HOUSE OF COMMONS

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: DFID's work on education: Leaving no one behind?, HC 367

Wednesday 18 October 2017

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Richard Burden; James Duddridge; Mrs Pauline Latham; Chris Law; Lloyd Russell-Moyle; Mr Virendra Sharma.

Questions 1–57

Witnesses

I: Rt. Hon Alistair Burt MP, Minister of State for International Development and Minister of State for the Middle East at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office; Anna Wechsberg, Policy Director, Department for International Development; Ian Attfield, Senior Education Adviser, Department for International Development

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Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt. Hon Alistair Burt MP, Anna Wechsberg and Ian Attfield.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon, and welcome to this first public evidence session for the International Development Committee. Welcome, everybody, and in particular welcome to the other members of the Committee, including those who are new or returning to the Committee today.

Minister, you are very welcome. Thank you for being here with us. At our first meeting, we decided that we would complete the inquiry on education that the predecessor Committee had started prior to the general election, and this is the only public evidence session that we are taking as part of that completion. Before we move on, this is our first opportunity with you, Minister, and I thought I would just give you an opportunity to tell us how it is going generally, particularly working with two bosses rather than one.

Alistair Burt: Thank you very much, Chair. Firstly, it is a great pleasure to appear before you. I have been a member of this august Committee twice in the past, before being moved on to other things. I always enjoyed it very much, and had the opportunity to observe a little bit of international development work over the years, and it is a great pleasure to be able to engage upon it as Minister.

I may not be as fluent about international development at the moment as I am, perhaps, in relation to my other responsibilities. Certain things are taking time to come together. As I think you know also, I am a team player, which means that when you ask the difficult questions, I have two colleagues who will make sure that they are answered. The point is that the department is here in order to answer your questions as thoroughly as we can, and while I will deal with my bit, if I feel we are straying into an area where there is more competence on either side of me, I will defer there.

In general, to answer your question, I am very pleased that the Prime Minister has taken the chance with these dual roles: me and Rory Stewart. There is a coherence to it, obviously, a symmetry, in the Middle East and North Africa region, particularly at the moment the refugee crises in Iraq and from Syria. Jordan and Lebanon, of course, I know you have seen, and you have seen the numbers of people being coped with in those states. We occasionally have the odd crisis about refugees in this country when perhaps 35 people are due. We have no understanding of how some of these states around the conflict areas are dealing, with remarkable hospitality, with the challenges they have. There is some coherence in looking after that, and Yemen, of course, as well.

I have two private offices to make sure I keep expertise in both places. The thematic areas I deal with—the human response issues in terms of crisis and, for our purposes, the human development agenda of the department—will enable me, in the areas that I cover for both FCO and

DFID, to visit and be briefed on those, as well as the other work that I do around them. So far, it is stretching, but I have very good officials in both departments. There is a huge amount of work to do that interests us all. It is absolutely fascinating to be engaged with the work, and being able to run it jointly together is a great thrill. I am very appreciative, and I know how much the Committee is engaged in these issues, and to share expertise with you is a particular pleasure, so thank you very much.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. We have an hour and a half with you, and we have 19 questions, so we are going to move at a reasonable pace. Let me kick off. During the inquiry, we have heard from a range of witnesses, including Alice Albright from Global Partnership for Education, that there is a funding gap in education, and Lord Bates, when he gave evidence to the predecessor Committee, said that he acknowledged there was a significant gap in education funding. Do you agree that there is such a significant gap, and, if so, what is DFID's current assessment of what the gap is between current provision and what is needed to meet SDG 4?

Alistair Burt: In relation to the international situation, we do recognise that there is a need for greater funding all round. The figures on access to education worldwide, as you know as well as me, are that there are a quarter of a billion children who are not able to access the education that they would wish to. That is one of the reasons the department has been engaged, both bilaterally and multilaterally, in order to meet this challenge in various different ways.

The Global Partnership for Education, as you know, to which we are a major donor, tackles the national education systems in various countries. Education Cannot Wait and other programmes—No Lost Generation and the efforts being made in Lebanon to make sure that those caught up in conflict are not left behind—have recognised that area. The Girls' Education Challenge has recognised the specific problems relating to girls, so my and the department's sense is that, whilst there are global issues in terms of providing basic education, there are specific areas that have tended to be left behind in the past, which are being plugged.

With our own spending, again, you know the figures very well. Over the past four or five years, from 2011 to 2015, about 8.5% of gross bilateral ODA is spent on education, but in addition we have £227 million through multilateral contributions. There is a recognition that we are trying to meet the spending gap. Regarding the international spending gap, the efforts being led by the World Bank and by Gordon Brown, with his new educational financing facility, are all attempts to plug the global gap in funding, and we are going to play our part in relation to that.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed, and that is a great, overarching introductory reply. We are going to go into the detail of a number of the points, Minister, that you have raised.

Q3 **Mrs Pauline Latham:** The current amount that DFID is spending on

supporting global education is about 7%, which Gordon Brown told us was too small. Having said that, when he was in the House, only about 3% was spent, and of course the budget is much larger, so 7% of a larger budget is a lot more than 3% of a much smaller budget. Also, the Malala Fund has called for the department to increase the spending to 15% of all aid spending. Given the magnitude of the global learning crisis, which you have referred to, will DFID be increasing its spending on education as part of its policy refresh?

