in small states. Thus, VUSSC will focus on strengthening existing post-secondary institutions in small states to combat the challenges outlined in the previous section.

2. With this in mind, VUSSC is committed to setting realistic targets for its collaborative course development processes, in order to ensure that high standards of quality are attained and that the resulting products are integrated into programmes offered by VUSSC institutions.

3. The focus will be on producing content that can be shared under a Creative Commons licence (see www.creativecommons.org for further information). Wherever possible, content will be shared under a Creative Commons by attribution, share-and-share-alike V2.5 (CC-BY-SA) licence.

4. All VUSSC initiatives will integrate structured capacity-building for any interested parties, in order to ensure that all participating states are provided opportunities to build their capacity to develop better quality educational programmes, using a full spectrum of media as appropriate. The nature of specific activities will be defined on a case-by-case basis.

5. The activities of the VUSSC consortium will be driven by its members, with coordination support from the Commonwealth of Learning.
Project Area and Beneficiaries

The primary beneficiaries of VUSSC will be those learners participating in and deriving educational benefit from higher education programmes using curricula and/or materials developed collaboratively through VUSSC activities. Thus, the focus will be on learners seeking post-secondary learning opportunities, and it will benefit them by broadening the diversity of available educational programmes, improving the quality of higher education, and developing the resources required to scale up post-secondary educational delivery in small states.

The secondary beneficiaries will be those people responsible for designing and implementing TVET Programmes in the Region. These beneficiaries will benefit from the wide range of capacity-building processes that will be integrated into the project’s design. This will include:

- Decision-makers in national government structures, who set policy frameworks within which programmes using VUSSC materials operate;
- Institutional decision-makers, who are responsible for setting strategic direction regarding the use of distance education methods and online learning in educational programmes;
- Education practitioners, including – but not limited to – course and programme planners and managers, materials developers, content experts, lecturers and tutors, and administrators.

VUSSC Targets: 2007 – 2013

As has been noted, VUSSC has already been successful in securing financial investment of £1 million from the Commonwealth Secretariat to take forward its work. However, the VUSSC interlocutors have simultaneously developed a more comprehensive set of targets for the period from 2007 to 2013. These are presented below, and a comprehensive logical framework is contained in Appendix Two.

Participation

1. By 2013, 90% of all Commonwealth Small States are participating actively in VUSSC.
2. By 2013, 75% of post-secondary institutions in small states are participating in VUSSC activities and contributing to its development.
3. By 2013, each participating institution should offer at least two programmes that make full or some use of courses and materials generated through VUSSC collaboration.

Learners

4. Access to post-secondary education in participating small states is increased by means of programmes using courses and materials developed through VUSSC, with enrolments in these programmes increasing overall enrolment in post-secondary education by at least 20% by 2013 (off a baseline on enrolment rates in 2007). This increase in enrolments opens access equally both to school-leaving youth and to adult learners.
5. Success rates in programmes using courses and materials developed through VUSSC increase the graduation rate in post-secondary systems of participating small states by at least 10% by 2013.
6. For learners enrolled in programmes solely using courses and materials developed through VUSSC collaboration, completion rates will be the same as or higher than other learners studying at the same institution.

7. All learners enrolled in programmes using courses and materials developed through VUSSC collaboration acquire appropriate ICT learning skills\(^7\) to enhance their future education and employment opportunities.

**Policy**

8. Each participating country has developed a national policy on ODL by 2009 (or within three years of joining the VUSSC Network). These policies are broad and encompassing, to enable extensive engagement by institutions through their institutional policies.

9. Each participating institution has developed an effective, enabling ODL policy by 2010 (or within three years of joining the VUSSC Network).

10. VUSSC has established and is maintaining and populating online mechanisms to share national and institutional policies, to share experience and knowledge.

11. By July 2008, an appointed expert has successfully completed a report on future organizational models for VUSSC, exploring the pros and cons of different options (including leaving VUSSC within the framework of COL, establishing an independent entity, setting up VUSSC as an educational institution, etc). These models are presented for consideration by interlocutors at their 2008 meeting, leading to a long-term sustainability strategy.

**Accreditation and Credit Transfer**

12. Clearly articulated course descriptors that will assist the various institutions in determining credit value are produced for each course developed through VUSSC collaboration.

13. Where institutions or individuals modify a course to align it with institutional requirements, they also modify the course descriptors correspondingly and share these modifications with other VUSSC partners.

14. For purposes of accreditation and credit transfer, participating institutions will use appropriate national education legislation (if it exists). Where such legislation does not exist, VUSSC will facilitate the creation of a framework for such legislation.

15. Prior learning recognition will be addressed by bridging mechanisms such as equivalent assessment and evaluation methods.

16. Participating institutions will actively pursue Memoranda of Agreement with other VUSSC institutions where appropriate to facilitate credit transfers between institutions.

**Quality Assurance**

17. A VUSSC quality assurance framework based on international standards is developed and agreed by July, 2008.

18. Tools and processes for evaluating courses and programmes produced through VUSSC collaboration are developed and agreed by December, 2007. These will include, but not be limited to:

\(^7\) This target consciously recognizes that a pre-condition for success will be to increase access to ICT infrastructure for participating learners.
18.1. Checklists;
18.2. Peer review mechanisms;
18.3. Quality indicators; and
18.4. Project management processes (Monitoring and Evaluation, results based management).

19. Participating institutions implement appropriate quality assurance systems when they begin delivery of programmes and courses created through VUSSC collaboration.

Institutional Development

20. As part of the commitment to using VUSSC as a vehicle to improve the quality of distance education delivery in small states, participating institutions are committed to ensuring that their systems operate according to agreed benchmarks of quality in ODL provision. It is also expected that VUSSC will function as a peer support network to assist institutions with achieving these benchmarks in order to facilitate achievement of the Participation and Learner targets outlined above. With this in mind, participating institutions in VUSSC are committed to ensuring that they have:

20.1. Agreed on a set of guidelines for effective ODL delivery by July 2008;
20.2. Secured efficient infrastructure for the management of programme delivery by 2009;
20.3. Established and are maintaining appropriate Student Record Management Systems with at least admissions, registration and examination functions by 2009;
20.4. Designed and are running Learner Support Systems by 2009, which will provide at least the same levels of educational support that would be expected of a host institution from its face-to-face students;
20.5. Appropriate technology (including broadband internet connections) by 2010;
20.6. A cadre of trained instructional designers in place by 2010;
20.7. Established appropriate systems for efficient financial management.

Curriculum, Programme, and Course Development

21. By 2013, VUSSC collaboration has led to the creation of at least one full degree, diploma, or certificate level programme of learning (comprising of all the required courses and materials for adaptation and use by participating small states) in each of the five VUSSC priority areas.

