



# International Development Committee

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From Stephen Twigg MP, Chair

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for International Development

25 April 2017

## DFID's work on education: Leaving no one behind?

Dear Priti,

As a consequence of the general election being held on 8 June, the International Development Committee will be unable to publish a final Report to conclude our long-running inquiry into 'DFID's work on education: leaving no one behind?' As you will be aware, the Committee has been considering this matter for some nine months now, has undertaken visits to the Middle East and East Africa and has collected a great deal of written and oral evidence. Despite our constraints, we are therefore determined to share with you our reflections and recommendations as we draw this very important inquiry to a close.

### Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4

*"All of the great [...] success stories in development start with education."*

- Kevin Watkins

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) commits the UK – alongside 192 other signatory countries – to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. With over 250 million children and young people currently out of school and

another 330 million in school but not learning, improving access, equity and quality in education presents an incredible challenge. However, it is a challenge the world must rise to. Education is central to development and to the achievement of all of the SDGs. It improves life chances, has a positive impact on health outcomes, helps prevent conflict, increases a country's human capital and contributes to economic development. As Minister Bates told us in evidence: “if your target is economic development and elimination of extreme poverty, then it would follow that you would place a very high emphasis on getting rid of the barriers to education.”<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, despite the central role education plays in development and the achievement of the SDGs, it has long been neglected by many national governments and the international community. DFID has traditionally been a leader on global education and has a strong reputation as one of the foremost donors working in the sector. However, we are concerned that the current UK aid strategy does not place sufficient emphasis on ensuring children across the developing world have access to quality education. In recognition of this, evidence to the Committee from

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<sup>1</sup> [Q152](#)

organisations such as Save the Children and the Global Campaign for Education has called for DFID to produce a new global education strategy, including a long-term spending programme for education.<sup>2</sup>

Whether it produces a new strategy, or simply refreshes the 2013 Education Position Paper produced under the Coalition Government, there is a need for DFID to reaffirm its commitment to education and to clarify its approach, including its support for education in emergencies. The 2015 Conservative manifesto, and subsequent UK Aid Strategy, included a commitment “to help at least 11 million children in the poorest countries gain a decent education, and promote girls’ education”, but gave no detail on how this would be achieved.<sup>3</sup> Producing a new, or refreshed, strategy would clarify the Department’s objectives and could also be an opportunity for colleagues across DFID’s various divisions (e.g. those working on global health, economic development, conflict and humanitarian) to work together to develop a comprehensive and joined-up approach to education.

### Financing education

Internationally, education is shamefully underfunded. In order to achieve SDG 4 by 2030, an enormous increase in funding is needed from domestic, international and private sources. The Education Commission estimate that expenditure on education will need to rise from \$1.2 trillion to \$3 trillion per year by 2030.<sup>4</sup>

*“Some will say this is impractical, or too expensive, or too hard. Or maybe even impossible. But it is time the world thinks bigger.”*

- Malala Yousafzai

There has been a clear decline in international aid spending on education since 2011 and the overall ODA spend is far lower than spending on health, government and civil society and infrastructure.<sup>5</sup> As Gordon Brown told us, even if you take all aid agencies together, “the average expenditure per child in low and middle-income countries on education through aid [...] is less than \$10 per head per year”.<sup>6</sup> The recent Education Commission report states that, “Education has not been a top priority for international actors, whether official donors, or charitable organisations”.<sup>7</sup> There is currently no finance mechanism for education equivalent to those that exist in the health sector – such as GAVI and the Global Fund – to galvanise innovation and funding for education. We hope to see this change through the introduction of a new International Finance Facility for Education, which we would like the UK to support in addition to its existing commitments.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst the UK remains one of the biggest donors to education internationally,<sup>9</sup> currently DFID dedicates just over 8% of its budget (£526.2m) to education; less than it spends on health, disaster and government and civil society.<sup>10</sup> In evidence to

<sup>2</sup> Save the Children ([EDU0046](#)) para 1.3; Global Campaign for Education ([EDU0009](#)) p. 2

<sup>3</sup> HM Treasury and DFID, 2015, [UK Aid: tackling global challenges in the national interest](#), p. 18