Alistair Burt: Firstly, let me put on the record some of the figures in relation to what we do spend. I will say right up front that we are a major donor to multilateral organisations and to challenges being met internationally. Your Committee yourself has been generous enough, in the letter that the Chair sent in April, to recognise the good things that the department is doing, and overall the nation's contribution of 0.7% is something that I think everyone on this Committee welcomes. We are up there, and we are quite prepared to recognise that we are making a considerable contribution. Everyone can always ask for more, but let us see what we are actually doing.

We think that we are spending close to the 10% that is asked for, if you average the money out over a period of time. Over the period 2013 to 2015, the department spent an average of £670 million a year through bilateral funding. That was 11% of total DFID ODA. We recognise that the 2015 spending was lower, because as the department has explained to me in technical terms, some of the payments are lumpy, which means that depending on the outcomes of programmes and where they are in the process, money goes out, but it is not a linear spread of finance. It cannot be done that way. However, overall, the department believes that we are getting close, if you take the period 2011 through to now, to that 9% or 10% figure. That is through both the contributions to multilateral, and through our bilateral programme.

Will we spend more? Talking about percentages is difficult, bearing in mind that we have a national commitment to 0.7%. If you pick another percentage, it might be artificial. The truth, and what I hope Parliament and the nation would want to see, is that we recognise, as I indicated before, the scale of the global challenge on education. The current trajectory to 2030 will see a world where half of all children, 800 million out of 1.6 billion, will not be on track to learn basic secondary-level skills, so that is the scale of the challenge.

They would want to see the United Kingdom detailing which part of the global education problem we think is most acute, from basic education through to specialised skills through to the most marginal, as I described in my first answer. They would want us to ask what mechanisms are available to deal with this. Is it through supporting the World Bank? Is it Global Partnership for Education, Girls' Education Challenge, or whatever, or is it through bilateral in-country programmes, and how much do we have to spend, and how is it spent most effectively?

I think we would maintain that what we will continue to do is to ensure that the resource that is needed and is available goes to priority areas, of which education is clearly one, and you have a reassurance from all the Ministers. The passion of the Secretary of State, particularly for girls' education and for quality in education—it is not just about numbers now; it is about what children are being taught—will carry us through. The short answer to your question is that I am not making a specific commitment to a percentage, but you will see us continually trying to ensure that we can justify what we are spending, and how it is best and most effectively used.

Q4 **Mrs Pauline Latham:** You have not said yes.

Alistair Burt: No, I have not said yes, and quite deliberately so.

Q5 **Mrs Pauline Latham:** Can you confirm that DFID's education budget will not be further cut?

Alistair Burt: I can confirm only what I said before. In terms of the global amount the United Kingdom spends on development aid, to talk about cuts will strike some people as a bit strange. We put a lot of money into development overseas, and everything has a priority—whether it is health, emergency relief or the structure of nations in difficulties and dealing with conflict. I am not going to say that in any one period of time, when one thing dominates over another, we must stick to a fixed percentage and that these amounts will not vary, year to year, five-year cycle to five-year cycle, depending on what is needed. No, education is a priority and important, but will the amounts change over time? Yes. Will they go up? Yes. Will they go down from time to time? Yes.

Q6 **Chair:** Minister, I understand the point about the figures being lumpy, as you put it. Am I right that the 2016 figure will be expected in late November? Is that correct?

Anna Wechsberg: Yes, that is correct.

Q7 **Chair:** Might we therefore expect it to be significantly higher than last year's figure, on the basis that last year's figure was significantly lower than the five-year average?

Anna Wechsberg: We will have to wait until we see it.

Q8 **Chair:** Are there no hints?

Anna Wechsberg: I do not think we are expecting the 2015 figure to be the start of a trend downwards, no.

Q9 **Chair:** Because that was our fear, and I think that was the basis for Pauline's question in terms of a cut—that that 2015 figure could indicate a trend downwards.

Alistair Burt: It is not my understanding either. As I say, if you compare it with the years previously, 2015 looked low. My understanding is that, as Anna has said, is not an indicator.

Q10 **Chair:** Therefore, we might expect it to be more in the region of 8.5%, in line with the five-year average.

Alistair Burt: Well, let's see.

Q11 **James Duddridge:** We are in October. Why on earth do we not have the 2016 figure? It is not like an annual report and account, looking for the final profit and loss. It does not seem unreasonable to have something within a few hundred thousand. Am I missing something in terms of cross-departmental accounting?

Alistair Burt: If a figure is due to be announced in November, it is due to be announced in November. Does it mean we know it now? We might, but if it is publicly announced on a particular date, that is when it needs to come out.

Anna Wechsberg: It is part of the UK aid statistics publication, which is an official statistics publication, and goes through quite a rigorous process before it is published.

Q12 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** You mentioned, Minister, the balance between different lines, and according to DFID's latest statistics, bilateral spending on education is £652 million, so around a third less than on health. Of course, you have priorities, but why is this figure so much less than spending on health when even the basic levels of educational attainment have been shown to have those knock-on effects of preventing ill health in the first place?