22. Participating institutions are either using the courses and materials created through VUSSC collaboration in their regular programmes or use them to launch new programmes, as appropriate.

23. The courses and materials for the above programmes have been developed for online and mixed-mode delivery and have been placed online in a common technical environment for shared access and use under a Creative Commons by attribution, share-and-share-alike V2.5 (CC-BY-SA) licence. Likewise, all adaptations made by participating institutions are also made available for shared access and use. Institutions may create their own course content for use by their own learners under mixed licenses, as they wish.
Professional Development

24. By 2008, at least three participants from each of the participating countries have been trained in developing learning content (priority areas) and engage in developing open content materials as well as training home country course writers (running at least one comprehensive training programme per year).

25. By 2010, at least two technical staff members from each of the participating institutions have been trained in the use of ICT based on agreed open standards, who then assist participating national institutions and train home country technical staff.

Technology Upgrading and Development

26. By July 2007, each participating institution will have carried out a needs assessment regarding technological requirements to ensure cost-effective and appropriate solutions for providing ICTs to underpin programmes using courses and materials created through VUSSC collaboration, particularly in remote regions.

27. By July 2007, VUSSC will have developed technical specifications for the ICT platforms required to generate high quality learning resources collaboratively.

28. At least 25% of participating institutions have introduced eLearning (defined as the use of ICT to support ODL teaching and learning methodologies) by 2010.

29. By 2010, all participating institutions have effective and efficient bandwidth at an affordable cost to enable their ongoing collaboration through the VUSSC network and growing use of ICT for teaching and learning. Provision of bandwidth draws on appropriate models derived from the experiences of participating small states.

Awareness Raising, Networking and Partnerships

30. By the end of 2007, relevant promotional mechanisms are established and operational in all member states.

31. At least 4 Information Days are organized in each member state annually to raise awareness of the public and educational institutions on the aims and scope of the VUSSC initiative.

32. A ‘showcase’ (physical and online) of materials developed during the period 2006-2007 is shared with a broad range of Commonwealth stakeholders by the end of 2007, to ensure that VUSSC becomes a household name amongst these stakeholders.

33. By June 2007, a VUSSC logo has been designed and approved for use.

34. By June 2007, a website has been established for VUSSC and is maintained and updated regularly thereafter.

35. By June 2007, a VUSSC brochure has been designed and made available for printing within member states.

36. By June 2007, a digital presentation has been prepared for use by all members in introducing VUSSC.

37. Interlocutors’ meetings take place biennially.

38. Baseline surveys are completed by mid 2007 at ministry level to help each country to discover ODL providers in their region and help to establish linkages between different providers.

39. Biennial regional workshops and conferences are hosted to facilitate communities of small countries experts to share their experiences.
40. Annual meetings of COL focal points, VUSSC interlocutors, and personnel from member institutions are held in their respective countries to oversee progress to date.

41. By 2010, VUSSC has signed at least 4 Memoranda of Agreement with learning networks at an institutional level to support collaborative activities.

42. Close and frequent contact among member states takes place through WikiEducator and other online communication mechanisms (e-Newsletters, Virtual conferences, etc).

**Funding**

43. Increasing Government contributions are reflected in VUSSC expenditure statements in each year of VUSSC’s existence.

44. Institutional policies reflect significant and growing investment in VUSSC-related ODL development across the institution.

45. Funding is secured for ongoing development of networks locally, regionally and across all VUSSC participating members.

46. At least 2 proposals for funding are prepared and submitted to appropriate funding organizations annually.

47. By 2010, at least US$5 million is secured for development activities through submission of proposals to funding agencies.

48. A process is established to create business models to prove the economic rationale behind the VUSSC initiative.

**Materials Development Approach for VUSSC**

In general terms, the proposed materials design and development approach can be represented diagrammatically as follows:
In the context of VUSSC’s international collaborative process, it will be necessary to take into account multiple national priorities and policies, although the focus will be on creating an adaptable content pool where some of this adaptation will by definition be done separately by national partners. While this will add cost initially to the process, it will serve to create truly ‘re-deployable’ content.

VUSSC represents an ideal opportunity to develop highly innovative content, which can showcase the true potential of distance education and computer-based multimedia materials. A primary focus in developing this content will be on ensuring that its content is highly relevant to the lives and learning contexts of learners from small states. In this context, simply importing content from other parts of the world is not considered to constitute a solution to the problems outlined in the introduction to this proposal.

In good distance education, the course, rather than the educator, provides an appropriate learning environment for students. Rather than simply referring to a set of materials, however, the course is the structure of learning that is designed into the materials. It has four basic elements:

- Conceptual pathways to command of its knowledge, conceptualizing skills, and practical abilities.
- Educational strategies for helping the learner find his or her way through these pathways.
- Summative and formative assessment should be integral to the learning process.
- The materials and presentation of the course as a whole must excite, engage, and reward the learner. Courses should be designed so as to involve learners actively in their own learning and should allow learners quick access and clear movement through them. Although there is no need for courses to use advanced technologies, most, but not necessarily all, will make use of a variety of media. Provision should also be made, in the
design of courses, for the necessary practical work. In order to be as flexible and open as possible, courses should be organized into modules.

Given this reality, in each proposed programmatic area, the project will begin by developing a comprehensive curriculum map, comprising the following:

- A contextual analysis that gives an overview of the challenges that exist in the region with regard to use of this material;
- A detailed breakdown of courses within each programmatic area (and modules within courses where appropriate);
- Overall purpose and learning outcomes of each of the courses (drawn from existing experience within participating organizations);
- An overview of the breakdown of the content (including descriptions of the flow through the content);
- Description of the teaching, learning, and assessment approaches and methods that will underpin the content;
- A profile of the intended learners;
- A description of the roles of those who will be involved in delivery of the content; and
- Financial analysis of the implications of delivering the completed programme to ensure that it will be viable for participating institutions to run the programme when the materials have been designed.

These maps will take account of the following design elements in each case:

- **Course design and development**
  As discussed above, courses and course materials will need to be carefully designed to provide the learners with access to the area being studied. Producing high quality distance education materials, which are appropriately scaffolded to enable learners to engage with the content and gain meaningful access to the knowledge, is a difficult task. It makes sense to have a central process which develops such materials, which draws on expertise from the continent in the various areas, but centralizes production (layout, printing, making digital, television production), as well as brings expertise in distance education to bear – getting distance education experts to work with subject experts.

