

Preface

Since 1985 the Commonwealth Secretariat's Education Programme has organized a set of activities focusing on the educational development of small states. This has been at the express wish of Commonwealth Ministers of Education at their meetings in Cyprus in 1984 and Kenya in 1987. In part, this is a mandate which reflects the composition of the Commonwealth, given that 28 of its 48 members have a population of under two million. National smallness of scale and the problems and benefits which derive from this in terms of economic and social development are, not surprisingly, at the heart of a range of Commonwealth programmes and projects.

In late 1985 the Government of Mauritius played generous host to a group of educators, administrators and academics drawn from countries in the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, Southern Africa and the South Pacific. The task of this group was to help to conceptualize the impact of smallness of scale on national educational development and to set the parameters for a programme of Commonwealth activity.

The Mauritius meeting identified a number of issues which relate closely to smallness. Thus special difficulties arise at the post-secondary school level. In planning for higher level education and training hard choices have to be made as to how far to go in the development of national institutions relative to continuing dependence on regional and overseas institutions. Similar predicaments are faced with respect to curriculum development and examinations; to what extent is it desirable, relevant, and cost-effective to prepare local syllabi and courses compared with retaining overseas prescriptions with their widely accepted credit-worthiness internationally? A related question concerns the ability of small state systems to offer education and training opportunities which will genuinely develop individual capacities to be flexible and adaptable in vulnerable and fluctuating employment markets.

The administration and management of small systems also came under review. It is clear that senior personnel in ministries and departments of education have to be all things to all men. Distinctions

between policy makers, planners and professional educators are difficult to apply in small states. The role of the administrator is multi-functional and there is little in the way of formal training to help prepare for such a varied and demanding life. One element of this composite role of the administrator is to manage the many overseas linkages which ministries have to maintain and sustain, be it with regional universities and examinations councils, aid agencies, overseas educational institutions or multilateral organizations. All of these tasks and functions have to be viewed against the highly personal society which characterizes small states; there is little room for the faceless bureaucrat in the micro-states of the Commonwealth.

The Mauritius group proposed that the Commonwealth Secretariat should develop a programme of activities based on its findings; a set of initiatives to facilitate a network of links, exchanges and collaborative activities, backed by an approved set of funded meetings and studies. Since 1985 three issues identified in Mauritius have received more detailed attention at pan-Commonwealth meetings. In 1987, in association with the Institute of Education at the University of the South Pacific, consideration was given to The Supply, Training and Professional Support of Education Personnel in Multi-Island Situations. A year later working with the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College in St. Lucia the focus was on Post-Secondary Colleges in Small States, whilst in 1989 a project on the Organization and Management of Ministries of Education in Small States was initiated at a meeting organized in association with the University of Malta.

All of these gatherings have highlighted the paucity of training and professional materials which take specific account of the needs of education systems in small states. This handbook is the first of a series of practical resource books designed for, and written by, educators and administrators in small states. They are intended for use by senior professionals and by those in national and regional institutions who have responsibilities for the training of senior ministry staff.

We are fortunate in this volume in securing the expertise of two Maltese educators with long experience of working in an education system which exemplifies many of the characteristics identified by the pan-Commonwealth group in Mauritius. It is intended for senior personnel in ministries of education. It identifies clusters of tasks which managers perform and offers pragmatic advice on the ways by which these functions might be managed more effectively. It constantly recognizes the social milieu within which decisions have to

be taken and the demands which this places on the administrator.

Volumes akin to this one are in preparation, and will include the management and organization of post-secondary colleges; ways of supporting educational personnel working in relatively isolated situations in archipelago countries; a directory of post-secondary institutions in small states; and a manual on the management and organization of ministries.

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