Alistair Burt: I am not sure if it is fair to make a comparison with different parts of the aid budget. There is a rationale for the spending on health that will be not dissimilar to the rationale in relation to education, and I do not think the Committee is asking us to reduce the amount of money that we spend on health overseas in order to balance what is spent on education.

Chair: No.

Alistair Burt: I go back to my first premise, which I think is the appropriate one. We know what the global needs are in relation to education. We know the mechanisms through which we can transfer funds. We are a major donor to the leading world multinational funds, and we are proud of that. We have been innovators on the work that needs to be done to provide education for those in conflict. We are a leader in looking at the most marginalised: whether it is girls, whether it disabilities. We commit the money to what is a priority.

Then to be held up and told, "You are not spending as much on something else," does not seem to me to be necessarily very fair. There

will be spikes in other areas of spending. The Ebola crisis, for example, absorbed a significant amount of funds from the development agency. I sometimes feel—and it is not just because I am a Tory—that just looking at the amount of spending and then saying, "You could spend more there and there," is not the point. What are we spending it on? How effective is it? What are DFID's footprints?

You have been yourselves to Lebanon and Jordan. You have reported what people have said about DFID and its spending on education. Would it be great to spend more? Of course it would, but we have to balance it with all the other commitments that we have. I do not think, in general, it is fair to contrast and say, "You are not spending as much as on something else," because people can easily then come along with the next one and say, "Why are you not spending as much on so and so?" It is very difficult. Look at what we are doing and how good it is. See if we are making the best commitment that we can and judge us on that.

Q13 **Chris Law:** The questions do not get any easier on this, I am afraid. Spending on global education by departments other than DFID has been rising in recent years. How does that fit in with DFID's policy research, and how joined up are the objectives of spending with DFID's own global education strategy?

Alistair Burt: They are good. I have a specific note on ODAs spent by others, because I knew you would be raising this.

The UK aid strategy is clear that the Government is committed to ensuring that all ODA represents value for money. This means better results for the world's poorest people. As with all other public spending, each government department is accountable for the quality and impact of its own ODA programmes. DFID is working with other government departments to instil best practice on ODA reporting, value for money, and accountability. DFID also supports other departments in delivering and quality-assuring their ODA spend. However, ultimately, departments are responsible for ensuring that their own ODA budgets are allocated optimally and spent well.

However, ODA spending through other departments is part of a national policy to recognise that there are other areas of government—trade, prosperity, defence and health—that also have an interest in education and an interest in ODA spending, and to make sure that they have sufficient provision to cover their needs. It brings more ideas into ODA spending generally if other departments are engaged and involved.

As one example, from another fund—if I may just give one—the DFID education adviser position is funded by the *CPF*[14.20.28] fund, the cross-Whitehall fund, to engage with the Department for Education and provide technical support on their reform planning, and to identify capacity-building needs and technical assistance. This work has been particularly important in dealing with the preparations for a sectoral World Bank loan to education worth $500 million in Egypt. We could not

have funded this out of DFID, but it is funded out of the cross-departmental fund.

The point I would make is to say that there are good reasons for other departments having access to ODA money, but it contributes overall to Britain's international development footprint, which need not all, these days, come through the Department for International Development itself.

Q14 **Chris Law:** I think the key concern, and a concern that has been raised repeatedly by NGOs and other bodies, is how much is getting transferred into these other departments. I want to ask: are we going to see more of this spend migrated away from DFID over the next few years, and, if so, what kind of scale are we looking at?

Alistair Burt: I cannot answer directly, because these decisions are taken over a period of time, over a review process. The concept that other departments have a role to play in ODA expenditure is now fixed, as far as I am aware. It is a matter of policy. If that is to be reversed, it would be a deliberate change of policy, but clearly the vast bulk of the ODA budget is spent through DFID.

The Government will continue, through a committee chaired by the Treasury and NSA, to look at cross-Whitehall funds and how ODA can best be used, and will make decisions based in the national interest as to how this should be done. I do not think there is any fixed amount that is going to other departments, nor is it possible to say whether this will continue to grow or be a fixed amount. It is not dealt with quite in that way.

Q15 **Chris Law:** Thank you. How much of a role does DFID play in looking at maintaining the spending? What analysis or oversight do they have?

Alistair Burt: That is really important. DFID is recognised to have the expertise in handling ODA finance, for obvious reasons, and clearly that expertise has to be available to other departments, otherwise people are going around reinventing the wheel, which is not the case. My understanding—and I do defer to colleagues here, if they want to comment technically—is that departments do come to DFID for expertise, and DFID does exert that expertise. It is still the departmental responsibility. It does not come back to DFID to decide, so if a department takes on ODA spending, they must deal with it and be accountable for it, but at least the knowledge and expertise is available.

Q16 **Chris Law:** Anna, I know you have now had the chance to speak, but I thought this was maybe an opportunity to say your own position with DFID and their expertise, looking at maintaining the spending.

Anna Wechsberg: What the Minister has said is exactly right. Accountability for the spend rests with the department that is spending, but we will always lean in and try to help, both on the mechanics of how money is spent well and also with our sector expertise. That might

include, for example, engaging other government departments in our sector, cadre conferences, or offering some help with procurement.