- **Learner support—contact sessions**
  Learners should be provided with a range of opportunities for real two-way communication through the use of various forms of technology for tutoring at a distance, contact tutoring, assignment tutoring, mentoring where appropriate, counselling (both remote and face-to-face), and the stimulation of peer support structures. The need of learners for physical facilities and study resources and participation in decision-making should also be taken into account during the materials development process.

- **Assessment design and management**
  Finally, assessment strategies will need to be incorporated into the design. These might include formative assessment, feedback, as well as external assessment to ensure standardization; in other words, some stipulation of a framework for assessment, processes for looking at actual tasks prescribed by different centres, as well as an external assessment.

- **Installing structures and processes to maintain the quality of content.**
  It will be a priority to ensure that the content is accurate and educationally effective. The following processes will be important:
Conducting ongoing research into needs of users, gaps in support requirements which learning resources should plug, developing principles and guidelines and implementing them quickly.

- Quality control of content through a content reference group of external skills, business, distance education, gender and rural development experts.
- A project-based approach to materials development to ensure that people with subject and material development expertise work on the project throughout.

**Approach to Capacity-Building**

In many ways, the key priority in VUSSC is to begin by focusing on developing skills in areas of need within educational institutions. As was noted in the introduction, this capacity is limited in education systems in most small states of the Commonwealth, and thus needs to be built up systematically. Historically, there has been a strong focus on using one-off professional development workshops as a primary strategy for developing this capacity. However, by themselves, one-off, professional development workshops tend to be of little educational value. Many interventions seeking to build education capacity in the developing world seem to assume that ‘hard’ skills can be taught by bringing together employees from many organizations to workshops of between three to five days. Such interventions have little educational merit, as they are simply too brief and too divorced from the day-to-day realities of work to develop any skills. This does not mean that such interventions have no value, but this value lies almost exclusively in their ability to raise awareness about key issues and to showcase distance education practices. If such face-to-face interventions are to hold value as educational interventions, this needs to be as part of a much longer, more sustained intervention of support for distance educators.

VUSSC will, therefore, be used to enable sustained, systematic capacity-building to take place with project partners. This capacity development will focus on producing cohorts of course materials designers and developers. It will also be aimed at current and potential coordinators of course design and development for distance education and at materials writers themselves. It will cover the following specific capacity-building needs (which have been identified during the consultative research process):

1. Financial planning of distance education programmes, in an effort to ensure long-term sustainability of the programmes developed. This is of particular importance if the project is to ensure that the programmes developed through collaboration are being offered on a sustainable basis by the time their design is complete.

2. Curriculum development and instructional design competence, with a particular focus on the special requirements of distance education and computer-based learning. Instructional design skills are of particular importance if the programmes are to have a significant educational impact. This project provides an ideal, sustained opportunity to provide new cadres of instructional designers the opportunities to develop their skills through workshops, ongoing mentoring, and peer networking.

3. Materials development skills, with special emphasis placed on capacititating institutions to be able to develop computer-based learning materials. Again, this project provides a unique opportunity to give educators from participating institutions the opportunity to develop new skills in materials development across a range of media. Thus, participating institutions will be expected to make educators from their institutions available to participate in the project in order to benefit from the capacity-building opportunities that
it will create. Again, these will take the form of sustained opportunities to develop skills through workshops, ongoing mentoring, and peer networking.

4. Distance education programme delivery skills. For many of the institutions participating in the project, this project will represent a first sustained effort to use distance education methods and computer-based learning in programmes. Thus, it is expected that support will be required to develop the capacity of staff at these institutions to be able to provide effective support to learners in a distance education setting, to be able run effective assessments, and to administer programmes efficiently.

VUSSC Implementation Structure

There are three primary players in the unfolding development of VUSSC. These are:

- **The Commonwealth of Learning**, which:
  - Coordinates the VUSSC initiative;
  - Facilitates the creation of networks
  - Shares expertise in educational technology (radio, television, print, multi-media, internet, and e-learning);
  - Supports indigenous capacity-enhancement;
  - Shares its resources;
  - Is not degree-granting; and
  - Is not a funding body.

- **Ministries of Education**, which:
  - Develop appropriate policy;
  - Review existing policy;
  - Liaise with other ministries;
  - Allocate resources for a sustainable project;
  - Support implementation;
  - Monitor implementation; and
  - Share information with partners.

- **Participating institutions**, which:
  - Assume responsibility for programme development and delivery;
  - Are responsible for supplementing and adapting course materials to local contexts to meet the specific needs of students; and
  - Commit to the granting of the awards earned by graduates.

The Executing Agency

The Commonwealth of Learning is an international intergovernmental organization created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning/distance education knowledge, resources and technologies. COL is helping developing nations improve access to quality education and training.

Headquartered in Vancouver, Canada, COL is the only official Commonwealth agency located outside Britain and is the world’s only intergovernmental organization solely concerned with the promotion and development of distance education and open learning. COL is helping to increase the capacities of developing nations to meet the demands for improved access to quality education and training.
In part due to the efforts of COL and its Commonwealth-wide network over the past sixteen years, distance education is now a part of the mainstream of education and training. It enables students to learn at the location, time and pace of their choice, for less money and with improved results. COL’s goals include maximizing the transfer of information, ideas, innovations and resources to support this rapid evolution of distance education.

Commonwealth Governments financially support COL on a voluntary basis. Major contributors include Canada, India, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa and the United Kingdom. For more information on COL, see Appendix Three.

**VUSSC Advisory Committee**

The work of VUSSC will be guided by an Advisory Committee, comprising the following individuals

- Sir John Daniel, President & CEO, COL (Chairperson);
- The Honourable Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, Minister, Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, Trinidad and Tobago;
- Mrs. Idamay Denny, Deputy Chief Education Officer, Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, Barbados;
- Mr. Daniel R. Tau, Director, Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning, Botswana;
- The Honourable Danny Faure, Minister, Ministry of Education and Youth, Seychelles
- Dr. Emma Kruse Vaai, Academic Director/Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Institute of Technology, National University of Samoa, Samoa;
- Mr. Jesmond Xuereb, Chief Executive Officer, Avicenna Knowledge Centre, The Temi Zammit Foundation, University of Malta, Malta.

The Advisory Committee shall

- Provide guidance on policy development for VUSSC;
- Advise on the development of strategic plans;
- Review progress on an annual basis to ensure that proposed targets are met;
- Identify sources of funding and suggest strategies for accessing resources;
- Make recommendations regarding the governance of VUSSC;
- Maintain appropriate relationships with the Commonwealth Education Ministers and key stakeholders; and
- Deal with any other matter as determined by the Chair.

The Advisory Committee will function in an ethical, open and transparent manner, assuming collective responsibility for decisions taken. It will further ensure that due consideration is given to gender, race, class, caste and regional concerns. Members will at all times have regard to the interests of the Commonwealth as a whole. Decisions will be taken by consensus or where necessary by a simple majority of members present and voting. The Chair will have an original and casting vote.

