

STATEMENT

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Statement By Honourable Sharie B. de Castro Minister for Education, Youth Affairs & Sports on Recent Developments at HLSCC

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Minister for Education, Youth Affairs & Sports

At-Large Representative

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Recent Developments at HLSCC

The College, with the support of the Board of Governors and the Ministry of Education, continues to make progress against its strategic goal of institutional effectiveness and organisational development.

Between Fall 2020 and Fall 2024, total enrolment at HLSCC showed modest fluctuation, with full-time student numbers declining before a partial recovery, while part-time enrolment rose steadily and surpassed full-time throughout the period, currently at 54% of 705 total associate and certificate students. This shift reflects a growing demand for flexible or modular study options, highlighting the need to ensure quality and support for part-time learners.

There has been a gradual improvement in the proportion of male students over the past five years, from 35% to 41%. This trend suggests growing engagement with young men, especially linked to the expansion of programmes in technical and marine studies and the surge in enrolment numbers in these areas.

Business and computer science majors remain the most popular programmes, averaging around 280 students per year, while the establishment of the Institute of Education has led to it becoming a significant department with more than 50 students per year pursuing degrees and certificates.

The H. Lavity Stoutt Community College's current accreditation with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) is up for renewal in 2028. As such, the College has begun its self-study process with an accreditation site visit

expected in 2027.

The Dual-Enrolment programme continues to be an unmitigated success. With a consistent upward trend of about 80 students per year, the programme demonstrates a strong partnership with public and private secondary schools and ensures students are better prepared for college-level engagement. This year, the College and the Ministry of Education are working on expanding the programme further, targeting technical subjects as well as improving college-readiness.

HLSCC also held recent information sessions for students and parents interested in pursuing CAPE at the College this Fall. Currently, HLSCC students are preparing to sit CAPE examinations in biology, mathematics, and physics.

Over the past year, the Ministry of Education provided an additional \$900,000 in financial support to HLSCC, further enabling the institution to meet its strategic mandate and strengthen the delivery of quality education and training.

The Board of Governors at HLSCC has approved or revised a number of policies this year to meet both accreditation standards and requirements arising from the Commission of Inquiry. These include policies on academic freedom, advisory committees, compensation and benefits, management of contracts and appointments, performance evaluation, professional development, retirement, and the student academic code of conduct and integrity.

From April to November 2024, Ernst & Young conducted a consultancy on behalf of the College's Board of Governors to review compensation and benefits packages, structures, and policies. Given the broader review of public service compensation across the Virgin Islands, it was both timely and necessary for HLSCC to undertake a parallel exercise. As Minister, I have consistently advocated for fair and competitive compensation for educators at all levels, and just as I championed salary adjustments within the Ministry for public school educators, I also advocated for this review to extend to the college level. In response, the Board of Governors initiated the consultancy, recognising the critical importance of ensuring the College remains competitive in recruiting and retaining high-quality faculty and

staff. Salaries at the institution had not been formally reviewed since 2009, aside from a Board-approved 3% increment in 2023. The final report provided clear guidance to improve transparency and fairness in compensation, aligning salaries with a new performance management framework.

The EY report recommended simplifying and increasing HLSCC salary bands to align with government salary bands and to prioritise the recruitment and retention of quality faculty. It further recommended that improvements to compensation and benefits be clearly tied to performance management and career development. Lastly, it advised that practices governing the determination of compensation and benefits be made more transparent through formalised policy in order to build trust with employees.

The College adopted a new simplified salary band structure, which is now included in advertised positions. It prioritised improving faculty compensation, increasing the average starting faculty salary bands by 35%. Existing faculty members who were paid below these new starting points received salary adjustments to the new starting salary for their respective positions, retroactive to 1 January 2025.

As we look ahead, I have given the College a mandate to explore the feasibility of seeking four-year degree-granting status in strategic areas. This includes beginning the necessary groundwork for accreditation of a bachelor's degree in education, where there is a well-documented national need.

HLSCC, as it celebrates its 35th anniversary in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, remains committed to its life-changing mission, providing high-quality academic programmes as evidenced through its world-class accreditation, numerous articulation agreements and MOUs, and thousands of proud alumni contributing meaningfully to the BVI economy. I am encouraged by these developments at the College and invite my colleagues to support the 2025 graduating class at the College's 32nd graduation exercises on the 12th of June at 1:00 p.m. at the Multi-Purpose Sports Complex.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.