There are lots of practical ways in which we are doing that, and on top of that we have really stepped up our engagement with BIES and the Department for Education on making sure that we have a coherent position across government. We recognise that with other departments getting involved, there is a risk that people go off in slightly different directions. We are actively trying to make sure that does not happen.

Q17 **Chair:** What is the main education spend that is ODA and not through DFID?

Anna Wechsberg: It will be scholarships.

Ian Attfield: It will be scholarships in the British Council and tertiary education. The Minister's example in Egypt is a good example, where, for example, a DFID education adviser was seconded in to the embassy, managed through Foreign and Commonwealth Office systems.

Q18 **Richard Burden:** When Lord Bates gave evidence to us, he did say this trend of ODA being channelled through other government departments or cross-departmental mechanisms was likely to gather pace. That is where there is a concern about alignment with the objectives that DFID would have.

In particular, perhaps I could ask you to comment on the Prosperity Fund, which spends ODA money in relation to education, but it operates principally in middle-income countries: China, India, and Brazil—in other words, places where either DFID has wound down, or is winding down, its programming. That, to me, does not feel like there is a great deal of alignment going on there.

Alistair Burt: No, I am not sure that is the case. One of the things that we all recognise, in the many years that we have been here, is that development is changing. When we were younger, most people thought of international development as providing food for the hungry around the world: very low basic income countries, and relief of absolute, basic poverty.

The world is changing; the world is moving, and it is a quite deliberate policy of the Government to recognise that middle-income countries still need assistance if they are going to reach their maximum potential and if children in those countries are going to be able to take advantage of their country's changing economies, changing opportunities and the like. It is a different form of development from dealing with those that are absolutely on the $2 a day, basic poverty line, but it is all a contribution to world development.

World development goals recognise that there are states that have moved away from absolute poverty where there will still be pockets. That is why we work in certain states, but also economies that are

changing and developing need assistance. That comes through DFID, and it can come through other government mechanisms as well. However, if the premise is that ODA and, as it were, government assistance should only be targeted at the countries at the lowest level of development, I think development has genuinely moved on from there. The cross-Whitehall funds give a bit of flexibility for Government to assist in areas where it would not be effective for DFID to be involved, but I do not think it is moving away from general development principles.

Q19 **James Duddridge:** The idea of bringing the role together geographically works. In terms of thematics, I am less convinced, and in the thrust of concern around handing over to departments, has any consideration been given to handing over DFID education policy much more lock, stock and barrel, so that the default position is that the Department for Education run it, and the ministerial line takes responsibility for the ODA element?

It seems to me that you have a whole department, many times larger than DFID, that looks at education; understandably, it is a different type of education service, but what consideration has been given to utilising and going more down that line, along the lines that Lord Bates suggested? I was not here when he gave that evidence, but that seems to be the thrust that he seems to be taking.

Alistair Burt: That answer will come better from someone who was engaged in that process and knows more about it than I do.

Anna Wechsberg: It is not our intention to hand over development policy on education to the Department for Education, nor is there any interest in the Department for Education in doing that.

Having said that, we absolutely do want to make best use of the expertise we have in the UK—whether that is the Department for Education, Ofsted, or our own universities—very actively. We have a number of new engagements that are trying to do that, including, for example, the SPHERE project in higher education, which is all about partnerships between developing countries' higher education institutions and ones in the UK. We are absolutely seeking to do that.

However, as you quite rightly say, the contexts are sometimes very different indeed. I have two things to say, which you may be coming on to anyway, Chair. Firstly, the problems in terms of teacher absenteeism are absolutely critical in poor countries, in a way that just is not the case in the UK, or anything like it. Secondly, we know that one of the key determinants of whether children do well in school is the literacy, or lack of it, of their mothers. There are some things that make these contexts very difficult and different to operate in from operating here.

Q20 **Chair:** I have allowed quite a few extra supplementaries. We have covered four questions in half an hour; we have 15 to cover in the remaining hour, so I am going to try to focus back on the questions, but abuse my position in the Chair to say that, as a former Education

Minister, I would be very sceptical of the idea of handing over global education to the Department for Education. However, it certainly makes sense to draw more on the expertise of Ofsted and others in so doing.

On the replenishment of the Global Partnership for Education, we saw the announcement at the UN General Assembly that France will co-host the replenishment with Senegal and others in early 2018. The United Kingdom has a great record as the largest donor to GPE. Minister, does DFID remain committed to supporting GPE, and how confident are you that they will be able to raise more this time than they raised in 2014?

Alistair Burt: I remain confident that we will be a strong supporter of GPE. I cannot say anything about the funding. We do recognise that 2017 is an important year for education financing. GPE replenishment is a fundamental part of this. DFID wholly supports a successful replenishment for GPE. DFID maintains a close working relationship with GPE. It currently funds 15% of GPE operations and, as you kindly said, is one of the biggest donors, contributing £210 million.

