Partner Presentation Form

Name of the organisation:	University of South Africa	
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Type of organisation:

SME ☐   School ☐   <u>University   X</u>   Public Authority ☐
Training ☐   No Profit ☐   NGO ☐

Other (Specify)

Fields of action:

SMEs ☐   Youth ☐   Universities X   Public Authorities ☐
Equal opportunities ☐   Schools ☐   Unemployed ☐

Other (Specify)

1

Description of the organisation

The University of South Africa (Unisa), the only higher education institution to carry the name of the country, is the people's university in every sense of the word. Throughout its history, spanning 15 decades, Unisa has responded to the developments brought about by changing times, the needs of a developing country and society at large, and an ever-evolving higher education environment. This was achieved through ongoing and dynamic transitioning. Unisa's journey has been one of continuous growth and transformation, aimed at shaping tomorrow through education.

Unisa's roots (and indeed that of higher education in South Africa) date back to 1873 when the University of the Cape of Good Hope was founded, initially functioning as an examining body for higher education.

In 1916, the university changed its name to the University of South Africa and in 1918 it relocated to Pretoria. In 1946, it became one of the first public universities in the world to teach exclusively by means of distance education. Today, Unisa is widely recognised as a leading comprehensive, open, distance and e-Learning (CODeL) university. The university has more than 370 000 students and is the largest university in South Africa and on the African continent, and one of the world's mega-universities.

With offices across South Africa and students from 109 countries, Unisa has an extensive geographical footprint and global reach.

Experience of the organization in previous European projects

1. **PROJECT FOR INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION**.

   UNISA was the lead institution in the PIECCE project that focused on the professionalisation of the ECD workforce through working in partnerships with other institutions and NGO partners. The University partnered with ECD NGOs and a TVET college. The project was a game changer in the field. UNISA led the development of the first knowledge and practice standards for birth to four which then led to the development of minimum standards for qualifications (diploma and degree in ECCE). UNISA also led the programme framework to help lecturers to design programmes that were in keeping with the critical issues of professionalisation of the birth to 4 ECD workforce. UNISA was the first institution to offer the Diploma in ECCE for birth to 4 in 2024. In 2025 more higher education institutions are coming on board to offer the Diploma and Degree. In summary, the PIECCE project catalysed change in that it created a career path for a majority of women workforce that were trapped at certificate level of qualifications. It also created new communities of practice for ECCE workforce development. Currently the work of PIECCE has expanded to informing the work of the South African ECD Human Resource Development Task Team

2. **POTENTIAL OF MICROCREDENTIALS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA (POMISA)**

   This capacity building in higher education (CBHE) project, a collaboration between Southern African and European universities and higher education councils, will systematically develop principles and policies for the recognition, quality assurance and regulation of microcredentials in Southern African countries. The global take-up of microcredentials has been slow and uneven, and while SouthernAfrican policymakers, including regional and national higher education qualifications and quality assurance councils, appreciate their potential to promote access, skills development and learner and worker mobility, they are concerned about issues of articulation, alignment, quality, equity and social justice. Emphasising European Commission priorities of digital transformation and the integration of migrants, as well as governance and sustainable growth, the project, located in Strand 2, aims to strengthen relationships between higher education and labour markets while enhancing higher education network and governance capacities. After examining the state of microcredential conceptualisation, policy development and implementation in Lesotho, Mauritius,

Namibia and South Africa, in both the public and private sectors, and through intra- and inter-regional consultations, the project will develop national concept papers for the systematic introduction of regional guidelines and policy frameworks on microcredentials. The ultimate aim of the project is to benefit the people and countries of the Southern African region, particularly but not only learners, employers and higher education institutions, entities and systems, by developing clear regulatory frameworks on, and a well-defined roadmap for, microcredentials.

Experience and Expertise of the organization in the project's subject area

UNISA is a relevant participant in this project. The Institution is an Open Distance and e-Learning institution which services its student population online (Learning Management System). It services almost 0,5 million students locally and internationally. The student enrolment per module runs into a few thousand. UNISA, therefore, makes a concerted effort to invest in student support. However, the complexity of the institution's service system makes student support a constant grey area that calls for unending attention. One of the main areas that need this continuous support is the management and maintenance of the teaching and learning resources. Though the different colleges have embarked on Open Educational Resources (OERs) as one of the identified solutions, it is clear that this aspect requires more attention; hence, there is a need for the institution to participate in this project. OERs must be made effective so that students benefit most from it. Given students' diverse backgrounds and affordability issues, OERs have proven to be the choice strategy to mitigate a lack of teaching and learning resources. Hence, the proposed project can enhance the management and maintenance of OERs and make lecturers and students take full control of them towards self-directed learning. Many lecturers have not yet taken full advantage of the OERs. Part of the problem is the technophobia that they seem to experience. Training them properly and conscientising them of the benefits of OERs can liberate them from the cocoon of ignorance and technophobia.

