In 2004 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) set out its vision to develop a world class system of education in England in *Putting the World into World-Class Education: An international strategy for education, skills and children's services*. The DfES Global Gateway, developed and managed by the British Council for the DfES, has become a significant delivery mechanism and means of support for this strategy, encouraging and enabling partnerships between the United Kingdom and other countries worldwide and providing a valuable source of information and guidance on opportunities available to everyone internationally in the education sector. The Commonwealth, with its long history of celebrating diversity, enriches this notion of learning in a global context and has much to offer in the drive for international collaboration in education.

**Aims and strategy**

*Putting the World into World-Class Education* aspires to equip the people of the UK with ‘the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to fulfil themselves, to live in and contribute effectively to a global society and to work in a competitive global economy’. It recognises that nations across the globe are increasingly interdependent and that developing an international awareness should be a fundamental part of a child’s education.

The strategy also acknowledges that, in order to achieve a world-class system of education, we must recognise what constitutes world-class standards and benchmark our performance against them, both in terms of attainment and tackling the educational challenges and skills gaps that are faced in the UK and by others around the world. The intention is to work as a truly global partner, learning from the experiences of other countries and sharing UK expertise to help other countries develop and reform their own education systems, in the process building mutually beneficial relationships internationally and increasing access to educational opportunities worldwide.

**Three core goals**

The strategy has three core goals: to ensure a strong international dimension across the UK’s education system, which equips young people and adults for life and work in a global society; to build stronger links with education systems in countries around the world by engaging with international partners ‘to achieve their goals and ours’; to maximise the contribution of our education and training and university research to overseas trade and inward investment.

The strategy focuses on plans for achieving these goals in England and has the support of the devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, who are developing their own plans for internationalising education, in line with this overall strategy.

The first of these goals has significant implications for schools and colleges, which are encouraged to incorporate an international dimension into the learning and skills development of all young people (see, for example, Box 1). The strategy identifies eight key concepts of which all who live in today’s global society should have an understanding:

- citizenship;
- social justice;
- sustainable development;
- diversity;
- values and perceptions;
- interdependence;
- conflict resolution; and
- human rights.

The strategy proposes that these concepts should permeate every subject of the National Curriculum.

It also identifies four generic skills required by the workforce in a global economy, as evident in international best practice: the ability to work comfortably in multinational teams; knowledge of different business methods, legislation and ways of working; an understanding and appreciation of different cultures; and, finally, confidence when working in or with other countries.

It is envisaged that such awareness and skills will be achieved through collaboration between UK schools and colleges and equivalent partner institutions in other countries. The aim is that, by 2010, every UK school and college will be working in a sustainable partnership with a school or college overseas, ensuring wider access to international educational opportunities - and this is where the DfES Global Gateway comes in.
**Box 1 Connecting Classrooms**

**Partnerships between schools in the UK and sub-Saharan Africa**

Connecting Classrooms is an exciting new British Council programme which allows young people to engage in intercultural dialogue within Africa and between Africa and the UK in order to increase the knowledge and understanding of each other's societies and to change perceptions. The programme arose out of market research conducted in Southern Africa and the UK. This showed that, in southern African countries, young people had an outdated and unrepresentative view of the UK whilst young people in the UK had a one-dimensional (often negative) view of Africa, which did not reflect the rich diversity of the continent. The programme aims to reach 1.5 million young people in the UK and Africa over the next five years.

The British Council programme will support new partnerships between clusters of UK schools and two sub-Saharan African countries, many of which are Commonwealth member states. The programme is about creating new equity-based partnerships which will allow young people to explore each other's cultures through collaborative curriculum-based projects which will be supported for a period of three years. The partnerships will contribute to delivering educational priorities in the UK and Africa and will raise quality by motivating learners and teachers.

The design and delivery of Connecting Classrooms has used the approach developed for the British Council’s Interaction initiative that aims to support emerging African leaders as they face up to the challenge of the 21st century. This means intercultural dialogue and respecting difference is built into the design of the programme as is learning from each other and learning by doing. The programme aims to transform the way in which individuals interact and perceive each other and will create an environment which nurtures new ways of teaching learning and values difference.

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**Global Gateway**

Conceived by Charles Clarke, then the Secretary of State for Education, the DfES Global Gateway – www.globalgateway.org – was soft-launched at the 15th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Edinburgh, Scotland in October 2003 and again, formally, in February 2004, as the UK’s official online resource for internationalism in education. It has since become one of the main mechanisms for driving forward the implementation of the DfES’ international strategy and secured endorsement from Ministries of Education in 59 countries and territories around the world, as well as the Commonwealth of Learning and the European Commission’s Directorate General for Education and Culture. Of these 59 ‘Strategic International Partners’, 13 are Commonwealth member states: Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Cyprus, Fiji Islands, Ghana, Guyana, India, Malawi, Malaysia, Malta, Singapore and Tuvalu.