We have been working with GPE through the board, so that it has a compelling case for investment, because we want it to encourage others, with its funding still heavily concentrated on the countries that need it most, and important innovations such as the Multiplier fund, which encourages countries to leverage additional financing from other sources, such as multilateral banks. We are currently the largest financier; we support GPE's replenishment plans, and we will be encouraging donors to increase funding. We are unable to comment at present on what the UK will contribute. Officials are providing advice to the Ministers in the coming months.

Q21 **Chair:** I had two possible supplementaries; you closed off one of them. I will not press you on the "what", but what about the "when"? Do you have a sense of when DFID will be able to make an announcement on funding for GPE?

Alistair Burt: It is the New Year, isn't it?

Anna Wechsberg: We have not said exactly when, and I do not think we would say that here.

Q22 **Chair:** Is it weeks or months?

Anna Wechsberg: Clearly, one of the objectives will be to ensure that others who have not stepped up as much as we have will step up, and that was partly what was behind capping our contribution last time.

Chair: Thank you. Richard has a question that relates directly to that.

Q23 **Richard Burden:** As the cap is meant to be there as an incentive to others to step up to the plate, does that not suggest that it will maximise the incentive value of that for DFID to say what its funding is going to be to encourage others to come forward? If the whole lot is going to wait until the New Year, that is not exactly going to be a disincentive, but it is

not DFID using the soft power it has to encourage others to step up.

Alistair Burt: Hold on; we are already the biggest donor, so we are already leading by example. I was in New York for the UN General Assembly, as I think the Chair was and maybe one or two others. The first thing to say about that is that wherever you move on the global education front, people recognise DFID. I am not saying that to blow my own trumpet—I have only just arrived—but just to say, as you will know very well, that the quality of work that has been done on education is terrific, and we are recognised for that.

You would have thought, if we were going to encourage others, that work is already proceeding. In all fairness, I do not think it necessarily depends on the date of replenishment or anything else. It does depend on our commitment to it, which we have made. It depends also on other donors recognising that the push we are making for reforms, to make sure that the spend is most effective, is the right way to go. That encourages investors as well, so it is not just the amount, or when; it is the direction of the funding.

You may well come back to this, but because there is now a renewed focus on quality, more donor countries will be engaged if we are successful with others, particularly like the World Bank, in convincing people that it is quality that matters, not quantity. For instance, it used to be important to say that so many million children are now in school—not if they are not being taught; not if the teachers are not there; not if they have been taught the wrong things. We are all genuinely moving away from that, and we have played a significant part, but there are many others saying exactly the same.

I would say that our encouragement to other donors is not necessarily based on our announcement of replenishment; it is based on all the work we are already doing and are very committed to. Your point is taken, but there are other ways of encouraging people, which we are attending to.

Q24 **Richard Burden:** I do not wish to suggest that it is an either-or on that. It is just simply to maybe suggest that the earlier that DFID can make its announcement, the greater the incentive.

Alistair Burt: The point of the Committee is made, and I understand that. It is a fair point.

Q25 **Chair:** To reinforce that, it is a very powerful point that the 15% does make sense as a way of triggering others, but if the announcement is right up at the end, then the influence on others is by definition going to be less.

Minister, can I broaden the question of funding to the multilateral position? I agree with you entirely that effectiveness is crucial and quality is crucial. It is not just how much you spend; it is how it is spent, but you acknowledged in answer to my first question that there is a funding gap, so there is an acceptance by Government that, in the global

system as a whole, we do need more money if we are going to deliver on effectiveness and on quality.

What is DFID doing to try to ensure that other donors, both global donors and other bilateral donors, are rising to the challenge of raising the extra money, whether it is for GPE or for other multilateral organisations, to ensure that funding gap is eventually closed?

Alistair Burt: First, simply advocating for increased resources based on financing gap analysis has not been, and will not be, effective, especially when money is tight all around the world. Secondly, demonstrating that resources can be spent more efficiently and more effectively to achieve specific outcomes will be necessary to mobilising more resources, domestically or internationally.

Thirdly, international financing will continue to play a key role, especially in low-income countries, and must be scaled. That is why the replenishments of GPE, and getting more finance for Education Cannot Wait, are so important. However, a significant increase in domestic financing will be important for all countries, and again the Committee will know that by far the greatest amount of money that goes into global education is domestic spending, not coming in from outside.

Finally, while filling the financing gap will require action by all partners, the multilateral development banks offer the best current opportunity to change fundamentally the gain for global education financing in terms of both achieving scale and improving effectiveness, particularly with the record IDA replenishment we saw last year. We need all these instruments to work together to address the funding gaps, and again the leadership that the United Kingdom plays in various multilateral organisations through the UN gives us the opportunity, through regular engagement and contact with donors, to encourage more to be done. We think that it is a variety of these tools that I have mentioned that will help fill the funding gap.

Q26 **Chair:** I agree with that entirely, and I imagine that all members of the Committee on a cross-party basis would agree that there is a variety of mechanisms. You referred, Minister, to the Global Partnership for Education and its own requirement that domestic expenditure be increased. Does that therefore suggest that a big focus on getting that replenishment for GPE is one of the ways of achieving the reform agenda that you have rightly referred to?

Alistair Burt: It is one of those.

Q27 **Chair:** Is it a significant one?