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

VUSSC will be accompanied by a rigorous project monitoring process, intended to ensure that the indicators of success for the project are achieved. This process will be implemented by COL. In addition, a comprehensive external evaluation will be commissioned to assess the
project and to extract relevant lessons for future projects. An evaluation will be done in order to assess the successes and failures of the programmes and materials. The evaluation will cover all aspects of the programmes, their benefits to individual learners, and to participating countries. This entails that the following aspects are evaluated:

- Programme and course design;
- Materials design;
- Administration, including registration processes;
- Distribution of materials;
- Learner support;
- Assessment;
- Quality assurance procedures;
- Livelihoods activities arising out of the course; and
- Job and income-generating opportunities for learners successfully completing the course.

Such information is important for further preparation to deliver the programmes on scale. The formative evaluation will take place through a series of activities and will be undertaken while programmes are initially offered to learners. Evaluation methodologies will be developed to assess each of the above separately.

On the basis of the outcome of the formative evaluation of the programmes, changes will be effected to programme and course design, materials developed, and the systems in place to register and support learners. This does not suggest that there will not be room for further learning as VUSSC unfolds. Systems to monitor and evaluate, on a regular basis, the provision of programmes delivered using VUSSC materials will be built in so that efficiency and quality is maintained. Long-term indicators will be developed in order to evaluate the impact of the programmes, over a period of ten years.

**Notional Budgets for VUSSC**

As part of the long-term business plan being developed, comprehensive budgets will be prepared. However, an indication of notional budgets over a period of five years is presented below, in order to provide a preliminary sense of the magnitude of investments that will need to be mobilized to ensure the success of VUSSC. These notional budgets include expected in-kind contributions and investments by member countries, as well as potential contributions by the donor community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Area</th>
<th>Unit Type</th>
<th>Cost per Unit</th>
<th>Number of Units</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baseline surveys</strong></td>
<td>cost per country per year</td>
<td>$50,000.00</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>$6,500,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support for policy development</strong></td>
<td>cost per country per year</td>
<td>$100,000.00</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>$2,600,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VUSSC organizational models research</strong></td>
<td>once-off cost</td>
<td>$15,000.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$15,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accreditation and credit transfer research</strong></td>
<td>once-off cost</td>
<td>$100,000.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$100,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VUSSC quality assurance framework</strong></td>
<td>once-off cost</td>
<td>$100,000.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$100,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>QA tools and processes</strong></td>
<td>days cost per Institution</td>
<td>$100,000.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$100,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support to institutions to improve processes</strong></td>
<td>cost per programme</td>
<td>$1,000,000.00</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$5,000,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programme development</strong></td>
<td>cost per person</td>
<td>$20,000.00</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>$2,600,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training of course writers</strong></td>
<td>cost per person</td>
<td>$20,000.00</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>$2,600,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training of instructional designers</strong></td>
<td>cost per person</td>
<td>$20,000.00</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>$2,600,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training of technical staff</strong></td>
<td>once-off cost</td>
<td>$20,000.00</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>$2,600,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development of technical specifications</strong></td>
<td>cost per person</td>
<td>$75,000.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$75,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support for institutions in implementing e-learning</strong></td>
<td>cost per institution marketing</td>
<td>$50,000.00</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>$1,300,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VUSSC promotional mechanisms</strong></td>
<td>cost per year</td>
<td>$50,000.00</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$250,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VUSSC website</strong></td>
<td>annual cost</td>
<td>$100,000.00</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$500,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interlocutors’ meeting</strong></td>
<td>annual cost</td>
<td>$100,000.00</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$500,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fundraising</strong></td>
<td>annual cost</td>
<td>$40,000.00</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$200,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$26,990,000.00</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix One: Small States Participating in VUSSC

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad developmental objective</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Sources of verification</th>
<th>Risks and Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop the human resource capacity that small states of the Commonwealth require to ensure that they are able to participate effectively in global economies and thrive as equal members of the world community</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Project purpose

- Use collaborative networks of participants from small states of the Commonwealth to build high quality educational courses and programmes, comparable with the best of their kind from anywhere else in the world
- Provide support to participating states in order to ensure that appropriate policy frameworks, technological platforms, and human capacity are developed to facilitate effective participation in VUSSC’s activities, as well as the necessary institutional capability to harness the results of the initiative to the benefit of learners

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• By 2013, 90% of all Commonwealth Small States are participating actively in VUSSC</td>
<td>• Signed Statements of Intent from participating small states</td>
<td>• The Commonwealth continues to be perceived as a network of relevance and importance by participating small states</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• By 2013, 75% of post-secondary institutions in small states are participating in VUSSC activities and contributing to its development</td>
<td>• National policy statements</td>
<td>• Increased funding for ongoing collaboration in VUSSC is secured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Access to post-secondary education in participating small states is increased by means of programmes using courses and materials developed through VUSSC, with enrolments in these programmes increasing overall enrolment in post-secondary education by at least 20% by 2013 (off a baseline on enrolment rates in 2007). This increase in enrolments opens access equally both to school-leaving youth and to adult learners.</td>
<td>• Institutional publicity information (particularly information on programme options available to students)</td>
<td>• All states formally make (and confirm annually) their commitment to VUSSC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Success rates in programmes using courses and materials developed through VUSSC increase the graduation rate in post-secondary systems of participating small states by at least 10% by 2013.</td>
<td>• Institutional web sites</td>
<td>• National commitments translate into resource allocations (in-kind and financial) for VUSSC activities within participating institutional budgets</td>
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</table>

