



SDG 4: Progress, gaps and recommendations for the UK

Compiled by:
Send My Friend to School



Education is a human right, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Quality, inclusive, and free public education also underpins the delivery of all the SDGs. **Goal 4** builds upon Millennium Development **Goal 2**, expanding the global agenda from a sole focus on access to education to include quality of learning and leaving no one behind. This important change has been reflected in international development agendas and seen a concerted global effort to improve conditions in the classroom to ensure all learners are learning.

Despite this, 262 million children and young people remain out of school and many more are in school but not learning.¹ The most marginalised from education have not experienced the progress they were promised. Across the world, equity gaps between the furthest behind children and the national average are stagnating or growing. This reality means that we are currently at risk of seeing 1.5 billion adults with no education beyond primary school by 2030.² The international community, including the UK, must accelerate progress as we enter the decade of delivery (2020 to 2030) as a matter of urgency, to ensure that **Goal 4** and the right to education are fully realised for all children.

Target 4.1:

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

DFID's 2018 Education Policy, Get Children Learning (GCL), outlines a strong vision for education development with three focus areas:

1. Teacher quality.
2. System reform.
3. Support for the most marginalised groups.

While this commitment is welcome, the DFID should develop an action plan to spell out how these objectives, as well as other UK commitments, such as work towards de-institutionalisation, will be achieved and momentum continued.

Securing more and better financing internationally and domestically should be a key focus for realising **Goal 4**. Overall, bilateral and multilateral aid for education is declining, sometimes drastically and most donor aid does not include amounts earmarked for disability and inclusive approaches.³ The UK remains a leading donor in education, including as one of the biggest donors to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), a key funding mechanism for global education that supports countries to develop strong national education systems. The UK pledged £225m over three years to the GPE in 2017. However, this amount was lower than civil society working on international education had hoped.⁴ The UK's leadership on the GPE is a positive step towards

1. <http://data.uis.unesco.org>
109. <https://report.educationcommission.org/report>

3. https://iddcconsortium.net/sites/default/files/resources-tools/files/iddc-report-short_16-10-17.pdf

4. <https://www.results.org.uk/results-uk-responds-uks-pledge-global-partnership-education>

education for all, including its work to strengthen and reform the Partnership. It is recommended that these efforts should continue to an even greater degree in support of the SDGs.

The UK should also increase the percentage of DFID's aid budget spent on education, recognising that its current rate is only 7.07%, far below the IDC's recommendation of 10% and civil society's call for 15%.⁵ The UK should invest equitably and adopt "progressive universalism", recognising the challenges associated with new financing models (such as the Education Outcomes Fund and the International Financing Facility for Education) and address these comprehensively.⁶ As the vast majority of funding for education comes from national budgets, DFID should also support countries to increase domestic resource mobilisation as part of this agenda.

Target 4.2:

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

Early childhood development and pre-primary education are key determinants of a child's educational attainment and lifelong success. Those who start behind, stay behind, and intervening early is vital for the poorest and most marginalised children. Outlined in GCL, DFID's commitment to expand their research-led approach on early years education is welcome. However, greater investment and action is needed, particularly in the pre-primary years. 85% of children in low income countries do not have access to pre-primary education and pre-primary education receives just 1% of all aid going to children under five.⁷

To secure its commitments on primary and secondary education, DFID should commit to greater action and investment in quality, inclusive and multisectoral early years education. They should clearly articulate how the research-led approach will be utilised to improve realities on the ground and provide a clear plan and pathway for consistently and steadily improving its focus and investment on early years education, particularly in the pre-primary years.

In GCL, DFID highlighted three marginalised groups of

5. <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/sector> (accurate at the time of writing); and <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmintdev/367/367.pdf>

6. Progressive Universalism has been defined as "expanding provision of quality education for everyone while prioritising the needs of the poor and disadvantaged." See: <https://report.educationcommission.org/report>

7. <https://theirworld.org/resources/detail/bright-and-early-report-on-financing-pre-primary-education>

Target 4.5:

By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

children which would receive increased support for education: children with disabilities, children affected by crises, and hard-to-reach girls.

As highlighted by the IDC: "the Department should... use its influence... to shine a light on the needs of disabled children" as "this is a vital area of work for DFID."⁸ The UK outlined its support for education for persons with disabilities at the Global Disability Summit (GDS) in 2018, where it announced the Inclusive Education Initiative (IEI), and with its Strategy for Disability Inclusive Development.⁹

The momentum for the most marginalised groups must not be lost and DFID should capitalise on its leadership to galvanise real inclusion of the furthest behind in education, including through honouring and implementing commitments made at the GDS, such as fully funding and developing the IEI. DFID's financial commitment to the IEI should be ambitious and it should work with other countries to increase the funding base.