Alistair Burt: It is an important one. When you discuss this internationally, as you obviously do, what I found impressive—moving slightly off script for a second—was the range of thought going into this in different places. For instance, I had two opportunities for meetings on the side of UNGA. One was with Gordon Brown's group; he was chairing

Education Cannot Wait, and then Sarah Brown was dealing with a business partnership in education, which was highly effective. A lot of multinational companies were working in different countries and providing, often, that bridge between schooling and jobs, the thought leadership that was necessary, etc. There are so many initiatives going on. A few years ago, we were not covering the needs of children in conflict situations at all. They were just a tag-end of the humanitarian development process after a conflict, but they did not have their own financing or anything else.

When meeting the global gaps, you have to identify where the gaps are. In some cases, it is the teacher training, and we might come on to that. In some cases, it is the shortage of teachers, and making sure the right numbers are there and the quality of teaching. In some places, it is the structure of the national education system. In some, it is specific areas that we mentioned earlier where people have been particularly marginalised, whether it is those with disability, girls in certain situations, and those in areas of conflict and the like.

I have been impressed, since coming into the department, in seeing the work being done in virtually all of these areas, but every time you identify a new need, you create a new demand, and you have to make sure that you are talking to investors in a way whereby they can be flexible as to what they want to support. They might want to support one area rather than another, but it has to be done through a variety of different tools, and that is the point that I was making about our encouragement for new initiatives, and also to make sure new tools work.

Q28 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Looking domestically, the Education 2030 agenda, agreed in 2015, said that globally, to meet SDG 4, countries should be spending about 15% to 20% of public funds expenditure on education. Last year, of course, in the UK we spent 12%, and we just touched upon how you are trying to leverage other countries to spend more domestically. How do we expect to be leading by example when we domestically are not meeting the targets that we are asking of others?

Alistair Burt: Again, it is a good question. It is slightly off-line to bring domestic spending into all this. I would answer it this way. The quality of the United Kingdom's education delivery is recognised worldwide: our universities, higher education, further education, and skills. We are globally an education leader in many respects. We are innovative in our teaching quality; we are now very flexible and very variable in our schools quality, because they are no longer monolithic. They contain both state schools, voluntary aided schools, free schools, the independent sector and everything else. UK education is demanded worldwide.

Again, as is often the case, it sometimes comes back globally to inputs of finance, rather than outputs of quality. It is always a good domestic political battle to measure your commitment to something by saying how much you are spending on it. I reject that. That is not a sufficient argument. You can spend money on all sorts of things, but if it is not

effective and it does not do the job, there is no point in spending it. It is nice to have targets, and there are other people around the world who maybe look at things slightly differently. It is not enough for the United Kingdom simply to say that it is only quantity that matters.

I go back to the discussion we have just had before. If you measure the quality of a state's education provision by asking, "How many children do they have in school?", that is no longer enough if they are having rote learning, if they are not equipped with critical analysis when they leave, etc. How many graduates are appearing throughout the region I know best, the Middle East and North Africa, who cannot get jobs because the jobs that are becoming available now require a different set of skills than they are learning in schools? I have wandered away from the point, but the argument I am making is purely to look at the statistic of how much a state is spending and saying, "That is the target," is not necessarily the whole answer.

Ian Attfield: That 20% is a very rough guideline that UNESCO suggest to countries, but obviously across the globe there is huge variation. One thing that does vary a lot is that a country like Britain has a much lower proportion of children, because of the demographics. For example, in low-income countries in Africa, where over 50% of the population are under 15, the proportion may well be larger. However, when it comes to meeting the SDG 4 commitments on education, the Department for Education respond domestically, and you will find that generally Britain's compliance with meeting SDG 4, which is applicable to all nations, not just poor countries, is very robust.

Alistair Burt: That is a much better answer—much more concise.

Q29 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** I would note, and maybe put as a question, two things: the GPE does require countries that are applying for it to be then aiming towards that 15% to 20%, so it is a bit more than just a lofty ambition from UNESCO. We are, as the biggest donor, requiring others to start to move towards and meet those targets, not just to wish it.

Secondly, I was in the negotiations of the High-Level Political Forum when it and the SDGs were being set up. DFID was, and is meant to be, the sponsor of the whole SDG agenda, so it is important there that it is not just the Department for Education that is reporting on our commitments to SDGs, but that DFID itself is the reporting body back to the UN on our fulfilment here in the UK. That is what was agreed at the High-Level Political Forum regarding how we would report back, and that is my understanding. Has that understanding changed? Is DFID not the reporting and sponsoring body?

Alistair Burt: Forgive me; I was not there. That is not a facetious answer; I do not know.

Anna Wechsberg: We have said that we, with the Cabinet Office, will make sure that this happens. All government departments accept that

they need to say something in their own planning and their own reporting about how they are contributing to the SDGs, for exactly the reason you said, and, as Ian said, they are global, and we accept that.

Q30 **Chair:** Do you think this is at all on the agenda of the DfE?

Anna Wechsberg: I do.

Q31 **Chair:** SDG 4 is in their mind when looking at domestic British education policy.

Anna Wechsberg: I could not speak for them on that, but certainly it is our expectation that achievement of the SDGs globally is something that the whole of the Government is committed to.

