

## UNESCO UK National Commission Skills Working Group Response to DfID Consultation on a new Education Strategy 29 October 2009

The Skills Working Group of the UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC) welcomes the consultation on its education strategy and the opportunity to comment particularly on skills aspects of the strategy. The working group is a newly formed body, charged with examining and exploring ways in which the Education for All goals that relate to life and vocational skills might be more effectively achieved than is currently evident.

Given this brief, we will focus our response on sections 6 and 7 of the consultation document.

### 6.2: investment in further education

As DFID's July 2006 "*Briefing on the importance of secondary, vocational and higher education to development*" and its briefing on adult literacy in 2008 both make clear, investment is needed at all levels to reach the MDGs and Education for All. What is needed is a holistic approach to address the rising number of young people coming out of primary and secondary education ill-equipped for work. Policy development in skills for growth should be supported by DfID, reflecting the UK government itself has recognised the importance of further and higher education's role in developing 'world class' skills for competitiveness and its three major national commissions in this area (Foster; Leitch; Humphreys). Skills strategies based on skills forecasting, and a sectoral approach is the national approach as in many other industrialised nations.

A wide range of UK research has provided a wealth of evidence about the relationship between skills and growth, and the added value to the individual of skills training. Nations increasingly compete on the skills of their workforce to attract inward investment.

Moreover, UNESCO has just ratified a new TVET and skills strategy and at its General Conference this month of October identified its new priorities under EFA for 2010 and 2011 in its programme and budget for Education as **literacy, teacher training and skills for work**.

The question therefore is not "should" DfID invest in further education, but where and precisely how the investment should be made. Teaching training, for instance, has long been identified by DfID as an important element of supporting the MDGs and current British practice highlights the importance of expanding this focus to continuing professional development. This is of great pertinence in DfID's priority countries as there is considerable evidence that new approaches to teaching and learning have struggled to take root in part due to a failure to engage rigorously with the identities and practices of existing teachers.

Clearly DfID needs to work in partnership with other international agencies to develop its knowledge and capacity on how to work in a stronger cross-sectoral mode. Agencies such as the European Training Foundation (ETF), CEDEFOP and the International Labour Organisation; and the British Council have knowledge and experience regarding skills for work that can be shared through partnership working, whilst the new UKNC skills working group also brings together an important range of UK expertise on skills in an international context.

### **6.3: basing decisions on evidence**

A wealth of evidence already exists about good practice here internationally on themes such as learner outcomes and destinations; quality management, self-assessment and inspection; employer engagement; and work experience. Fundamentally this is about good governance, quality assurance and accountability of TVET institutions. Inevitably, much of this evidence relates to industrialised and transitional economies so there does need to be some “translation work” in applying it to DfID priority countries.

In addition, DFID could consult with, and learn from, colleagues in other parts of the UK government in relation to policies relating to skills, including adult literacy and numeracy. Evidence to support these policies and strategies has been referenced and cited in order that the UK can develop the capacity of individuals, organisations and communities to meet the economic and employment demands of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Again, there will need to be some work in contextualising these lessons for different settings.

### **6.4: using public private partnerships**

At government level Sector Skills bodies (representing employers across one sector of the economy) and national skills commissions are key public private partnerships needed at government level – nationally they can together engage on identifying skills gaps and needs and addressing planning requirements.

At local authority or municipal level encouraging industry and the private sector to invest in and run apprenticeship schemes linked to local TVET colleges.

Research evidence from developing countries does point to the considerable challenges that are faced in developing such structures in contexts where formal large-scale industry is weak. Nonetheless, there are examples of good practice within growth sectors in countries such as Colombia and South Africa and of long-term work with informal sector associations in several West African and South Asian countries that confirm the potential of such an approach.

National Qualifications Frameworks have become particularly popular in the very immediate past in many countries. Whilst it is clear that there are very different challenges to making NQFs work in poorer contexts, it is clear that the strong involvement of industry in partnership with public providers and national governments is essential if such approaches are to work.

### **6.5: supporting youth into the workforce**

There is considerable experience of work with supporting youth into the workforce internationally. What often is required are innovative and informal programmes in softer skills/prevocational skills. These may have particular potential in areas such as new media and technology and sport, where appropriate and possible, to engage youth from disadvantaged groups with progression to apprenticeship programmes

There is evidence that flexible credit-based programmes with a focus on basic employability skills and entry-level practical occupational skills can play an important role, particularly if they lead to agreed progression routes through apprenticeship programmes and potentially into higher vocational learning.

It is also vital to ensure there are flexible credit based access programmes for adults returning to learning and training, and to support the accreditation of alternative informal or non-formal learning, and encourage the re-engagement of learners after extended periods away from formal accredited learning.

In spite of widespread agreement regarding their importance, high quality information, advice and guidance careers advice services are rarely available to young learners. These should be supported and made available to all learners, regardless of age.

It is essential to support national and international campaigns to raise the profile and status of TVET. For instance, World Skills is an excellent example of how national competitions can support raising the quality of skills provision.

### **7.2: improving our delivery**

Given the current skills base in working on TVET in international agencies, it is vital that DfID works openly and effectively with other international development agencies.

### **7.3: better use of research**

It is equally important that DfID recognises the need for joined up research in this field, which has been seriously under resourced for so long. There is a real opportunity for DfID, in drawing on wider British expertise, to play a leading role in the drive to get international agreement on definitions and indicators, and establishing a baseline for a Global Monitoring Report.

### **7.4: measuring impact**

There is a growing international (especially European) knowledge base in measuring the impact of skills development.

This experience suggests that quantifiable measures require confidence in the rigour of their collection, and the 'transferability' / equivalence, of their outcomes. Investment may therefore be required in ensuring that such systems are reliable and comprehensive.

Moreover, quantitative evidence will require a range of measurement tools, including independent review (and self review supported by independent audit), and data gathering from a wide range of stakeholders.

In addition to quantitative measures and data on engagement, achievement and employment, qualitative indicators need to be developed.

Again, there is potential for DfID to work with other UK agencies and with other European partners in this area.

### **7.5: cross-sector partnerships**

Modalities such as national, sectoral and local Skills Commissions that bring all parties together to identify priorities for investment are clearly valuable tools for encouraging wider partnerships. Equally, the development and maintenance of occupational standards and the quality assurance of public vocational provision offer opportunities for wide stakeholder involvement