### Outputs

1. Establishment and maintenance of supportive

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Each participating country has developed a national policy on ODL by 2009 (or within three years of joining the VUSSC)</td>
<td>• National policy documents</td>
<td>• COL provides effective project management support to VUSSC, and continues to be recognized by all participants as the appropriate agent to manage VUSSC’s activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Capacity exists within institutions to participate in VUSSC activities</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Realistic, financially sustainable fee structures can be finalized ahead of marketing of programmes using collaboratively designed materials</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Growing numbers of students are able to afford the fees necessary to sustain growth in enrolments at participating institutions</td>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Commitments of small states in statements of intent convert into</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National and institutional policies in all participating states</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Sources of verification</td>
<td>Risks and Assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network. These policies are broad and encompassing, to enable extensive engagement by institutions through their institutional policies.</td>
<td>• Each participating institution has developed an effective, enabling ODL policy by 2010 (or within three years of joining the VUSSC Network).</td>
<td>• Institutional policy documents</td>
<td>• Sustained commitments to create policies where these do not exist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• VUSSC has established and is maintaining and populating online mechanisms to share national and institutional policies, to share experience and knowledge.</td>
<td>• By July 2008, an appointed expert has successfully completed a report on future organizational models for VUSSC. These models are presented for consideration by interlocutors at their 2008 meeting, leading to a long-term sustainability strategy.</td>
<td>• Publicity/marketing documents of participating institutions</td>
<td>• Leadership and senior management within institutions drive development of institutional policies (with capacity-building support provided by VUSSC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• By July 2008, an appointed expert has successfully completed a report on future organizational models for VUSSC. These models are presented for consideration by interlocutors at their 2008 meeting, leading to a long-term sustainability strategy.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Institutional web sites</td>
<td>• Small states participants in VUSSC have sufficiently reliable Internet access to post resources to a shared online platform and to participate in collaborative processes online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• VUSSC discussion lists</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• VUSSC web site, WikiEducator, and linked online databases and collaborative platforms</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Expert report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• VUSSC sustainability strategy report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Development of mechanisms to facilitate accreditation and credit transfer of programmes using VUSSC frameworks and materials</td>
<td>• Clearly articulated course descriptors that will assist the various institutions in determining credit value are produced for each course developed through VUSSC collaboration.</td>
<td>• National legislation on accreditation</td>
<td>• Institutions fulfil their licensing obligation to share adapted materials online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Where institutions or individuals modify a course to align it with institutional requirements, they also modify the course descriptors correspondingly and share these modifications with other VUSSC partners.</td>
<td>• VUSSC web site, WikiEducator, and linked online databases and collaborative platforms</td>
<td>• Accreditation for programmes can be secured nationally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• For purposes of accreditation and credit transfer, participating institutions will use appropriate national education legislation (if it exists). Where such legislation does not exist in a specific country, VUSSC will have facilitated the creation of a framework for such legislation in that country by 2013.</td>
<td>• Learning materials</td>
<td>• There is sufficient commonality of need to facilitate transfer of credits between institutions participating in VUSSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Participating institutions have actively pursued Memoranda of Agreement with other VUSSC institutions where appropriate to facilitate credit transfers between institutions, leading to the signing of at least 10 such Memoranda by 2013.</td>
<td>• Licensing agreements within learning materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Assurance of the quality of programme delivery in institutions participating in VUSSC</td>
<td>• A VUSSC quality assurance framework based on international standards is developed and agreed by July, 2008</td>
<td>• Memoranda of Agreement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tools and processes for evaluating courses and programmes produced through VUSSC collaboration are developed and agreed by December, 2007. These will include, but not be limited to:</td>
<td>• Monitoring and evaluation reports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Checklists;</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Indicators

- Peer review mechanisms;
- Quality indicators; and
- Project management processes (Monitoring and Evaluation, results based management).

- All participating institutions are implementing appropriate quality assurance systems when they begin delivery of programmes and courses created through VUSSC collaboration

#### Sources of verification

- Collaborative platforms
- Institutional documents on quality assurance and quality assurance systems
- Monitoring and evaluation reports

#### Risks and Assumptions

- Systems (with capacity-building support provided by VUSSC where necessary)
- Full-time appointments are made within institutions to run programmes by the time of completion of VUSSC programme design, in line with national policy commitments

### 4. Curriculum, Programme, and Course Development

- By 2013, VUSSC collaboration has led to the creation of at least one full degree, diploma, or certificate level programme of learning (comprising of all the required courses and materials for adaptation and use by participating small states) in each of the five VUSSC priority areas.
- Participating institutions are either using the courses and materials created through VUSSC collaboration in their regular programmes or use them to launch new programmes, as appropriate.
- The courses and materials for the above programmes have been developed for online and mixed-mode delivery and have been placed online in a common technical environment for shared access and use under a Creative Commons by attribution, share-and-share-alike V2.5 (CC-BY-SA) licence. Likewise, all adaptations made by participating institutions are also made available for shared access and use. Institutions may create their own course content for use by their own learners under mixed licenses, as they wish.

#### Sources of verification

- Curriculum documents
- Learning materials
- Publicity/marketing documents of participating institutions
- Institutional Management Information Systems
- VUSSC web site, WikiEducator, and linked online databases and collaborative platforms
- Licensing documentation
- Monitoring and evaluation reports

#### Risks and Assumptions

- Full-time appointments are made within institutions to run programmes by the time of completion of VUSSC programme design, in line with national policy commitments
- Capacity from participating institutions can be ring-fenced to participate in materials development projects
- Participants in content development initiatives have sufficient online access and develop sufficient ICT confidence to use the online platform
- All copyright issues pertaining to release of materials under a Creative commons licence are resolved

### 5. Development of institutional capacity

- Participating institutions have:
  - Agreed on a set of guidelines for effective ODL delivery by July 2008;
  - Secured efficient infrastructure for the management of programme delivery by 2009;
  - Established and are maintaining appropriate Student Record Management Systems with at least admissions, registration and examination functions by 2009;
  - Designed and are running Learner Support Systems by 2009, which will provide at least the same levels of educational support that would be expected of a host

#### Sources of verification

- Publicity/marketing documents of participating institutions
- Institutional Management Information Systems
- Monitoring and evaluation reports