Q32 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Is there a discussion, then, where DFID is going to Education—and the other departments that require these messages—to say, "Are you thinking about these things?" Is that an active conversation that you are having, or is it just something that you are hoping that they will get to through osmosis?

Ian Attfield: I have certainly seen, internally, a UK response from the Department for Education, tracking the extent to which we are currently meeting the SDG 2030 targets and indicators. Clearly, we do not have that information or data. Certainly, one area where we do liaise quite closely with the Department for Education is, in a sense, meeting with the technical co-operation groups and committees that shape and set the SDGs, but SDG 4 has 70, or maybe up to 90, thematic and sub-indicators.

There is also an expectation, or a parameter, about the proportion of GDP that gets spent on education. Again, I do not know offhand how the UK matches to that, but certainly in many of the partner countries, that is very low, and DFID does a lot of work to support countries to increase their tax bases, so that there are public resources available to spend on public education.

Chair: Sorry, we have gone way off theme now.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: We did meet the GDP commitment. To be fair to the Government, we did meet that.

Q33 **James Duddridge:** Can I take you back to disabilities? In this area, we do have leadership, but it is one of the big failures of MDGs empirically, globally, that we did not meet the targets—we were nowhere near—in relation to children with disabilities. I was interested in hearing more about what we are doing to help teachers interact with disabled children in the developing world through DFID, which I think you alluded to earlier and you might have more information on.

Alistair Burt: I have, and as a former Minister for those with disabilities, you never quite lose a sense of how important it is and seeing the world in a different way.

The UK is committed to focusing on reaching the most marginalised children, including those with disabilities. We have publicly committed through our Disability Framework to a) ensure all educational construction directly funded by DFID is fully accessible; b) to work with partners to improve data on children with disabilities and special education needs, both in and out of education. A primary step is to find out more about it, to address the data shortages, and we are supporting UNESCO's Institute of Statistics to create a new World Education Equity database, which will publish available data on equity, ensuring that it is easily available and globally comparable, and new international standards and tools for equity measurement, including on disabilities.

In addition, we are clearly looking at what we can do to assist with individual needs and states that need special training, in order to work with teachers to handle disabilities. There are practical needs for those with disabilities, of course, which are rather different to the teaching needs, and we are working in a variety of different countries. We have some bilateral country examples—Tanzania, Pakistan, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe, for example—where specific work is going on with disabilities.

James Duddridge: It would be great to see that, because it is something we might consider looking at in more detail in coming years.

Alistair Burt: I will just give you one for the Committee, if I may, Chair. In Punjab in Pakistan, the Inclusive Education Programme screened 7,000 children, mainstreamed children with mild disabilities in 464 schools, and trained 11,000 teachers. This is a huge advance; it is a big thing for all of us, and again the country can be proud of what it is trying to do in relation to this.

Chair: The predecessor Committee, when we went to Kenya, saw a fantastic programme that DFID was funding, which Leonard Cheshire was delivering. It sounds very similar to the one you have just described in Punjab.

Alistair Burt: The Leonard Cheshire stuff is great, isn't it?

Q34 **Mrs Pauline Latham:** Minister, could you tell us if funding has been approved for the next stage of the Girls' Education Challenge?

Alistair Burt: It is in progress. It is going to be approved, but I do not have the numbers—just a second.

£100 million has already been announced. The Girls' Education Challenge remains very important. The flagship challenge focuses on getting girls into school and learning, enabling up to 1 million marginalised girls to continue to learn, to continue primary school and transition to secondary school. DFID announced last year it will provide a further £100 million to keep those girls in schools, as well as 175,000 of the poorest, most marginal girls in the world to get an education through a Leave No Girl

Behind funding window. We are currently looking at the challenge before we make a further decision on funding.

Q35 **Mrs Pauline Latham:** Do you have any idea of timescale?

Alistair Burt: Again, on timescale?

Anna Wechsberg: I cannot give a precise time, but it will be soon.

Alistair Burt: We are looking at the challenge specifically, to look at quality and standards again—again, that shift of moving away from just the sheer numbers to the quality—to look at coherence, and to look at the lessons already learned. This was a flagship programme, as you know, devised by DFID in the United Kingdom, so seeing it through its first stage, looking at what has happened, meeting the criticisms, and moving on to what is next is a key part of it. However, it remains a fundamental focus, very important to the Secretary of State and to the rest of us.

Q36 **Mrs Pauline Latham:** You talked there about the first phase. Do you know how many projects have received funding under the second phase of the programme to date?

Anna Wechsberg: I think we had initially over 40 projects. I think that has come down to below 30 now. There is a whole range of performance within the Girls' Education Challenge, as you probably know, and those that were not performing well will not be continued with.

Q37 **Mrs Pauline Latham:** ICAI criticised the programme heavily. What lessons has DFID learned through ICAI's evaluation, and how is the next phase going to be different from the first?

Alistair Burt: Let me just answer this, because obviously this came up in my briefings and review of this. The headline was that the department feels the criticism was a bit rough. It was not quite as ICAI had suggested; we thought it was rather better, but we are responding. The line is that we recognise some of the challenges ICAI has identified, and have taken action on a number of the issues over the past month since the reporting period. We are looking forward to reporting on those in December, when we next respond to ICAI on this important issue.