The complex needs of children and young people with disabilities, including the discrimination they face, must be fully addressed in education sector plans supported by the IEI to ensure that no child is left behind. DFID's new Disability Strategy illustrates an ambitious vision for inclusive education and includes a groundbreaking commitment to "work towards the long-term process of de-institutionalisation." DFID should continue to cement itself as a world leader in this area by ensuring the delivery plan for the Strategy effectively implements all commitments.¹⁰

Similarly, the UK has taken a leadership role in supporting education for children affected by crises, but there is much more that needs to be done. In 2016, the UK pledged £30m to the Education Cannot Wait fund, which was expected to reach over 1 million children by the end of 2018.¹¹ With a replenishment expected in 2019, the UK should recommit to supporting this fund and reaching children in conflict-affected areas. In 2018, the UK also signed the Safe Schools Declaration and is currently in the process of implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict.¹² The UK should continue

8. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmintdev/367/367.pdf>

9. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfids-disability-inclusion-strategy-2018-to-2023>

10. Ibid.

11. www.educationcannotwait.org

12. <http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/>

to fully implement the Declaration across all relevant departments, including the FCO and the Ministry of Defence (MoD), and work with other countries on endorsement.

If there is gender disparity in education, there is a risk that girls will be undervalued in their communities and blocked from further opportunities, whereas increases in girls education can be a positive sign of improving attitudes towards women’s rights and empowerment (see **Goal 5**).

The UK is one of the leading countries on girls’ education, including through the Girls’ Education Campaign and the Platform for Girls’ Education. These initiatives are underpinned by the commitment made by the former Foreign Secretary to support 1 million vulnerable girls to achieve 12 years of quality education by 2030 through £212m in UK aid. The Girls’ Education Challenge (phases one and two) similarly illustrate the UK’s commitment to gender equality and reaching vulnerable girls, including those with disabilities. DFID should continue to lead in this field, maintaining the momentum established through these initiatives by fully implementing the recommendations made by the ICAI in 2016.¹³

Minorities and indigenous peoples worldwide have restricted access to education. This is due to hostile school environments, lack of respect for culture or language skills by teachers, and higher risk of arriving at school hungry, ill or tired, which contributes to higher dropout rates and poor performance.¹⁴ The prohibitive cost of school fees may also be a factor, or mismatch between state-taught and community values, such as in the case of Roma students in Turkey or the Fulani in Nigeria, among many others.¹⁵ The language of instruction in early grades education also has a significant impact on children’s educational outcomes and resulting life chances, as being taught in an unfamiliar language can lead to lower test scores and further risk of being left behind.¹⁶ DFID requires data and evidence on language to assist its support for mother tongue education in the early grades and effective advocacy with partner governments.

While honouring commitments is vital, DFID should also do more to ensure that policies and programmes aimed at the hardest-to-reach children are underpinned by appropriate, disaggregated, relevant, and meaningful data collection to ensure they are leaving no one behind (see chapter on “**Leave No One Behind**”).

DFID should use the opportunity presented by the VNR process to assess progress and to commit to data collection

for different groups of children, including children with disabilities, minority ethnic and indigenous children, refugee and crisis-affected children and youth, institutionalised children, and girls.

Recognising that marginalisation is often a product of compounding and complex factors, DFID should also map and address the cross-cutting factors of marginalisation and take an intersectional approach to disadvantage, assessing all policies and programmes to ensure they are reaching the hardest-to-reach learners. This will help to place inclusion at the heart of all DFID education programming, with education in emergencies programmes that are conflict and gender sensitive; education for children with disabilities that addresses all barriers to access and learning; and interventions that address the cross-cutting and compounding factors of marginalisation comprehensively.



Target 4.7:

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.

In late 2018, DFID launched the Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning Programme (CCGLP), which aims to “build long-term partnerships between schools and communities in the UK and countries around the world.” The CCGLP is expected to reach 3 million children and train 30,000 UK teachers and school leaders, and 30,000 from the Global South.

While this programme is welcome, it lacks ambition. It represents a third reduction in funding compared to its predecessors and runs for three years rather than five. It also needs a stronger focus on critical pedagogy, particularly in terms of developing a social justice rather than charity mindset in schools. Global citizenship education should be central to every young person’s education in the UK, prioritised and embedded within the national education system. There should also be a joined up, cohesive approach to global citizenship education across the education and development sectors, and responsibility for delivery of **Target 4.7** should move from DFID to the Department for Education (with DFID remaining a key accountable stakeholder).

