

# Perspectives

## THE DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT'S APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

Stephen O'Brien

In this article, **Stephen O'Brien**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development, outlines the position of the Coalition government toward development education. The UK government has recently commissioned a thorough review of DfID's full portfolio of development awareness work and an independent review to assess the case for this area of work more broadly. This article considers the results of the review and the government's policy for development education going forward.

Since taking office in May 2010, the Coalition government has paid particularly close attention to the question of whether aid money should be spent, for any purpose, in the United Kingdom (UK). Our starting point is that the Coalition government stands steadfast behind the decision to protect the aid budget and bring spending up to our target of 0.7 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This imposes a double duty to ensure that aid funds are spent well. First our duty is to those this money is intended to help - the poor of the world living in developing nations. Secondly it presents a duty to taxpayers in the UK who fund our development work. In this time when across government budgets are being cut, we must ensure that we get the maximum value out of every pound of our aid funding. Results, transparency and accountability are our watchwords and guide everything we do. The Department for International Development (DfID) regards transparency as fundamental to improving its accountability to UK citizens and to improving accountability to citizens living in the countries we support. Transparency will also help us achieve greater value for money in the programmes we deliver and will improve the effectiveness of aid in reducing poverty.

The 2002 International Development Act permits aid money to be spent in the UK, but it makes a clear requirement that the Secretary of State must be '*satisfied that to do so is likely to contribute to a reduction in poverty*'. This government has addressed this requirement with great seriousness, and as

such, we have adopted a quite different policy on spending to promote awareness of global poverty in the UK. On entering office in May 2010, the Secretary of State immediately identified a number of development awareness projects that failed to demonstrate real development impact and value for money. The decision was taken to close these projects with immediate effect, saving the UK taxpayer over half a million pounds. The Secretary of State then launched a thorough review of DfID's full portfolio of development awareness work and an independent review to assess the case for this area of work more broadly.

The independent review by the Central Office of Information (COI), completed in June 2011, has been enormously useful in reappraising the arguments and assumptions that sit behind efforts to educate the public about, and promote wider awareness of, international development. The review challenged many of the arguments which were contained in the DfID's *Building Support for Development* strategy produced in 1999. That strategy contained an assumption that DfID's funding should be used to spread an awareness of global poverty in as many ways as possible - through faith and community groups, through non-governmental organisations (NGOs), informal and formal education, trade unions and businesses, and the media. The *Building Support for Development* strategy did not however give a clear indication of how it would measure success, nor did it set out what evidence to gather that would show whether all these activities benefited anyone in the developing world. We have therefore looked again at the case for funding development awareness work and we have used the conclusions of the COI review to set our policy for development education going forward.

The review concluded that while it is difficult to prove a direct link between DfID's investment in building support for development and a reduction in global poverty, there is a reasonable causal chain that can be used to justify future investment. This is because positive public opinion encourages positive actions such as donating money or purchasing Fairtrade goods, which cumulatively contribute to a reduction in global poverty. It is likely that DfID's investment has contributed to a reduction in global poverty in this way, however this contribution cannot be easily measured and DfID's investment is likely to have been one of many factors.

As a result, the Coalition government has adopted a new approach, deciding that there will be no new development awareness projects. The link between these programmes and poverty reduction is not strong enough to satisfy

our rigorous criteria for development impact. Ongoing projects will be allowed to continue to conclusion, but only if project reviews show they are achieving results.

However the COI report has shown that government spending can play a positive role in building awareness of global poverty when the interventions are carefully designed and well targeted. It highlighted notable successes of working through the formal education sector, by integrating the global dimension into the school curriculum. We will therefore continue our development education work in schools and will put all our formal education work on a strategic footing. Our starting point is that every child growing up in the UK should learn about the world around them, about the bald facts of poverty and underdevelopment which face children their own age in other countries, about the potential of trade, wealth creation and economic development to build a freer, more prosperous world. By working through the formal education system DfID will target the next generation of the UK workforce.

Schools across the UK are already delivering tremendous work to teach children about these issues. Many teachers are highly proficient in teaching international development themes, drawing on their own international experiences or their own research to teach inspiring lessons about the causes and solutions of global poverty. Britain's excellent international NGOs have also, for many years, been producing high quality resources to be used in schools. DfID has championed the use of these resources through funding the one stop website [www.globaldimension.org.uk](http://www.globaldimension.org.uk) to provide easy access to educational resources from the many organisations that work on international development.

We are very much aware that the experience in schools and the resources produced by classroom practitioners is our best repository of development education expertise. Consequently, the best way to spread good practice will be through networks of schools, using teachers who have proficiency to train others who want to improve their skills. With the support of the Department for Education, DfID will establish a single programme that will work with schools in England at Key Stages 2 and 3 on a demand led basis to support teachers who have particular skills in teaching global issues to share their practice with other teachers. Outside England, support for schools will be delivered in collaboration with the relevant devolved authorities, thereby ensuring that teachers across the UK are supported.

We have also decided to continue to support the excellent work that goes on around the country to establish links between schools in the UK with similar organisations or groups in developing countries. We have a huge opportunity to share Britain's skills with communities in the developing world. Forging links between people around the world is a powerful way to build understanding and cooperation. Britain has a long history of links to developing countries and the Coalition government wishes to build on these strong foundations to strengthen our communities and achieve development results.

DfID has run a school linking programme for a number of years under the banner of the Global School Partnerships programme (GSP). This programme aims to motivate young people's commitment to a fairer, more sustainable world. Recognising that hard evidence is needed to test the impact of this work, DfID contracted the National Foundation of Educational Research (NFER) to complete an assessment of the impact of school linking. The study, which used a sample of over 8,000 students, and ensured that a matched control group provided a statistically valid comparison, assessed how much impact a link with a school in a developing country can make.

The report, which has now been published and is available on the NFER website, clearly shows that involvement in the GSP programme has a significant positive effect on pupil awareness of, and attitudes and response to, global issues at both primary and secondary school level. The most significant differences were observed in schools that had been linked for three years, where partnerships are well established and the principles and values promoted by the GSP programme have had time to become embedded in whole-school policy. Significant effects were also found in schools that have been linked for a shorter period of time.

We are also keen that school leavers take up the Prime Minister's International Citizen Service (ICS) initiative to volunteer in some of the world's poorest communities to fight poverty and tackle development issues. Those taking part will contribute their skills and enthusiasm while learning about the causes of, and solutions to, poverty and building connections across the globe. For more details, see [www.dfid.gov.uk/ICS](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/ICS).

Overall, DfID recognises that development education through the formal education system can and should have a positive effect on young people's knowledge and attitudes to global poverty and international development. It is also a hugely exciting topic for young people to engage with, and we are very much aware that when teachers have the chance to develop the topic, they turn the issues of global poverty into powerful and compelling lessons. Government will no longer hand down directives that take autonomy away from schools. Decisions on whether to place emphasis on development education must be taken by schools themselves. Only they are able to tell what to prioritise for their pupils. But we have seen that the demand is there and we are determined to help schools and teachers realise their ambitions.

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