#### Risks and Assumptions

- Leadership and senior management within institutions provide full support to development of necessary systems to support delivery of programmes (with capacity-building support provided by VUSSC where necessary)
- Full-time appointments are made within institutions to run programmes by the time of completion of VUSSC programme design, in line with national policy commitments
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Sources of verification</th>
<th>Risks and Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| institution from its face-to-face students;  
  - Appropriate technology (including broadband internet connections) by 2010;  
  - A cadre of trained instructional designers in place by 2010;  
  - Established appropriate systems for efficient financial management.                                                                                                                                   | • Workshop attendance records  
  • Online forum distribution lists and collaboration platforms  
  • Capacity-building materials (print and online)  
  • Certificates of successful completion of capacity-building initiatives  
  • Monitoring and evaluation reports                                                                                                                                         | • Institutional budgets make provision to run the necessary systems for successful programme delivery of programmes using ODL and online learning |
| 6. Development of individual capacity  
  • By 2008, at least three participants from each of the participating countries have been trained in Content Development (priority areas) and engage in developing open content materials as well as training home country course writers (running at least one comprehensive training programme per year)  
  • By 2009, at least two people from each of the participating countries have been trained in Instructional Design (covering both print and multimedia development) and are training home country instructional designers (running at least one comprehensive training programme per year).  
  • By 2010, at least two technical staff members from each of the participating institutions have been trained in the use of ICT based on agreed open standards, who then assist participating national institutions and train home country technical staff. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | • There is sufficient continuity in individuals participating in capacity building initiatives to ensure that they can become experts in the identified areas of competence  
  • Participants in capacity-building initiatives have sufficient online access and develop sufficient ICT confidence to use the online platform |
| 7. Technology Upgrading and Development  
  • By July 2007, each participating institution has carried out a needs assessment regarding technological requirements to ensure cost-effective and appropriate solutions for providing ICTs to underpin programmes using courses and materials created through VUSSC collaboration, particularly in remote regions.  
  • By July 2007, VUSSC has developed technical specifications for the ICT platforms required to generate high quality learning resources collaboratively.  
  • At least 25% of participating institutions have introduced e-learning (defined as the use of ICT to support ODL teaching and learning methodologies) by 2010.  
  • By 2010, all participating institutions have effective and efficient bandwidth at an affordable cost to enable their ongoing collaboration through the VUSSC network and growing use of ICT for teaching and learning. Provision of | • Needs assessment reports  
  • Technical specifications  
  • Institutional Learning Management Systems  
  • Student enrolment records  
  • Institutional Management Information Systems  
  • Connectivity agreements                                                                                                                                         | • Institutions dedicate capacity to completing needs analyses  
  • Connectivity rollout in Small States of the Commonwealth is significant enough to facilitate cost-effective participation by learners in online learning programmes  
  • Market demand exists for online learning programmes |

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### 8. Awareness Raising, Networking and Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Sources of verification</th>
<th>Risks and Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bandwidth draws on appropriate models derived from the experiences of participating small states.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• By the end of 2007, relevant promotional mechanisms are established and operational in all member states.</td>
<td>• VUSSC logo</td>
<td>• Dedicated national funds are secured for national information days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• At least 4 Information Days are organized in each member state annually to raise awareness of the public and educational institutions on the aims and scope of the VUSSC initiative.</td>
<td>• VUSSC brochure</td>
<td>• Dedicated regional funds are secured for regional workshops and programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A ‘showcase’ (physical and online) of materials developed during the period 2006-2007 is shared with a broad range of Commonwealth stakeholders by the end of 2007, to ensure that VUSSC becomes a household name amongst these stakeholders.</td>
<td>• VUSSC digital presentation</td>
<td>• Other networks will be interested in collaboration with VUSSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• By June 2007, a VUSSC logo has been designed and approved for use.</td>
<td>• VUSSC web site, WikiEducator, and linked online databases and collaborative platforms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• By June 2007, a website has been established for VUSSC and is maintained and updated regularly thereafter.</td>
<td>• Publicity/marketing documents of participating institutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• By June 2007, a VUSSC brochure has been designed and made available for printing within member states.</td>
<td>• Interlocutor meeting reports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• By June 2007, a digital presentation has been prepared for use by all members in introducing VUSSC.</td>
<td>• Baseline surveys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interlocutors’ meetings take place biennially.</td>
<td>• Regional workshop/ conference programmes, documents, and reports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Baseline surveys are completed by mid 2007 at ministry level to help each country to discover ODL providers in their region and help to establish linkages between different providers.</td>
<td>• Memoranda of Agreement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Biennial regional workshops and conferences are hosted to facilitate communities of small countries experts to share their experiences.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Annual meetings of COL focal points, VUSSC interlocutors, and personnel from member institutions are held in their respective countries to oversee progress to date.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• By 2010, VUSSC has signed at least 4 Memoranda of Agreement with similar learning networks to support collaborative activities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Close and frequent contact among member states takes place through WikiEducator and other online communication mechanisms (e-Newsletters, Virtual conferences, etc).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix Three: The Commonwealth of Learning

Introduction

The Commonwealth of Learning is an international intergovernmental organization created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning/distance education knowledge, resources and technologies. COL is helping developing nations improve access to quality education and training.

Headquartered in Vancouver, Canada, COL is the only official Commonwealth agency located outside Britain and is the world’s only intergovernmental organization solely concerned with the promotion and development of distance education and open learning. COL is helping to increase the capacities of developing nations to meet the demands for improved access to quality education and training.

In part due to the efforts of COL and its Commonwealth-wide network over the past sixteen years, distance education is now a part of the mainstream of education and training. It enables students to learn at the location, time and pace of their choice, for less money and with improved results. COL’s goals include maximizing the transfer of information, ideas, innovations and resources to support this rapid evolution of distance education.

Commonwealth Governments financially support COL on a voluntary basis. Major contributors include Canada, India, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa and the United Kingdom. For more information on COL, see Appendix Three.

Mission

Recognizing knowledge as key to cultural, social and economic development, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is committed to assisting Commonwealth member governments to take full advantage of open, distance and technology-mediated learning strategies to provide increased and equitable access to education and training for all their citizens.

(COL Mission Statement)

Through its own resources and its extensive networks, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) provides a wealth of services and collaborative opportunities for policy makers, institutions and distance education practitioners to encourage the development of, and help enhance, the use of open and distance learning (ODL) policies, systems and applications.

COL’s mission focuses on helping Commonwealth member states to use technology as a means of increasing the scope, scale, quality and impact of their education and training systems. The application of technology through ODL techniques has shown its power and value in many countries and for many purposes.

COL was created in 1988 by Commonwealth Heads of Government. Since 1997, with the concurrence of Ministers of Education, the organization has adopted a three-year planning cycle to guide its services to the Commonwealth. Leaders took the decision to create a new organization believing that a precondition to development, whether human, social or
economic, is an education and training system accessible to all. Providing such access solely through conventional face-to-face education was failing. Moreover, the already tight financial situations of many countries could not allow increases in educational spending commensurate with population growth. Awareness that human capital was overtaking other economic inputs in importance added urgency to the challenge.

Open and distance learning (ODL) enhanced through newer technological developments was seen as an opportunity to meet this challenge. COL was established to help member states exploit its potential to extend access to education to the remotest regions and to meet the requirements of those without the option of face-to-face learning. ODL was seen as a means to meet the increasing demand for learning and training without requiring many thousands of classrooms and lecture halls to be built and equipped.

In the area of knowledge provision, COL strives to “level the playing field” by developing and running systems that enable policy-makers, educators and learners in the world’s poorest countries to access information and knowledge on a par with that available to people in the wealthy G8 countries. ODL has grown significantly in the Commonwealth during the last decade. Countries have incorporated innovations based on COL’s advice, assistance, encouragement and support. COL’s influence has gone beyond the Ministries of Education to whom it has a primary obligation. Other ministries – including those of Youth, Justice, Health, Rural Development and Agriculture – have requested and received support from COL in their human resource development. COL has had success in many sectors, including:

- Tertiary education;
- Teacher training;
- Open schooling;
- Technical and vocational education;
- Health education;
- Rural development; and
- Agriculture.