<sup>4</sup> The Education Commission, [The Learning Generation: Investing in Education for a Changing World](#), p. 21

<sup>5</sup> The Education Commission, [The Learning Generation: Investing in Education for a Changing World](#), p. 22

<sup>6</sup> [Q81](#)

<sup>7</sup> The Education Commission, [The Learning Generation: Investing in Education for a Changing World](#), p. 110

<sup>8</sup> The Education Commission, 2017, [A Proposal to Create the International Finance Facility for Education](#)

<sup>9</sup> OECD DAC, [Education-related aid by OECD DAC members](#), accessed 25 April 2017

<sup>10</sup> DFID, [Aid by Sector](#), Development Tracker, accessed 19 April 2017

the Committee, Minister Bates was unable to reassure us that the current education budget would not be cut.<sup>11</sup> Organisations are calling on DFID to commit to spending a far larger proportion of its budget on education, with the Malala Fund advocating for the figure to rise to 15% of all UK aid spending.<sup>12</sup>

The Committee takes the opportunity once again to voice its support for the 0.7% aid target, enshrined in law, which is necessary to ensure sustainable UK aid funding for global education. We welcome your statement last week reaffirming the important work of DFID. Given the balance of DFID's current spending priorities, and the importance of education, we recommend that DFID commit to spending no less than 10% of its annual budget on education.<sup>13</sup> An increase in funding to education could perhaps be achieved by slowing the pace of allocation of aid to other Government departments. This reflects our concern – which we were hoping to explore further in our now curtailed inquiry into non-DFID ODA – that the distribution of aid across Government is threatening areas of development spending, such as education, which should be a core priority for UK Aid.

### Education in emergencies

*58% of children in countries affected by conflict complete their primary education and just 37% complete secondary education.*

- Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2015

Education remains hugely neglected as a proportion of humanitarian aid, currently making up just 1.8% of all humanitarian funding, when the globally agreed target is 4%.<sup>14</sup> The Education Commission estimates that the need for funding for education in emergencies has increased by 21% since 2010, but international financing for it has declined by 41% over the same period.<sup>15</sup>

Humanitarian finance also suffers from being short-term and unpredictable.<sup>16</sup> As Gordon Brown told us: “We cannot forever continue with this situation where the only way we fund humanitarian aid, whether it be for education, health, shelter or food, is through a begging bowl.”<sup>17</sup> In the wake of 2016's World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), DFID should continue to support reforms to the international humanitarian system to ensure that the international community is better prepared to support the needs of children whose lives are torn apart by emergencies. For these children, their top priority is education,<sup>18</sup> and the UK has a key role to play in leading international efforts to secure this.

We congratulate DFID on its significant role in the creation of the Education Cannot Wait fund, launched at the WHS last year. Now that it is operational, we would like to

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<sup>11</sup> [Q221 & Q222](#)

<sup>12</sup> Malala Fund ([EDU0066](#)) para 3.4

<sup>13</sup> DFID currently spends 11.75% on Health, 9.87% on Disaster and 8.69% on Government and Civil Society, DFID, [Aid by Sector](#), Development Tracker, accessed 19 April 2017. The [Global Education Monitoring Report 2016](#) recommends donors allocate 10% of all ODA spending to education.

<sup>14</sup> Malala Fund ([EDU0066](#)) para 4.3

<sup>15</sup> The Education Commission, [The Learning Generation: Investing in Education for a Changing World](#), p. 23

<sup>16</sup> [Q78](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Q101](#)

<sup>18</sup> Malala Fund ([EDU0066](#)) para 4.2

see the Department commit to long-term, sustainable funding for the fund, recognising that protracted crises and an increase in refugee flows across the globe have created a need for additional, enduring support for refugee education from the international community. We also note the leading role that DFID is playing in ensuring Syrian refugees have access to education in the Middle East. During our visit to Jordan and Lebanon last year we witnessed the extraordinary support DFID has given to the governments there to ensure that education can be accessed by those children who have fled conflict in neighbouring Syria. We are, however, concerned by the disparity between DFID's support for refugee education in the Middle East, compared to its support for education provision for refugees and internally displaced persons in East Africa, where migration flows are also high as a result of conflict.<sup>19</sup> This was a subject we were planning to look at in more detail through our inquiry into forced displacement in East Africa.

