



United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organization

# United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO

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## ELIMINATING WORLD POVERTY

Response from the Education Committee of the UK National Commission for UNESCO to the DFID  
White Paper consultation document of January 2006

### Introduction

The consultation paves the way for a White Paper setting out a plan for how the UK government can translate the promises of 2005 into better lives for people in poor countries.

It asks:

- A. What can we do to reduce poverty and deliver development quickly?
- B. What policies are needed in the UK and internationally to create the conditions necessary for reducing poverty?
- C. How can the international development system be reformed so that it delivers better results for development, and is more responsive to the needs of poor people?

The Education Committee of the UK National Commission for UNESCO (hereafter the UNESCO UK Education Committee) would like to respond specifically on education issues related to these questions.

### Aid policy

1. The UNESCO UK Education Committee recognises the very positive role the UK government has played in lobbying for more aid to basic education internationally and raising its own commitments to aid in general and to basic education in particular in recent years.

2. However, much more needs to be done if the government is to fulfill its commitments to Education for All (EFA) made at the World Education Forum in Dakar 2000 and at the UN Millennium Summit. It is disappointing that the target of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 has already been missed and it is vital that we step up efforts to achieve the internationally agreed 2015 goals. In addition to free good quality primary education for all, these include an expansion of early childhood education, and access for all adults to life skills programmes, basic education and continuing education.

3. Education is not just a human right. When it is universal, attained by all, regardless of class or caste or gender, it is the key to overcoming poverty and unlocking the potential of every human being within a society. While literacy and numeracy skills are valuable in their own right, they are vital to development and are one of the most important factors in empowering the world's poorest people to change their lives for the better. Yet an estimated 862 million adults cannot read or write. And at least 100 million children in the world do not get the chance to go to primary school, two-thirds of whom are girls. Yet, as World Bank studies have suggested, the single most effective intervention that can be made to encourage economic growth is the

provision of good-quality basic education for girls. There is a compelling body of international evidence to demonstrate the knock-on effect that educating all children, and educating girls in particular, can have on a wide range of development indicators from family health, child mortality and life expectancy to productivity in rural and urban self-employment. It is therefore vital that UK aid policies place basic education at their heart.

4. To ensure adequate funds are made available to countries committed to sound plans for Education for All, the UNESCO UK Education Committee recommends that:

(i) DFID ensures UK aid spending on basic education is made transparent; that mechanisms for tracking how much is spent on basic education are put in place and those figures are made public each year.

(ii) the government gives a clear commitment to make basic education a higher priority within the aid budget between now and 2015, the target date for achieving Education for All. The Government should significantly raise the share of its aid budget spent on basic education.

(iii) it is not just levels of funding that matter but the duration of the UK commitment both globally and for individual countries. This is a long-term enterprise and countries need to know that funding will be available long-term in order to plan investment in training and provision of teachers and infrastructure.

(iv) while the UK has taken a lead in providing funds for the Fast Track Initiative, the global level of funding has been low and the UK could set an example by contributing significantly more through this or other multilateral initiatives. If the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved, more attention should be given to those countries in the greatest need – particularly in Africa where the EFA challenge is most difficult to overcome – as well as to the high population countries.

(v) regarding policies towards multilateral institutions: the UK government should encourage a move away from IMF policies that unduly constrain the size of the public sector wage bill and consequently limit the capacity of developing country governments to hire and retain trained teachers, because they cannot pay them a living wage. The UK government should continue to use its influence in international bodies such as the World Bank and G8 to rally support for the FTI and any other multilateral initiatives that successfully channel funds to support sound EFA plans. It should support the reform strategy for UNESCO set out in the Navigant Report and support the infrastructure, including its institutes and the Global Monitoring Report team, that enables UNESCO to operate as the lead body on EFA. The UK government should urge the EU to play a much more vigorous role in supporting basic education.