**Functions**

The website was designed originally to act as a portal to enable everyone involved in the schools sector – from teachers, school leaders and governors, to students, parents and education authorities – to find out about the wide range of international education opportunities available worldwide. In the two years since its launch, it has built up a vast catalogue of links to quality assured lesson plans and resources, activities, sources of funding, and schemes that support international partnerships, exchanges and study visits.

The site also offers advice for teachers and school leaders on how to run projects with partner schools, how to set up exchanges and visits and where to find appropriate information communication technology (ICT) tools to help international collaboration between schools and improve the ICT skills of teachers and pupils alike.

The real heart of the site lies in its school partner finding facility, which has a database of more than 7,800 schools worldwide that are currently looking for a partner school in another country. There has been significant interest from schools within the Commonwealth, with nearly 4,200 of those currently looking for a partner (54%), being in Commonwealth member states.

**Commonwealth Club**

As the chosen host of the web presence of the Commonwealth Clubs Project, the DfES Global Gateway actively encourages the setting up of out-of-school clubs in UK secondary schools, which support links between Commonwealth countries and link to multicultural and anti-racist strategies, citizenship and development education initiatives, curriculum topics and school policies for international awareness. The website also highlights and celebrates Commonwealth Day as an important date in the international calendar.

However, far from being simply a tool for schools, the DfES Global Gateway also serves the skills and training sector, is branching out into the higher education sector, and offers a ‘Policy Zone’ designed for use by international partners of the DfES - principally overseas Ministries of Education – to contribute to policy dialogue.

**Skills and Training Zone**

In 2006 the website expanded into the further education sector, with the addition of a customised ‘Skills and Training Zone’. The new zone, which has been developed in consultation with key organisations and individuals in the skills sector, is designed to help the DfES fulfil its aim to ‘encourage education and training providers to work internationally in partnership with business’.
offers 16+ colleges, institutes of further education and training bodies the means to make useful international contacts in vocational skills and training, so preparing their students for work in a global economy.

Managers, administrators and trainers can find links to funding programmes run on behalf of the European Union in the UK, information about opportunities available in other countries and other useful databases. For students and trainees, there is information about international internships, exchanges, placements, home stays and volunteering, as well as guidance on studying, living or working abroad. Colleges, training providers and businesses are also encouraged to register on the partner-finding database to look for international partners. Work has begun on a similar zone for the higher education sector, which the British Council will develop over the coming year, in partnership with the DFES and higher education institutions, bodies and professional associations.

Policy Zone

The ‘Policy Zone’, launched in 2006, supports the DFES’ commitment to engaging with international partners to support educational improvement worldwide. Offering a resource pool of recent DFES strategy documents covering all areas – children’s services, education in schools and colleges, skills and training, teacher training and more general educational strategies – it ensures that other countries have ready access to British educational reform processes and expertise.

The zone is primarily directed towards assisting educational reform in Africa and the developing world. And, following the commitment expressed by Commonwealth Ministers at the 15th CCEM in 2003, to addressing a range of issues aimed at transforming the education and life chances of citizens across the Commonwealth and in particular sub-Saharan Africa. Investigations are currently underway into the feasibility of a further resource-bank of policy documents and strategies from around the world, which would ensure the multi-way flow of information sharing, for the mutual benefit of the UK and all partner countries.

Conclusion

As an active member of the Commonwealth the UK recognises the role that the Commonwealth plays in this international strategy. The shared framework of language, laws and learning provides a strong platform on which to build the mutual partnerships that underpin both the strategy and the DFES Global Gateway, which is why the website was launched first at the 15th CCEM and why the Commonwealth of Learning was the first Strategic International Partner of the website.

In addition, India and Malta have become ‘Partners of Choice’, an advanced form of partnership indicating that a country is working with the DFES to develop their engagement with the DFES Global Gateway. This might mean creating their own customised version of the website and receiving support for in-country promotion and training to help build the international dimension in education in their country – which, ultimately, has the potential to increase the number and quality of international links.

In this ever-changing world where conflicts threaten global social cohesion, the long, shared history of the Commonwealth, its tradition as multi-faith and multi-cultural, and its contribution to UK diversity, make it an ideal vehicle through which to explore what it means to be a global citizen and a perfect partner of the DFES Global Gateway in this venture.

The DFES Global Gateway – www.globalgateway.org – is managed by the British Council for the Department for Education and Skills. If you represent a Ministry of Education which would like to become a Strategic International Partner of the DFES Global Gateway, please contact Neil Shaw, Global Gateway Strategic International Partnerships Manager: neil.shaw@britishcouncil.org

Endnotes


Biographical notes

Mary Stiasny joined the British Council as Director Education and Training in November 2003, prior to which she was Head of the newly formed School of Education and Training, University of Greenwich (London, UK). Mary has held senior positions at Oxford Brookes University (UK) and Goldsmith’s College (London, UK) and has extensive management experience in higher education. She was awarded the title of Visiting Professor in Education by the University of Greenwich in August 2004.