As highlighted earlier, any new, or refreshed, DFID education strategy should clarify its approach to supporting refugee education in emergencies and protracted crises.

### **Multilateral, bilateral and centrally managed programmes**

Bilateral cooperation between the UK and its priority countries on education remains essential. The Springfield Centre, an independent research centre, told us, "What is needed is a pragmatic and analytical approach cognisant of local social, economic and political realities, seeking locally appropriate, sustainable solutions to achieve impact at scale."<sup>20</sup> DFID's ability to produce such nuanced and context-driven responses depends on the strength and expertise of their education cadre in-country and strong relationships with governments, local authorities and relevant non-governmental stakeholders.

We are not currently convinced that DFID's decisions to open and close its bilateral education programmes are sufficiently strategic. We welcome the Department's decision to resume its bilateral education programme in Uganda. However, the reasons given for closing its bilateral programme in Kenya were unsatisfactory, particularly as DFID did not provide the Committee with a copy of its Country Poverty Reduction Diagnostic, which was referred to in evidence as the rationale for its closure.<sup>21</sup> Given that DFID remains engaged in centrally-managed and multilateral education interventions in Kenya, it seems – without further evidence – peculiar that the Department has disengaged from its bilateral programme, a key element of which the Committee saw, and was very impressed by, during its visit to Kenya.<sup>22</sup>

Given the importance of education to achieving the SDGs, and DFID's expertise and comparative advantage in this area, DFID should maintain its bilateral education programmes wherever possible in its priority countries, to complement and strengthen its investments in multilateral and centrally-managed programmes. It

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<sup>19</sup> DFID has established specific education programmes to support Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, such as the £80m ['Jordan Compact Education Programme'](#). There are no such specific programmes in East Africa.

<sup>20</sup> The Springfield Centre ([EDU0001](#)) para 22

<sup>21</sup> [Q239](#)

<sup>22</sup> The TUSOME programme aimed at improving literacy outcomes in the first and second grades of primary school, which was supported under the bilateral Kenya Essential Education Programme and continues to be supported by USAID.

should also have at least one education adviser in each country, instead of the crossover that occurs between countries such as Zambia and Zimbabwe.<sup>23</sup> This would enable the in-country team to give appropriate priority to education and to help develop the nuanced and specialist response – including strong relationships with domestic governments – that is needed to improve education systems.

DFID's support to education through multilateral organisations also remains essential, where it is effective and complementary to its bilateral and centrally-managed programmes. However, it is clear that many multilaterals, including the World Bank, are not allocating enough funding to education, particularly in the low-income countries that need most support.<sup>24</sup> As the largest bilateral contributor to the World Bank, and a significant contributor to many others, the UK has considerable influence and should use it to ensure that enough funding is allocated to education and that this funding is provided in the low-income countries where there is most need.

Evidence to the inquiry showed widespread support for DFID maintaining its financial commitment to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), which was up to £300 million at the last replenishment (dependent on a number of conditions, including that this did not exceed 15% of total donor contributions). Although GPE did not receive the highest score possible in the latest Multilateral Development Review,<sup>25</sup> the Committee recognises the significant and positive reforms that GPE has undergone since the last multilateral review process in 2013. It is clear that these reforms have been spearheaded by the current CEO, Alice Albright, largely in response to the performance conditions attached to DFID's funding, which she described to us as "fantastic".<sup>26</sup> Along with the Education Cannot Wait fund, the Global Partnership for Education forms an essential part of the multilateral landscape on education as it focuses on low-income countries and on basic education, where we have seen support is most needed. It also works directly with governments to support national education systems; work which is vital for sustainable improvements in education but difficult for DFID to undertake now that it has moved away from direct budget support. It is important that the UK either maintains or increases its financial commitment to GPE at the next replenishment in the final quarter of 2017/18. A substantial contribution from the UK will ensure GPE can continue to achieve results, and will also encourage other donors to invest in what is currently the only multilateral mechanism dedicated to improving education systems.

