The UK is third-largest donor to global education; focus is on teacher training, accountability, and marginalized populations

The UK’s development strategy (‘UK aid: tackling global challenges in the national interest’), published in 2015, outlines four strategic objectives for UK development assistance. Under the objective “Tackling extreme poverty and helping the world’s most vulnerable”, education is listed as one of seven key areas that support poverty alleviation. Specifically, the UK pledges to “help at least 11 million children in the poorest countries gain a decent education and promote girls’ education”.

DFID’s 2018 education position paper (DFID Education Policy: Get Children Learning), outlines three priorities:
1. quality teaching;
2. systematic reform of education systems; and
3. targeted support for poor or marginalized children.

The UK prioritizes girls’ education. In 2012, the UK launched the Girls’ Education Challenge (GEC), which aims to help up to a million girls access quality education. The fund is the largest-ever financial reserve devoted entirely to girls’ education. The UK provided £310 million (US$399 million) to the program in its first phase, which ended in April 2018, and £450 million (US$579 million) in its second, which will end in March 2025. It has a 12-year mandate for action and as of May 2019, it had 27 active projects in 15 countries.

The UK’s bilateral ODA for education focuses on primary education

In 2017, the UK’s bilateral ODA to education amounted to US$916 million, down from US$1.3 billion in 2016, according to OECD data. The largest share (41%) of bilateral ODA to education in 2017 went to ‘basic education’ (see figure below). Most support for basic education funds primary education. ‘General education’, which largely supports efforts to strengthen partner countries’ education policy and administration but also includes teacher training and educational research, received the second-largest share of bilateral education ODA (28%). These funding priorities align with the UK’s stated emphasis on education system improvements, such as teacher training, and a strong focus on primary education.

The UK is a strong supporter of multilateral education initiatives

The UK is the largest provider of multilateral ODA to education in the world, spending US$300 million in 2016 (latest year or which data is available). This represents 19% of the UK’s overall education ODA that year. Most of this funding was disbursed in the form of core contributions to the World Bank’s International Development Association (IDA; 46%), and the EU (35%). In addition, the UK is the largest donor to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), having contributed US$1.1 billion since 2005 (reported as bilateral ODA). The UK pledged £252 million (US$367 million, according to GPE’s conversion as of pledging data) for the 2018-2020 period at the GPE’s replenishment conference in 2018.

But the UK’s pledge to GPE also came with conditions: one-third is contingent on whether GPE focuses on UK priorities, such as raising teaching standards. The UK’s ultimate contribution to the GPE is historically capped at 15% of the total amount pledged by all donors for the replenishment period. With US$2.4 billion pledged at the conference, the UK commitment currently sits below the 15% cap. Advocacy organizations have raised concerns, pointing out that the UK’s final commitment is continu-
gent upon final contributions from other countries and the proportional pledge could result in no increase – or even a decrease – compared to the previous period.

The UK has also been highly engaged in the creation of the International Finance Facility for Education (IFFEd). The UK hosted two of IFFEd’s four last technical meetings, and DFID has been closely involved in testing its design with a range of stakeholders. It is likely to provide funding to IFFEd once the final structure of the facility is confirmed.

**DFID directs education policy development**

DFID drives the formation and implementation of the UK’s development assistance for education. Specifically, the director-general of policy and global programmes directs policy design and global programs managed at headquarters levels, such as the Girls’ Education Challenge. However, as with overall UK development cooperation, design and implementation of education programs in specific partner countries is decentralized and largely driven by DFID country offices. Additionally, small but increasing amounts of education funding are controlled by government departments outside of DFID or by cross-government funds, such as the Prosperity Fund and the Conflict, Stability, and Security Fund. In 2017, approximately 10% of all UK ODA funding for education was provided by bodies external to DFID.
THE UK’S ODA TO EDUCATION
US$ millions

- Multilateral education ODA
- Bilateral education ODA
- Education ODA as % of total ODA

OECD CRS, and imputed multilateral contributions to the education sector.
DAC secretariat estimations. In 2016 prices.

THE UK’S BILATERAL ODA TO EDUCATION ACROSS SUB-SECTORS, 2017
Total: US$916 million

- Vocational training: 5.1% (US$47m.)
- Secondary education: 10.3% (US$94m.)
- Post-secondary education: 15.6% (US$143m.)
- General education: 28.1% (US$267m.)
- Basic education: 40.9% (US$375m.)

OECD CRS. In 2017 prices.