GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

# PRESS RELEASE

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# HLSCC Marks Historic Milestone with Approval of First Bachelor's Degree Programme

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The H. Lavity Stoutt Community College (HLSCC) marked an historic milestone during its 2026 Graduation Exercise with the announcement of the approval of the College's first-ever bachelor's Bachelor of Education degree programme.

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), has approved the college’s accreditation and  expansion into synchronous, asynchronous, and blended online offerings. Together, these developments is said to signal a transformative new era for higher education in the Virgin Islands.

Minister for Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, Honourable Sharie B. de Castro described the moment as not only a graduation for students, but a graduation for the institution itself during the HLSCC’s  33rd graduation ceremony on Thursday, 11 June.

Honourable de Castro stated, "Today, H. Lavity Stoutt Community College graduates.For thirty-six years, this institution has prepared graduates for the future. Today, it graduates into its own."

The minister saaid the achievement represents institutional transformation, reinforces the Virgin Islands' commitment to expanding access to higher education, and positions the College to serve students regionally and internationally.

"These approvals represent institutional transformation. They signal that HLSCC is no longer limited by geography — that opportunity is no longer confined by borders," she said.

Honourable de Castro further explained that the development aligns with the Government's broader vision for education reform and workforce development in the Territory.

President Dr. Richard Georges announced that HLSCC has signed articulation agreements with four United Kingdom institutions — London Metropolitan University, the New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering, Richmond American International University, and the University of Westminster — to facilitate 2+2 transfers for HLSCC graduates into more than 50 bachelor's degree programmes in the United Kingdom. Dr. Georges added that the college is

currently in negotiations with several additional universities.

Premier and Minister of Finance, Honourable Dr. Natalio D. Wheatley, also announced two major institutional recognitions during the ceremony. He said the college's main building will be named in honour of retired educator and HLSCC President Emeritus Dr. Charles Wheatley, in recognition of his longstanding contribution to the college, education and national development in the Virgin Islands.

Additionally, the Virgin Islands Studies Institute will be renamed the Jennie N. Wheatley Institute for Virgin Islands Studies & Heritage, honouring Mrs. Wheatley's contribution to the development of the institute and, more broadly, to Virgin Islands culture, heritage, and history.

The ceremony also highlighted the Government's continued investment in the future growth of HLSCC. With a government grant of $1.3 million, the college has improved its digital student management systems, funded the Let's Build VI Scholarship Programme, and engaged the Recovery and Development Agency in plans for student dormitories.

Honourable de Castro stated that the college's evolution reflects the audacious vision first established by the late Honourable H. Lavity Stoutt, whose dream created opportunities for generations of Virgin Islanders.

"Let today be remembered as the day we decided that what has never been done before can, in fact, be done," the minister said. "The future of the Virgin Islands is not something we wait for. It is something we create."

The 2026 Commencement Ceremony celebrated the accomplishments of graduates across multiple disciplines while marking a defining chapter in the continued transformation of higher education in the Virgin Islands.

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**For Additional Information Contact:**

Ms. Angelique Lettsome
Information Officer I

Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports
Telephone: 1-284-468-9448
Email: anlettsome@gov.vg

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