COL is based in Vancouver, Canada, where it operates with 35 staff members, one-third of whom are internationally recruited education specialists. It is also equipped with technology that enables it to connect effectively and efficiently with the rest of the Commonwealth from Vancouver. It has a small subsidiary operation in India, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia.

**Brief History and Major Accomplishments**

In the 1980s, several trends converged into the proposal to establish COL. There was concern that the declining mobility of university students between countries might weaken the cultural, economic and intellectual ties that bind the Commonwealth together. However, some Commonwealth countries had recently established open universities that were already demonstrating startling success in increasing access to higher learning whilst reducing costs and improving quality. Juxtaposing these trends created the idea of moving programmes to students rather than students to programmes.

At the same time there was a wider and growing belief that Commonwealth countries could benefit by harnessing technology to education and training at all levels.
The Heads of Government came together for the 1987 CHOGM against this background. Having received a report from a group chaired by the British social historian Lord Briggs, *Towards a Commonwealth of Learning*, they decided to establish an organization with that name. The Working Group, appointed to develop institutional arrangements for Commonwealth cooperation in distance education and chaired by Dr John Daniel (then president of Laurentian University) – the “Daniel Report” – recommended the creation of the Commonwealth of Learning.

They recommended that COL would help countries use technology, particularly the techniques of distance learning, to strengthen their national provision of education and training. Furthermore, this help would be provided for all levels, not just for post-secondary. COL was duly constituted and established in Vancouver.

**COL’s Network and Constituencies**

Through its own resources and its extensive networks, COL provides a wealth of services and collaborative opportunities for policy makers, institutions and distance education practitioners to encourage the development and use of open and distance learning (ODL) through policies, systems and applications. COL takes pride in its work in sensitizing the Commonwealth to the role that open and distance learning can play in the delivery of education and training by member states. COL supports member governments in their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The main developed world funders are the UK, Canada, New Zealand and developing world funders are Nigeria, India and South Africa. The developed world can expect that, through leveraging, for every $1 invested in Commonwealth activities, up to $5 of benefits can be gained towards building ODL policy, systems and applications.

Despite its modest resources, COL has achieved significant results. In large measure, this is due to the organization’s ability and willingness to form partnerships. These involve others from a global network of like-minded organizations and individuals willing to undertake programs that could not, or would not, have been done without COL’s participation. Its partners have included:

- Education ministries and their officials;
- Other ministries engaged in human resource development;
- Institutions of learning;
- Professional associations of scholars and practitioners;
- Commonwealth organizations and institutions, notably the Commonwealth Secretariat (ComSec), the Commonwealth Foundation and the Association of Commonwealth Universities;
- International agencies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Joint United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the institutions of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR);
- International financial institutions such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and African Development Bank;
- Government ministries and agencies such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK (FCO), Department for International Development, UK (DFID), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canada (DFAIT), New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID),

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Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), IMFUNDO (part of DFID) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA);

• Non-governmental and community-based organizations (especially those that serve the disadvantaged or vulnerable); and

• Private bodies such as The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

The Commonwealth of Learning employs open learning and distance education to increase access to education and training. COL collaborates with governments and educational institutions and works with national and international development agencies, national and regional distance education associations and open universities and schools around the Commonwealth. Through its model-building programs, COL has:

• Enhanced access to learning and knowledge in more than 40 countries;

• Influenced the development of open schools and universities;

• Conducted training seminars and studies;

• Established an extensive network of education and technology specialists;

• Placed particular focus on poverty alleviation and the marginalized, empowerment of women and

• Facilitated systemic changes in the delivery of education and influenced government policy.

COL’s success in this area was highlighted in a speech by Queen Elizabeth, the Head of the Commonwealth, in her message on Commonwealth Day in March 2004:

That work continues as the Commonwealth responds to today’s new challenges. In our association, where around 75 million children lack access to basic education, one clear objective is the UN Millennium Development Goal of achieving universal primary education by 2015. Another is mitigating the effects of HIV and AIDS, two-thirds of whose sufferers around the world are Commonwealth citizens, and which in some member countries each year causes the death of more teachers than can be met by newly qualified replacements. A third objective is to expand distance education, through bodies such as the Commonwealth of Learning – based in Canada – which encourages Commonwealth countries to pool their expertise. Knowledge-based economies are the key to future prosperity, and overcoming technological and other inequalities will be much in the minds of Commonwealth Heads of Government when they meet in Malta in November.