As emphasised in a number of its past reports, the Committee remains concerned about DFID's use of centrally-managed programmes. Although we welcome the introduction of the Girls Education Challenge (GEC) as an innovative way of targeting interventions and funding towards girls that are hardest to reach in DFID's priority countries, a number of valid concerns were raised by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) about the way the programme is operating.<sup>27</sup> As getting marginalised girls into school is an area where little evidence exists on 'what works' DFID must ensure that there is a mechanism for ensuring any learning gained

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<sup>23</sup> [Q241](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Q61](#); Save the Children Annex B ([EDU0064](#))

<sup>25</sup> DFID, 2016, [MDR one page summary: Global Partnership for Education](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Q13](#)

<sup>27</sup> ICAI, 2016, [Accessing, staying and succeeding in basic education – UK aid's support to marginalised girls](#)

through GEC programming is used to inform future work in this area. We are pleased that DFID committed to this in its response to ICAI's 2016 report and look forward to hearing more about how this will work in practice.

The ICAI report also highlighted concerns about DFID's approach to value for money when targeting marginalised girls. The report concluded that, "there is a risk that the drive for economy and efficiency will create disincentives for DFID and its partners to focus on marginalised girls".<sup>28</sup> As UNICEF highlighted to us, DFID should accept that targeting the most marginalised "will require more complex and often more expensive policy responses".<sup>29</sup> We therefore welcome the commitment from DFID, made in evidence to us, to incorporate equity into its value for money guidelines for education. We look forward to seeing these new guidelines in due course, and reflecting on how they might be used across the organisation to ensure DFID maintains its focus on leaving no one behind as it supports the achievement of the SDGs.<sup>30</sup>

As is often the case with centrally-managed programmes, we also remain concerned about DFID's ability to join up the GEC programmes with its bilateral and multilateral interventions in its priority countries. As it moves into its second phase, we would like to see DFID make a concerted effort to join its GEC programmes up with its other in-country education work to ensure a coherent approach towards marginalised girls' education.

### **The UK as a global leader on education**

Over the course of this short Parliament, it has become clear to the Committee that DFID has significant political capital and influence amongst donors and non-governmental actors in the international development sector. In addition to its own commitments, evidence has therefore pointed to the need for the UK to act as a leader and global advocate on education, where there has been such relative apathy from the international community in recent years.<sup>31</sup>

The UK could use its voice to encourage other donors to allocate more funding to education and ensure that current funding is allocated where it is most needed, rather than being spent in donors' own countries providing scholarships to domestic institutions.<sup>32</sup> DFID can also use its influence with governments in its priority countries to encourage them to allocate a greater proportion of their domestic budgets to education.

Even before the general election in June, there will be an opportunity for the UK to show such leadership at the G7 Summit in Italy, where education is on the agenda. The Summit provides the UK with a potential platform to encourage other donors to increase their international financial contributions to education. The G7 and G20

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<sup>28</sup> ICAI, 2016, [Accessing, staying and succeeding in basic education – UK aid's support to marginalised girls](#), para 5.4

<sup>29</sup> UNICEF ([EDU0058](#)) p. 6

<sup>30</sup> [Q177](#)

<sup>31</sup> Save the Children ([EDU0046](#)) para 3.1

<sup>32</sup> Some donors, such as Germany and France, spend a large percentage of their international aid to education in their own countries, providing scholarships to domestic universities. See [Q90](#)

Summits this year will offer crucial opportunities to galvanise the funding and drive needed to achieve SDG 4, including for those most vulnerable, such as refugees. The UK has the opportunity to be a leader on global education, and we hope that this Government, and the future Government, will be committed enough to take up the mantle.

## **Allocation of resources**

DFID currently allocates around 44% of its education spending to basic education, 18% to secondary and 4% to post-secondary. Just 1.3% of its basic education spending goes on early childhood education.<sup>33</sup> Overall, the evidence we received agreed that DFID was right to focus the majority of its resources on basic education. As Alice Albright told us, if we think of education as a staircase, one of the critical investments is to ensure “the bottom of the staircase is pretty wide” so that “every kid can start at the bottom”.<sup>34</sup> This makes sense as, if children do not have access to basic education, they stand no chance of progressing on to the later stages of schooling. Gordon Brown expressed concerns that some countries had got out of primary school education too early, “before we had completed our commitment to get every child to school”.<sup>35</sup>