Contributions that can be provided to the project

UNISA brings a wealth of academics' expertise who will participate in the project. These academics are experienced in online teaching and know the needs of the students to a great extent. The academics participating in this project will implement it by interacting with their colleagues and students. As an experienced Open Distance and e-Learning institution, UNISA will greatly benefit the project by sharing its expertise in using the OERs, considering its over 150 years of experience as a distance education institution. It will inject this wealth of experience into the project. Moreover, UNISA comes into the project as a team member, thus adding resources to the project. It will participate in discussions and offer inputs that will appraise the project. It will also contribute to the publications that will ensue.

Reasons of involvement in the project

The reasons of UNISA's involvement in the project are aligned to the benefits it will gain from the project instead of the project being the only one benefiting from its participation. As UNISA is forever growing, it is clear that this project will hugely contribute to the desired management of the teaching and learning resources in terms of:

- the training to be offered to lecturers to capacitate them in making the best use of the OERs in servicing their students.
- the training to be offered to students to capacitate them to independently manipulate the wealth of resources that are freely available online.
- once the students have been fully capacitated, the resource affordability issues will fade away.
- the full use of the OERs which will boost UNISA's identity as an ODL university.
- best practices on OERs greatly benefiting UNISA.
- the training that lecturers and students will receive, capacitating them in becoming innovative and developing OERs ultimately.

Furthermore, the project will help develop the STEM OERs repository and programmes/modules that might enhance student learning and performance in the subjects. It has the potential to establish communities of practice in the STEM subjects and their online offerings. Lecturers and students will master the skills and

knowledge of teaching and learning through the OERs. From the project, seminars will be conducted as dissemination platforms about best practices. Team presentations at conferences, as well as publications in the form of journal articles will also be considered.

Contact Person's Experience and Expertise

1. **Frankie MP Mojapelo** holds Bachelor of Arts, BA Honours, Programme in Business Leadership and Master in Business Leadership. Frankie has over 27 years working in Higher Education in fundraising, proposal writing, project development, stakeholder engagement and alumni relations. Gained strong leadership, team building, communication and interpersonal skills with substantial experience in strategy development, fundraising, policy development, strategy implementation, project management, development and partnership/stakeholder engagement, financial management, audit and risk.

   Leading the team driving the fundraising and project development of the UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA which has been increasing steadily over the past 10 years including as a lead person and a person of contact for the establishment of Young African Leaders Initiative – YALI Regional Leadership Centre Southern Africa. A US Presidential Project.

2. **Prof Mishack T Gumbo's** academic experience in higher education spans over 29 years. Prof Gumbo is a Full Professor of Technology Education and Indigenous Technology Knowledge Systems in the Department of Science and Technology Education at the University of South Africa. His other areas of interest are E-Learning and Distance Education, Technology Education Teachers' Professional Development, and Decolonisation of the Curriculum. UNISA designated him as a Research Professor on 1 February 2022 – 31 January 2025. He has more than 150 publications in journal articles, conference papers, book chapters, and books. He leads research projects and mentors the developing academics in the College of Education. He has given keynote addresses at numerous seminars and conferences, both locally and internationally. He has successfully supervised 26 doctoral students and 13 master's students. He has examined dissertations and theses for several universities locally and internationally and reviewed peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers. He serves on numerous academic committees and boards. He is Editor-in-Chief of Indilinga: African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. He has been awarded as follows: External Recognition Award (2019); National Research Foundation C1 Rating (2021); Received the National Research Foundation Rating Award (2021); currently recognized among the Top 10 000 Influential Scientists in Africa and 100 in South Africa in the AD Scientific Index; Competitive Programme for Rated Researchers Holder (2022-2024); Designated as Research Professor (1 February 2022 – 31 January 2025); Best Mentoring Award (2024), Joint Mentor-Mentee with Prof MV Makokotlela (2024).