(vi) DFID should continue to support efforts to encourage developing countries not to assume that traditional Western models of education are necessarily the best way to increase access to or the quality of education in their country but to seek solutions which can best scale up provision of good quality provision to all children in the context of their own local curriculum needs and available resources. For instance, interim measures may be required such as the hiring of a para-teaching force that is trained on the job over a number of years or the creation of voluntary village schools in countries like Afghanistan where extreme lack of local infrastructure is a major deterrent to girls attending school.

(vii) DFID should also support developing countries' efforts to increase investments in education sub-sectors beyond primary education to complement the focus on universal primary education. For instance, adult literacy is an important factor in the achievement of universal primary education because literate adults are much more likely to demand education for their children and will be more supportive of their children's attendance and learning at school. The UNESCO UK Education Committee urges DFID to work with UNESCO, which is the lead international agency on adult literacy (adult literacy was the theme of this year's Global Monitoring Report), to ensure tangible progress towards the 2015 goal of a 50 per cent improvement in adult literacy and to engage with relevant professional groups in the UK to examine ways in which UK expertise can be harnessed to contribute to the international effort.

### **Sharing expertise via partnerships**

5. In addition to the above steps, the UNESCO UK Education Committee believes DFID should not work alone within the UK government in trying to achieve Education for All. The UK has an abundance of educational expertise – highly valued by many other countries – which should be shared through

international partnerships, without impinging on existing aid funding. This would not be a form of traditional technical assistance. UNESCO is urging DFID and the Department for Education and Skills to work together to translate the DfES's international strategy into a national effort to share expertise at government, local education authority, school leader and teacher level with developing countries, with mutual benefits for our partners and our own education system. Clear objectives need to be set and support structures put in place to dramatically scale up the good work that is already going on in this field, not least through DFID's Global School Partnerships scheme, and Link Community Development's school partnerships programme. UNESCO UK is playing its part by reviving UK involvement in UNESCO's ASPNet scheme, which links almost 8,000 schools around the world. Useful mechanisms could include:

- a requirement that LEAs have a strategy for their area that demonstrates how the international dimension will be covered in schools, youth services, FE and adult education.
- special funding for teacher training institutions to form links and work with overseas partners on curriculum development projects and delivering fast-track basic teacher training programmes in the school holidays in developing countries seeking emergency or interim solutions to extreme shortages of qualified teachers and curriculum expertise.
- scaling up the DfES's Teachers International Professional Development scheme and International Placements for Headteachers scheme and funding two-way exchanges involving developing countries.
- a significant enlargement of the DFID Global School Partnerships scheme
- a national publicity drive and special funding where appropriate to encourage LEAs, teacher training institutions, curriculum developers, school and college leaders and individual teachers to make their own personal contribution to EFA by engaging in such international partnerships with the specific aims of sharing expertise for mutual development, providing professional development for teachers, and encouraging collaboration between pupils as equal partners on curriculum projects and in joint citizenship work.

### **Promoting understanding and mobilising public support**

6. At the same time it is vital that children, teachers and members of the public in the UK have the opportunity to learn about development; the economic, social, political and environmental forces that shape our lives and those of people throughout the world; the role of international institutions and aid programmes; and how to achieve sustainable development including understanding man's impact on climate change. Without this, the popular understanding and support will not be there to sustain and strengthen aid programmes in future; without this linking programmes can be detrimental; and without this aid programmes can more easily be undermined by other policies, for instance unfair terms of trade for developing countries' farmers that reduce those countries' ability to build a tax base from which they can fund education and other services. Therefore the UNESCO UK Education Committee supports the Development Education Association's recommendations that DFID should:

- (i) increase its funding for this area to at least £10m by 2007 and £15m by 2010.
- (ii) work with the DfES on the global dimension in schools but also on education to combat climate change.
- (iii) develop a strategy to support Development Education Centres and resource centres on climate change.
- (iv) consult educational bodies to ensure promotion of better understanding of international bodies, such as the World Bank and IMF, and the role people can play as active global citizens.

8. The government should also be pressing the EU to play its part in fostering north-south co-operation and strengthening the quality and extent of development education in its member countries, so that its own aid programmes may be made accountable and to build a constituency of public support for them.

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