However, despite its allocation to basic education being broadly right, DFID may wish to consider some adjustments to its overall allocation. During the inquiry we have heard particularly compelling evidence from a large number of sources, including UNICEF, the University of Cambridge and Save the Children, to suggest DFID should be spending far more on early childhood education. Kevin Watkins told us that the current low spending on early years had to be seen as a “shooting yourself in the foot’ strategy” because by neglecting early childhood education “you are driving down the learning outcomes from the investments you are putting in place”.<sup>36</sup> Professor Pauline Rose reinforced this point, telling us that, “the evidence is quite clear that that [an early childhood development programme] makes a huge difference to their readiness to learn once they are in school and has greater benefits once they go through the system, particularly for the most marginalised.” She also added that the most marginalised are currently the least likely to get access to these sorts of programmes.<sup>37</sup> Given the weight of evidence on the benefits of pre-primary education, in terms of learning outcomes and equity, we recommend that DFID considers urgently its options for scaling up its support in this area.

We have also heard convincing arguments on the benefits of investing in secondary education, particularly when targeted towards the most marginalised, including girls. Camfed emphasised the need to invest in adolescent girls because they are “tomorrow’s mothers” and education for them will also benefit the next generation.<sup>38</sup> The Malala Fund focused on the wider development benefits of a full 12 years of education for girls, stating in their evidence that, “If all girls had 12 years of education, child marriage would drop 64%, early births would drop 59% and child

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<sup>33</sup> DFID, [Development Tracker](#), accessed 20 April 2017

<sup>34</sup> [Q6](#)

<sup>35</sup> [Q90](#)

<sup>36</sup> [Q60](#)

<sup>37</sup> [Q188](#)

<sup>38</sup> [Q218](#)

deaths would decrease by 49%”.<sup>39</sup> This links directly to your strong focus on family planning. Professor Pauline Rose argued that DFID’s efforts should be focused on the transition [from primary to secondary, where there are large numbers of dropouts] and the most marginalised.<sup>40</sup> The evidence suggests therefore that DFID is right to maintain a considerable investment in secondary education, but its interventions here must be focused – at least for now – on key transition periods (where drop outs are high), the most marginalised children, and particularly on girls.

## Improving learning outcomes

Although we remain concerned about slippage in some countries, and there are still millions of children out of school, access to primary school has improved immensely since 2000 as a result of the Millennium Development Goals’ focus on achieving universal primary education.<sup>41</sup>

However, with 330 million children in school but not learning, it is clear now that there is a crisis

in the quality of learning outcomes. In order to have a real impact on improving global education and ensure that we leave no one behind, DFID should now focus on supporting improvements in the quality of education that children receive and their ability to learn. But as the Department admits, “there are no quick fixes”.<sup>42</sup>

*By 2030, 69% of children in low-income countries – 264 million – will not have achieved basic primary level skills in literacy and numeracy.*

- The Education Commission

Improving learning outcomes will require considerable investment in research and data, to try and find out where the major problems are and how they may be solved. To this end, we welcome DFID’s £26.7m investment in the RISE (Research on Improving Systems of Education) programme and its continuing support for the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, OECD Programme for International Student Assessment for Development (PISA-D) and the Global Education Monitoring Report, which are currently the biggest sources of education data.<sup>43</sup> Although, as DFID admits, there are still relatively few statistics to be found on learning outcomes.<sup>44</sup>

What is evident is that good quality teaching is essential to improving learning outcomes for children in DFID’s priority countries and this may be another area where DFID wants to consider its ability to scale up support. Professor Pauline Rose highlighted that ensuring children were not left behind in education relied on ensuring “they have the best teachers, the most qualified teachers and teachers who have been given training in how to teach basic literacy and numeracy”.<sup>45</sup> She also emphasised the need for teachers to be trained in inclusive teaching practices, to ensure they can deal with diverse groups of children in the classroom and ensure children are not left behind once they reach the classroom, including those with disabilities.<sup>46</sup> Evidence to the Committee from the Open University provided some

<sup>39</sup> Malala Fund ([EDU0066](#)) para 3.2

<sup>40</sup> [Q190](#)

