

# DFID: Supporting education in the Commonwealth

**Nicola Watt, Chris Berry and Evelyn Ashton-Griffiths**

Some 28 million primary-aged children in Commonwealth countries (about 41 per cent of the global total) are not enrolled in school. At CHOGM in 2011, heads of government agreed to accelerate efforts to achieve quality universal primary education. The Department for International Development (DFID) is currently engaged in realising these efforts, both in the Commonwealth and beyond. Its post-2015 priorities are to improve learning for all, with a particular focus on girls and those living in fragile states, and to increase focus on skills for work and higher education.

## Education programmes

By 2014/15, DFID's bilateral programme will support some nine million children in primary school and two million children in secondary school worldwide. Currently, 12 of DFID's priority countries for bilateral education programmes are Commonwealth countries where levels of educational need are judged to be high: Nigeria, India and Pakistan alone account for more than 17 million

primary school-aged children who are out of school. Bilateral programmes run by DFID in Commonwealth countries include the following two examples:

- In Nigeria, a new teacher development programme to train primary and junior secondary teachers in maths, science and technology in six states was introduced in 2013. A girls' education programme is helping remove barriers to girls' education, using conditional cash transfers; advocacy work with traditional leaders, parents and Islamic teachers; and female teacher scholarships
- In Sierra Leone, DFID's work has focused on ensuring that better quality basic education is accessible for more children, especially the most marginalised, with more children achieving better learning outcomes. By working with the government and through its Improving Schooling in Sierra Leone (ISIS) programme, DFID is supporting over 400,000 children in primary education and nearly 80,000 in junior secondary education



© Shutterstock / TheFinalMiracle

*Nigeria, India and Pakistan between them account for more than 17 million primary-aged children who don't attend school*

DFID is supporting girls' education through the Girls Education Challenge (GEC) Fund. This channels financing to non-state actors that seek to accelerate progress in access to education and learning for the poorest girls. In a GEC programme in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, girls receive 200 rupees (about £1.50) a month and a set of textbooks. In return they must attend school for at least four out of five days a week. As a direct result of UK support, girls' secondary enrolment increased by 13 per cent in some of the province's most remote and rural districts. In Malawi, close to 9,000 bursaries were given out to secondary school girls in 2012–13 and teacher training for 700 women is currently underway. In Ghana, 10,000 girls have so far been provided with scholarships and a target of 70,000 is hoped to be reached by 2015. Evaluation components are built into these bursary programmes to build on the existing evidence of the methods that work best to keep girls in school and learning.

Another key initiative was DFID's establishment of the Higher Education Taskforce, with a membership of 20 UK and international higher educational (HE) experts, including two Commonwealth Scholarship Commissioners. The taskforce was established to look into the role of HE in development given changing global circumstances and to consider where DFID could best invest. DFID is now actively assessing options for increasing their work in higher education and these are expected to benefit a number of Commonwealth countries. In the first instance, DFID plan to expand the size and scope of their HE partnerships programme, previously known as DelPHE, and DFID's support to scholarships will also continue. Other activities are likely to focus on the role DFID could play in supporting new ideas, particularly around innovation and access throughout the HE system, and also on generating better evidence for the impact of HE and how its quality can be improved. DFID aim to continue to work with a diverse range of partners, including governments, universities and the private sector, as the new agenda is taken forward.

## Educational support

DFID is also involved in supporting a number of multilateral organisations that are active in education in Commonwealth countries. These include the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF and the Global Partnership for Education. The latter is the only global fund that focuses solely on education. It currently operates across 13 Commonwealth countries.<sup>1</sup>

DFID's UN and Commonwealth Department (UNCD) works with a wide range of multilateral organisations, aiming to improve their effectiveness and maximise their impact. The Commonwealth organisations currently supported by DFID include the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, Commonwealth of Learning, the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust, Commonwealth Foundation, Commonwealth Local Government

Forum and the organisation everyone equates immediately with 'The Commonwealth' – the Commonwealth Secretariat, for its Commonwealth Youth Programme and Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation – CYP and CFTC. In total DFID supplied these organisations with around £45 million in 2013/14.

Of the educational bodies, UNCD's most significant relationship is with DFID's only executive Non-Departmental Public Body, the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, which implements the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. This is expected to receive £25 million in programme funding in 2014/15, which will fund around 800 new awards both for scholars to come to the UK and for distance learning students to undertake courses offered by UK universities. The Commonwealth of Learning (CoL) improves access to open and distance learning across the Commonwealth – DFID's Head of Profession for Education, Chris Berry, is the UK Board member. CoL has a particular comparative advantage in small island states of the Caribbean and Pacific.

## The Commonwealth

Prior to a recent event hosted by the Council for Education in the Commonwealth, DFID were posed the interesting question as to whether the Commonwealth has a comparative advantage in education co-operation. If the Commonwealth is taken as a whole – a network of networks, rather than a single organisation – a few things spring out. The diversity of membership in the Commonwealth, which is nonetheless focused on a common language, is a real strength; the proportion of small member states makes the Commonwealth uniquely placed to focus on their challenges; and Commonwealth institutions have real convening power and the potential to mobilise common frameworks on curriculum or qualifications.

DFID anticipates a global commitment to a challenging goal of learning for all. To achieve this will require renewed commitment from all partners, and DFID anticipates that Commonwealth countries and organisations will have an important part to play in achieving this ambitious goal.

## Endnotes

1 EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2014.

2 Nigeria, Kenya, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Zambia, Rwanda, Mozambique, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Ghana and Tanzania.

3 See: [www.globalpartnership.org/developing-countries](http://www.globalpartnership.org/developing-countries).

**NICOLA WATT** is the current acting deputy head of the United Nations and Commonwealth Department in the UK's Department for International Development.