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13. <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/ICAI-review-Accessing-staying-and-succeeding-in-basic-education-UK-aids-support-to-marginalised-girls.pdf>

14. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/mandated-areas1/education.html>

15. https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/September-2018_MR_Trends_Report_170x240_WEB_FINAL-1.pdf; and <https://www.odi.org/publications/10288-who-being-left-behind-sub-saharan-africa-asia-and-latin-america>

16. <http://www.unesco.org/education/EFAWG2009/LanguageEducation.pdf>; http://www.adeanet.org/adea/downloadcenter/Ouga/B3_1_MTBLE_en.pdf

Target 4.a:

Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

In 2013, DFID committed to ensuring that all schools directly funded by the Department were disability accessible.¹⁷ However, physical accessibility is not enough to secure learning for all children in the classroom. It is important that inclusive schools are developed within the community, preventing children from having to move away from their family home to receive an education.

Promoting inclusive education should be done in line with CRPD Committee General Comment 4, including the recognition that inclusive education is a “process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all learners of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and the environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences.”¹⁸

Every child has a right to an education and to feel safe to learn, and for this adequate WASH facilities are as vital as pens and books. Safe, single-sex and private toilet facilities are essential to ensuring all children can access school safely. However, in 2016, UNICEF found that over 620 million children worldwide lacked access to a single-sex, usable toilets at their school, and “a third of schools in sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern and South Eastern Asia had no sanitation service.”¹⁹

For girls in particular, access to WASH is fundamental to universal access to education and a safe learning environment, since in latrine blocks on school grounds bullying, harassment and even rape are occurrences that can lead to girls dropping out altogether. Girls often have to stay at home if they are unable to safely manage their periods at school, with 40% of girls in Bangladesh reporting missing school during their period.²⁰ The UK should step up support for inclusive infrastructure and should expand its commitment to ensuring that all education infrastructure directly or indirectly funded by DFID is inclusive. It should also take a fully gender sensitive approach to the issues faced by girl learners, including by integrating WASH into DFID education strategies.

17. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-disability-framework-2014>

18. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD/C/GC/4&Lang=en

19. <https://www.unicef.org/eap/reports/drinking-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-schools>

20. <https://www.wateraid.org/uk/publications/out-of-order-the-state-of-the-worlds-toilets-2017>

Target 4.c:

By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially LDCs and small island developing states (SIDS).

GCL recognises that “teaching quality is the most important factor affecting learning in schools,” and the focus on teachers is a very welcome one.²¹ This should be underpinned by a clear action plan working with countries, teachers and teacher unions to increase the number of teachers recruited, make the teaching profession more attractive, and ensure that teachers have the skills necessary to reach and teach the most marginalised learners, including through pre-service and in-service training. The funding committed to GPE in 2017 will facilitate the training of 170,000 teachers but falls far short of the 69 million teacher gap to achieve **Goal 4** by 2030.²² These teachers must be supported to teach in the most difficult contexts, including in conflicts and crises and rural locations, to ensure that every child realises their right to a qualified teacher.

21. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-education-policy-2018-get-children-learning>

22. <https://dfidnews.blog.gov.uk/2018/02/02/replenishment-of-global-partnership-for-education/>; and <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246124>

To achieve Goal 4, the UK government should:

- Develop an action plan that sets out how the objectives of the GCL Education Policy will be achieved. Ensure that the momentum created through this and other commitments, including the GDS and DFID’s commitment to end institutionalisation, are fully realised.
- Commit to greater action and investment in quality, inclusive and multisectoral early years education.
- Map and address the cross-cutting factors of marginalisation and take an intersectional approach to disadvantage. Assess all programmes and policies to ensure they are reaching the hardest-to-reach, particularly with reference to gender, disability status, ethnicity, language and religion (amongst others). Continue and build on the UK’s global leadership in girls’ education and education in conflict and crisis.
- Secure more and better financing for education. Ensure DFID invests equitably, increases the proportion of ODA spent on education to 15%, and supports countries to increase domestic resource mobilisation.
- Ensure that global citizenship education is prioritised and embedded in the UK curriculum.
- Step up support for inclusive infrastructure. Expand the commitment to ensuring that all education infrastructure directly or indirectly funded by DFID is inclusive. Take a disability and gender sensitive approach, in particular by addressing issues with WASH negatively impacting the education of girl learners. Integrate WASH into DFID education strategies.
- Work with countries, teachers and teacher unions to develop a clear action plan for comprehensive recruitment, retainment and training programmes.

This chapter is part of Bond’s report, **The UK’s global contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals**.

Access the rest of the report at bond.org.uk/UK-global-contribution-SDGs

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