Tourism experts from the Moffat Centre for Travel and Tourism Business Development were called on to conduct a study on the potential economic opportunities in St Vincent and the Grenadines attributable to the development of the new airport and the Buccament Bay resorts, including the identification of arising opportunities for SMEs in the area.

Specific project deliverables included employment generation, rural development and improving export competitiveness. The context was a small island economy with relatively low levels of tourism on the main island of St Vincent, and high value tourism attracted to the smaller surrounding Grenadine Islands. Using best practice application and identification of critical success factors, the importance of an airport enterprise zone was identified by Moffat experts, as was the importance of an ethical and fair trade supply chain offer to the resort development.

During the consultancy project, funded by the EU and St Vincent and the Grenadines Centre for Enterprise Development Inc. The Moffat Centre established that linkages between the airport and the resort development in terms of training and recruitment of local labour supply was necessary and would advance the potential for incorporating training and education in key technical and vocational areas. Agro-processing and fresh food export element of economic development were also explored and investment returns quantified and feasibility undertaken for investors.
Led by Director Professor John Lennon, the Moffat Centre undertakes consultancy and research in tourism, hospitality, events and travel. The Centre has delivered strategies and planning in these areas at regional and national levels and has undertaken high profile business training and development activities nationally and internationally.

The Centre’s work within the Caribbean has been significant. The Caribbean island of St Lucia has seen a decline in tourists due to a combination of factors – the terrorist attacks on America in 2001, recession, fewer air flights and growing markets in the Middle East – and wanted to revive the market, improving its performance, competitiveness and sustainability. Tourism is a key contributor to the economy and social wellbeing of St Lucia. “St Lucia was losing its competitive edge,” explained Professor Lennon.

He completed a major project to differentiate St Lucia on the basis of service quality, benchmarking its hotel industry against the best in the world and proposing how it could be on a par with – or better than – other luxury destinations. Like many of the Moffat Centre’s consultancy projects, the work for St Lucia Hotel and Tourism Association (SLHTA) called on the centre’s expertise in capacity building and laying strong practical foundations to drive change and add value. Wide experience of business development in the tourism field across the world is underpinned by high quality qualitative and quantitative research to inform practical guidance for its clients.

The year-long study, won in an international competitive tender, assessed the island’s tourism industry in core areas before identifying those which needed attention. One area for action was the training and development of the workers in the tourism sector, so the Moffat team developed a bespoke training course.

The training programme aims to build capacity on the island in order to change and redefine the service offered. Working in partnership with local hoteliers, resort operators and the tourism authority, the project was designed to leave behind a tangible product that can be updated and delivered in the absence of external consultants. It provides a foundation for service training on the island for the next decade and the aim is to ensure all of those working in tourism (circa 17,000) undertake this training.

Another aspect of the project was to provide St Lucia’s tourism stakeholders with a measure of key performance variables on which to establish a more scientific basis for developing a strategy to respond to operational and performance deficiencies in the industry and competitive challenges.

A written guide for the calculation of efficiency metrics and a training programme were developed to encourage the use of performance benchmarks to help ensure the effective management of costs and revenues. The Moffat team also provided advice on the organisational support, marketing, public relations and budget necessary to carry through its recommendations. St Lucia can now look forward to the next decade with a clear understanding of the challenges it faces in the international marketplace and, armed with practical programmes to improve the experience of tourists on the island, the ability to grow its income from tourism.