<sup>41</sup> UN, [Millennium Development Goals Report 2015](#), p. 4

<sup>42</sup> DFID ([EDU0054](#)) p. 9

<sup>43</sup> DFID ([EDU0054](#)) p. 9-10

<sup>44</sup> DFID ([EDU0054](#)) p. 9

<sup>45</sup> [Q188](#)

<sup>46</sup> [Q188](#)

interesting suggestions on the potential for DFID to support school-based teacher development.<sup>47</sup> Camfed highlighted the need for support for teacher training to be systemic.<sup>48</sup> The Committee also saw some good practice examples of teacher training support provided by DFID through the EQUIP-T programme in Tanzania, so there are existing examples that the Department can draw from.

## **Leaving no one behind**

As we have already explored in some depth in this letter, one of the greatest challenges the world faces in achieving SDG 4 is tackling inequality in education. We were told repeatedly in evidence that the poorest children are the least likely to be in school and the most marginalised children – including girls, disabled children and refugees – are most at risk of missing out on an education. As a result, it is clear that a huge proportion of the world’s children are being left behind and reaching them will be a critical challenge for DFID in the years ahead. Vital to this process will be the collection of disaggregated data to ensure countries have accurate information on who is being left behind and where they are, to enable governments and donors to reach out to them. We are pleased to note that DFID is already supporting some of this work strengthening data systems.<sup>49</sup>

The education of girls is essential and DFID has repeatedly shown its commitment to getting more girls learning. However, breaking down the barriers that prevent girls getting to school, especially those based on cultural or social norms, remains a huge challenge. As already stated, we welcome the innovative approach of the Girls Education Challenge and recognise that the lessons learned from these programmes could be vital in finding out ‘what works’ in supporting more girls to receive an education. We have been particularly impressed by Camfed’s multidimensional, community-based approach to improving girls’ education in Tanzania, and hope lessons can be learned from this programme and transferred to other contexts.<sup>50</sup>

UNICEF estimates that 90% of disabled children in the developing world do not go to school.<sup>51</sup> This is an extraordinary figure. The British Council highlighted to us that whilst DFID has had a strong focus on girls’ education, it “has had less focus on children with disabilities and special educational needs”.<sup>52</sup> DFID has in recent years shown itself to be a leading advocate on rights for disabled people in developing countries, with the publication of the DFID Disability Framework in 2015.<sup>53</sup> Although the Framework made some basic commitments on ensuring all school building supported by DFID met accessibility requirements, there was no firm commitment on supporting the provision of quality education for children with disabilities. You stated very recently that, “Disability is shamefully the most under-prioritised, under-resourced area in development”.<sup>54</sup> We agree and recommend that DFID must now put greater emphasis – akin to its focus on girls education – on working to ensure

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<sup>47</sup> The Open University ([EDU0013](#))

<sup>48</sup> Camfed ([EDU0053](#)) para 6.1

<sup>49</sup> DFID ([EDU0054](#)) p. 9-10

<sup>50</sup> Camfed ([EDU0053](#))

<sup>51</sup> UNICEF, 2014, [Global Initiative on Out of School Children: South Asia Regional Study](#)

<sup>52</sup> British Council ([EDU0027](#)) para 11.2

<sup>53</sup> DFID, 2015, [DFID Disability Framework](#)

<sup>54</sup> DFID, [Speech: Bond Annual Conference 2017](#), 20 March 2017

children with disabilities have access to appropriate, high quality education. In Kenya, the Committee were particularly impressed by the Girls Education Challenge project run by Leonard Cheshire Disability in Kisumu and would like to see DFID supporting similar programmes for all disabled children.

As already mentioned, in order to ensure no one is left behind, it is vital that DFID's approach to value for money acknowledges the additional costs involved in reaching the most marginalised children, including girls and children with disabilities, and adequately reflects the Department's stated commitment to leave no one behind in education.

### **Low-fee private schools**

Low-fee private schools are a reality in many of DFID's priority countries. There are many different models of low-fee private schools, from small, local providers to large international chains. We have seen examples of different types of low-fee private schools on our visits to Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya over the past two years. Recent visits to these countries, and to the Democratic Republic of Congo, have also opened our eyes to the informal charges parents often have to pay at government schools. Because of this, we recognise that the issue of DFID's engagement with the 'low-fee sector' is more complex than many commentators would suggest.