Elizabeth R.
14 March 2005

http://www.col.org/ComDay05/queensmessage05.pdf
## Appendix Four Participants’ Analysis for the VUSSC Initiative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Main Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advisory Committee</strong></td>
<td>• Is a high-level committee of COL that approves overall strategy and vision for VUSSC;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Receives reports from interlocutors’ meetings;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• May make policy recommendations on VUSSC;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Agrees the strategic planning;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Holds annual meetings, virtually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interlocutors</strong></td>
<td>• Is a senior governmental officer in ODL;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is responsible for advocacy of VUSSC at national level;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Represents the government at VUSSC meetings;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Coordinates VUSSC initiatives at national level to ministers of education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COL Focal Point</strong></td>
<td>• The person who is responsible for all COL activities in one country (both VUSSC and all other activities).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participating Institutions</strong></td>
<td>• Contribute to VUSSC by providing content or materials;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provides a quality mechanism to ensure the quality of materials produced;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Need to promote availability of OERs to get institutions involved;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The portfolio of programmes offered by institutions is expanded by the country being a member of VUSSC;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increase access to knowledge and learning;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Add value to national development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Participating Institutions</strong></td>
<td>• These may provide content to VUSSC (e.g. UKOU) or use VUSSC content;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Need to promote availability of OERs to get institutions involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Donor agencies</strong></td>
<td>• Provide funds to support VUSSC activities;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• May help coordinate the inputs of a range of donors;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Should participate in the development of financial proposals which must be in line with what donor priorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Facilitate project delivery;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Participate in review committees to evaluate activities;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Alignment is needed with donors’ (political?) interest;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Donors should not have too much control over activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ministries of Education</strong></td>
<td>• Ensure political support by governments for VUSSC;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support the participation of representatives in VUSSC activities;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide counter contributions to VUSSC (matching donor funds in cash or in-kind contributions);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Focus on development &amp; social improvement of the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implementers</strong></td>
<td>• Are senior managers in institutions that participating governments choose to work through in delivering on VUSSC activities;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide staff and content for VUSSC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Materials developers</strong></td>
<td>• Materials developers in all countries;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop materials and pass on skills through F2F and online interaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder</td>
<td>Main Tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners</td>
<td>• Lifelong Learners in all participating countries; • Might want a formal, non-formal or informal course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLOSS developers</td>
<td>• Listen and respond to VUSSC needs; • Experiment and produce needed content against VUSSC demands; • To enhance materials that have been produced; • Help to provide for VUSSC’s need for content without restrictions; • Help provide flexibility to get required features without restrictions; • Without donor financing, they may not be able to produce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printers</td>
<td>• To print finalised content created by VUSSC partners; • Might charged on a per-page basis, irrespective of if the material is used or not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishers</td>
<td>• To provide content under acceptable terms; • To provide content at reasonable prices; • License fees can be expensive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecom providers</td>
<td>• To provide affordable and good quality connectivity, • Put infrastructure in place and create other demands to take up capacity; • Provide for the long-term at all points needed for education; • Develop content to show necessity for bandwidth; • There is a risk of monopolies over charging for sub-standard services; • Services need to be cost-effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT providers</td>
<td>• To provide affordable and good quality hardware and software; • To provide pre-packaged hardware and software choices in new systems; • To provide hardware and software which can host generic materials and which allow for platform flexibility and neutrality; • Should not provide infrastructure which is not cost effective; • Should not ‘drop-off boxes and leave’; • Need to be tied in to provide appropriate support. • License fees should not be a limiting factor • Branding should not limit access to resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>• In-country employers; • Can benefit from the training provided; • License fees should not be a limiting factor • Branding should not limit access to resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Networks</td>
<td>• Share regional resources and inter-institutional support; • Support capacity building exercises; • Expand opportunities for capacity building and learning; • Could be under-resourced; • Risk of political differences between institutions and countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COL</td>
<td>• Provide leadership and support; • Provide marketing of the VUSSC concept; • Lead in raising funds; • Development of ODL; • Delivery on development goals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix Five: VUSSC Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Initiated and endorsed by Ministers</td>
<td>• Diversity of small states and institutions may be a weakness (may not be able to find commonality, and there may be cultural and development differences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interest of and strong commitment from small states and institutions</td>
<td>• Understanding about VUSSC is not clear among the policy makers and institutional managers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Financial support from COMSEC and the Hewlett Foundation</td>
<td>• Slow pace of the development of courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Financial investment mobilized as a result of the open content model</td>
<td>• Lack of assurance of finance and cost effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Commonwealth umbrella</td>
<td>• Limited funding for ongoing development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A permanent home and coordination function from COL, to keep up collaboration</td>
<td>• Reliance on external funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quality assurance due to COL involvement</td>
<td>• Possible lack of capacity of institution to deliver courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expertise available from various countries</td>
<td>• Differences in technological platforms available to various countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collaborative network already established among small states</td>
<td>• Paucity of IT skills for content development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Established community of practitioners already engaged in exchange and sharing of resources.</td>
<td>• Communication between interlocutors and Ministers is not strong enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Completed ground work in planning the initiative</td>
<td>• Communication at national level between interlocutors, implementers, and course developers not optimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Creative Commons (BY-SA) licensing model</td>
<td>• Lack of continuity in participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A single language for collaboration/networking</td>
<td>• Skills of content developers need to be strengthened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use of open source technology (e.g. WikiEducator)</td>
<td>• Problems with connectivity in some countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Links with networks such as CKLN</td>
<td>• Lack of technology and infrastructure, as well as technical capacity to maintain hardware, in some regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The diversity and different experiences represented across the network</td>
<td>• Communication lines not clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gains to individuals</td>
<td>• Open content model may be quality control problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Aimed at a range of levels – not just university</td>
<td>• Insufficient documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Excellent coordinating mechanism</td>
<td>• No legal identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• South-South collaboration</td>
<td>• Limited capacity in member states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The VUSSC name (with use of the term ‘University’) may create confusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Open educational materials already available for VUSSC to build on</td>
<td>• Some big names in ODL are not participating or cooperating or supporting, or showing interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opportunity for capacity building</td>
<td>• Migration of skills from one institutions to another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Human capital development is the priority of small states</td>
<td>• Commitment from stakeholders is not always clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Availability of expertise to help individual institutions</td>
<td>• Poor connectivity between small states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Technological developments facilitate delivery of ODL</td>
<td>• Academic freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Research and developing innovative technologies</td>
<td>• Lack of ICT and ODL policies in countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Transfer of technology and competencies</td>
<td>• Rapid changes of technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Commitment to implement MDGs turns into commitment for ODL</td>
<td>• Further funds to be identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Regional collaboration</td>
<td>• Stakeholders commitments not clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collaboration with other network (CKLN)</td>
<td>• Sustained funding – donor fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sustained efforts and commitment from institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths</strong></td>
<td><strong>Weaknesses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• VUSSC initiative from local level</td>
<td>• Rapid technology changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Filling gaps in small states</td>
<td>• Commercial entities may poach skills as they are developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Community creation and process of course development</td>
<td>• Academic freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provides capacity building to local teams</td>
<td>• Institutions holding on to status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Builds up advocacy on ODL strategies locally</td>
<td>• Resistance to openness – holding back of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• First step towards development in long term of a Commonwealth Qualifications Framework to include RPL, Accreditation, QA mechanisms</td>
<td>• Delegation of responsibility to reluctant institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Economies of scale for ODL in small states of Commonwealth (SSC)</td>
<td>• Competition arising from similar initiatives when resources are limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Capacity building through Regional workshops</td>
<td>• Competition from existing programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quality assurance</td>
<td>• Member states may not have universities or tertiary institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• International credibility</td>
<td>• Delegation of responsibility to reluctant institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Changing mindsets (so that small states are not seen only as consumers of materials)</td>
<td>• Competition arising from similar initiatives when resources are limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Links with networks such as CKLN</td>
<td>• Member states may not have universities or tertiary institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Making a difference to countries without the resources to do it on their own</td>
<td>• Delegation of responsibility to reluctant institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Help countries to develop capacity</td>
<td>• Competition arising from similar initiatives when resources are limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensure Ministers delegate responsibility to appropriate institutions</td>
<td>• Member states may not have universities or tertiary institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Define the value to institutions and seek their support</td>
<td>• Delegation of responsibility to reluctant institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Continuous ICT development to cross fertilise VUSSC</td>
<td>• Competition arising from similar initiatives when resources are limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased demand for post secondary education</td>
<td>• Member states may not have universities or tertiary institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Re-inventing /strengthening the spirit of the Commonwealth</td>
<td>• Delegation of responsibility to reluctant institutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>