

Preface

The challenge set by smallness of national scale is nowhere more evident than in the efforts of the world's smallest states to provide post-secondary education for their citizens. For small countries to find a sustainable niche in the political and economic world community requires investment in people; in the development of skills and capacities to exploit and develop whatever comparative advantage exists or can be created.

The South Pacific is a region where this challenge is being addressed in a variety of ways. The provision of a range of specialist national institutions is not an option for island countries, most of which have a population of under 500,000. But this is not an argument for neglecting post-secondary education at the national level. As this volume in the Challenge of Scale series demonstrates there is a remarkable range of educational activity taking place, within national colleges and outside them; and provided by an array of actors including government, the churches, the private sector, NGOs, international companies and overseas educational institutions.

The difficult balancing act for small states is to determine how far they wish to strengthen this national capacity, including, in some cases, the possibility of creating national universities, and how far it is through access to regional and international provisions that national interests are best served.

Ron and Marjorie Tuianekore Crocombe have spent their lives in the service of education in the South Pacific. Their experience has given rise to firm views on the directions which post-secondary education should take in their region. These views are forcibly expressed in this study. They are views which deserve debate and not only in the South Pacific. For the Crocombes the challenge for

small states is to strengthen national provisions; ensure greater equity in the availability of regional opportunities; and widen the exposure of Pacific islanders to the countries of the Pacific Rim.

The ideas expressed in this study are those of the authors alone. They do not represent an official position taken by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

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