The biggest problem is that, as things stand, DFID does not have a clear, evidence-based approach to its support for low-fee schools. The impact of such schools on education systems, and on children's learning outcomes, is something which needs a lot more research and interrogation. The evidence presented to us during this inquiry certainly suggests that the majority of low-fee private schools are not serving the poorest and most marginalised children,<sup>55</sup> which is where DFID's focus should certainly be. In addition to this, there is little evidence yet to prove that, once the social background of a child is accounted for, low-fee private schools produce better learning outcomes for children than government schools.<sup>56</sup>

Currently, DFID invests the majority of its education funding in government education systems. This should remain the case, as government schools are still where the most disadvantaged children are based.<sup>57</sup> Investments in low-fee private schools should only be made on an exceptional basis, where there is clear evidence that the school's target children would not otherwise be able to receive an education in a government school (for example the very impressive PEAS schools, which targets marginalised, rural girls in Uganda). Low-fee schools will continue to exist, and to proliferate, in many of DFID's priority countries. Where this is the case, rather than supporting schools directly, DFID could concentrate on providing support to governments to help them establish good systems of regulation for low-fee private schools, to ensure a better and more consistent quality of education for the children attending them. We have already seen examples of this type of work through the DEEPEN programme in Nigeria.

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<sup>55</sup> Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre, University of Cambridge ([EDU0023](#)) p. 4; [Q214](#); Ark ([EDU0073](#))

<sup>56</sup> [Q70](#); Ark ([EDU0073](#)); [Q214](#)

<sup>57</sup> Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre, University of Cambridge ([EDU0023](#)) p. 4

In the specific case of Bridge International Academies, the Committee is not convinced that DFID was right to provide grant funding to Bridge in Nigeria in 2014 and we would be keen to understand, and further interrogate, the rationale behind the substantial investments CDC made in the company in that same year. The evidence received during this inquiry raises serious questions about Bridge's relationships with governments, transparency and sustainability.<sup>58</sup> The Committee visited Bridge schools in Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya and we recognise that the model is innovative and provides a solution to some of the problems associated with teaching quality in the countries it operates in. However, whilst some of the schools – particularly those in Kenya – appeared to be providing a decent education to children who otherwise may not otherwise be in school, the quality and accessibility of the schools seems variable in different contexts. At this stage, there is limited evidence on Bridge's results, although we look forward to seeing the outcomes of randomised control trials later this year.<sup>59</sup> We would not recommend DFID make any further investments in Bridge until it has seen clear, independent evidence that the schools produce positive learning outcomes for pupils. Even at that time, we would want to see a compelling case for any further DFID support, including evidence to prove that Bridge was providing education to the very poorest and most marginalised children which was not being provided elsewhere.

I look forward to reading your response to our findings and hope that they will prove useful for future policy work in this area. Education is an issue close to the hearts of people in the UK. This is shown by the impassioned evidence we received from UK youth campaigners from the 'Send My Friend to School' campaign. One of the letters we received stated:

"I did not attend school until the age of seven and a half when I moved to the UK, so I know what it feels like to not receive a fundamental part of childhood, the chance to go to school and learn. If I didn't receive the education I am currently getting, I wouldn't be here speaking out on behalf of the children around the globe. What we would like to do is to stress the importance of this issue. Furthermore, we'd like you to keep expressing your support to giving foreign aid to education."<sup>60</sup>

I hope this Government, and any future Government, will take this into account and make education a key priority in its approach to international development.

Yours sincerely,



**Stephen Twigg MP**  
**Chair of the Committee**

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<sup>58</sup> Dr Joanna Harma ([EDU0019](#)); Oxfam ([EDU0018](#)); Right to Education Project ([EDU0028](#)) para 11; [Q186-214](#); the Committee also received a number of pieces of evidence from stakeholders in confidence and Committee members engaged with various stakeholders during their country visits

<sup>59</sup> [Q204](#)

<sup>60</sup> Send my Friend to School ([EDU0071](#))