

Research Briefing No. 9

Education in Small States: Policies and priorities

Key findings

Commonwealth small states are relatively advanced in progress towards basic education global goals and targets:

- Most have achieved almost universal access to basic education.
- Many have achieved or are close to gender parity in primary and secondary schooling. In some, the disparities lie in favour of girls. This is a distinctive priority for future attention.
- Internationally agreed Education for All (EFA) and education Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) targets remain relevant, while pressing priorities often lie beyond those currently commanding attention of larger states and international development agencies.

Small States have an early pattern of shifting educational priorities beyond matters of access towards issues of retention, quality, equity, inclusion and skills training. This has generated much insightful and valuable experience from which others can learn.

The rise of the knowledge economy has underpinned an expansion and strengthening of higher education (HE), with related implications for harnessing ICT, creating quality-assurance mechanisms, and improving coordination, integration and regulation. Realistic application of ICT in small states can help transform future development, management and reach of HE.

Contemporary priorities concern how small states can respond to major external shocks and challenges within environment, economic, cultural and political domains.



The research

The research builds upon a report prepared for presentation to Ministers of Education and senior officials at the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 2009. It draws upon these direct consultations and discussions, and upon a detailed programme of original research to:

- revisit the pertinence of early Commonwealth work on education in small states,
- examine the impact of changing global contexts,
- document the changing nature and significance of recent and contemporary educational policy priorities,
- advance the case for new and strengthened initiatives for small states, including those supported by the Commonwealth and other organisations.

The Commonwealth classes 32 of its 54 members as small states.

These are defined as:

'countries with a population of 1.5 million or less. These states possess unique special development challenges – limited diversification, limited capacity, poverty, susceptibility to natural disasters and environmental change, remoteness and isolation, openness, and income volatility. The Secretariat's grouping of Small States also includes the larger member countries of Botswana, Jamaica, Lesotho, Namibia and Papua New Guinea because they share many of the same characteristics of small states (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2012 <http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Internal/180407/>)

Research design

The study draws on original research, international databases, related literature and consultations with policymakers, planners and practitioners in both small and larger states:

- lead authors had field visits to Papua New Guinea, Turks and Caicos Islands, Fiji Islands, Solomon Islands and Suriname;
- insights were gained from discussions with personnel from international agencies, including the Commonwealth and UNESCO;
- formal written input was contributed by educational planners, practitioners and researchers in small states and by academic specialists in the field of comparative and international education;
- original field research carried out by doctoral researchers working at the University of Bristol helped to ground the study in the views of practitioners and in recent empirical evidence of educational policy in practice in small states worldwide; and.
- feedback from ministers and their senior officials at the 17th CCEM provided a core foundation for the analysis.

Further information

The research was conducted jointly with UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Publications

1. **Book** Crossley, M., Bray, M., Packer, S. with Atchoarena, D., Colin, M., Martin, M., & Sprague, T. (2011) [Education in Small States: Policies and Priorities](#) London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
2. **Chapter** Louisy, P., & Crossley, M. (2011) 'Tertiary Education in Saint Lucia: Challenges and priorities within the evolving global environment.' In Martin, M., & Bray, M [Tertiary Education in Small States: Planning in the context of globalization](#), pp 149-166. Paris: UNESCO/IIEP
3. **Article** Crossley, M. (2010) Context Matters in Educational Research and International Development: Learning from the Small States Experience. *Prospects* 40:4, pp 421-429.

Website

<http://www.smallstates.net>

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