If I give you one example, just to demonstrate what is being done in detail, their first recommendation was to develop country-specific strategies that combine policy dialogue, system-building and targeted interventions. Our response to that is that we are putting in place measures to drive better planning and coherence across our programmes. We are recruiting regional advisers in our Girls' Education Challenge programme to ensure better co-ordination with our country-level programmes and develop regional influencing strategies. We are also pushing others globally to be more effective on how they reach marginalised girls through our new international influencing strategy on gender-inclusive education.

My analysis, having not been there at the time, is that DFID has recognised the challenges, and responded well by recognising that where there are fair challenges we are putting things in place, although there is some robustness in feeling, as I said, that the report was perhaps rather harsher than we thought it might have been.

Q38 **Mrs Pauline Latham:** How involved were the DFID country teams in the process?

Ian Attfield: They were very involved. At the moment, we are currently in the process where we are deploying more regional advisers to help with the coherence issues. The report was about girls' education, not the GEC alone, so I know that somebody is scheduled to go out to work in Afghanistan quite soon. There is somebody working in the Horn, based in Uganda now, as there are a lot of programmes in East Africa, where the Committee visited.

Generally, there is a big push. There has been an increase overall in the number of education advisers deployed around the world, and coming back to the earlier question about the Department for Education, that is one area where we have a very strong comparative advantage in terms of having people in countries who can understand. In a sense, they are linking together the bilateral programmes, representing the Global Partnership for Education on the local education group, and interacting with the central fund manager and the local operators of the Girls' Education Challenge programmes within a particular country. For example, in Kenya, I believe there are four or five of them. That is important.

Linking back to the earlier question about disability, in terms of the GEC portfolio, we received almost 1,000 applications for funding for the Leave No Girl Behind window, which is very much trying to target some of the most marginalised girls, including disabled girls. The process of whittling that down to the most effective programmes to fund and support is due to be announced early next year, I think.

Q39 **Mrs Pauline Latham:** Could you tell us what successes in state school provision have been seen in the first round of the Girls' Education Challenge, for example Camfed programmes in Tanzania and Zimbabwe? Do you think these sorts of programmes will be prioritised in future funding arrangements? Camfed is the Campaign for Female Education.

Ian Attfield: Certainly, the Camfed programme is recognised as world-class, not just in those two countries. It has spread out from Zimbabwe; it works in Ghana and Malawi.

In a sense, DFID and the UK in general has been very supportive. They have demonstrated how you can get this broader wrap of life skills for girls and how to support generic female empowerment. The model is that the alumni association from Camfed go out; former secondary school graduates go back to the schools to mentor younger girls.

The very broad model of Camfed is recognised as best practice, and those are exactly the sorts of programmes that will continue through the Girls' Education Challenge and possibly more broadly.

Q40 **Mrs Pauline Latham:** Will some of this £100 million be funding these girls to stay in school?

Alistair Burt: Do you mean of the existing money?

Mrs Pauline Latham: Yes.

Alistair Burt: Yes, I am sure it does.

Mrs Pauline Latham: No, the additional—you mentioned an additional £100 million.

Ian Attfield: The additional £100 million that has already been announced was around supporting that cohort of girls who had been supported in the first phase in the period up to 2020. Funding decisions or announcements about broader support have yet to be made, as was answered earlier.

Anna Wechsberg: It is our intention to continue with the best performing projects under the Girls' Education Challenge, of which, as you say, Camfed is one. We have learned a huge amount about the sorts of things that work, and I would just like to refer the Committee to the material on the midline evaluation of the Girls' Education Challenge, which is available on the GOV.UK website. There is an absolute wealth of information there on what does and does not work.

Q41 **Richard Burden:** Could I just ask you a couple of questions in relation to the Education Cannot Wait initiative? I would like, if possible, to clarify what the scale of the ambition is there. It says that it aims to reach 18% of crisis-affected children by 2020, and it estimates that is 4.5 million by the end of next year—the end of 2018. What I am not clear about is what that is 18% of. Are we talking about 18% of 37 million children? That is the amount estimated to be out of school due to conflict or other crises. That would be 6.6 million children. Alternatively, are we talking about 18% of all of those whose education is estimated to be affected by emergency or protracted crisis? That is 75 million children, so 18% of that would be around 13.5 million children. Either way, the fund reports that it is currently reaching 3.4 million, so it is a little bit off in relation to both of those figures. Can we just clarify what the ambition is? Is it 18% of 75 million or 18% of 37 million?

Alistair Burt: Let me tell you what we are doing at the moment. You are right; the numbers are horrendous. I will just give you some of the figures of what we are dealing with, and colleagues will come back to you on the overall ambition. You are right to say that it is 75 million that we are concerned about; 75 million children and young people are affected by emergencies and protracted crises and in need of education support. We think we have been at the forefront of developing a new approach in

emergencies and crises, including for refugees. Education Cannot Wait was only launched in 2016 at the World Humanitarian Summit. It will ensure millions more children access quality education even in the toughest of circumstances. We have pledged £13 million to this, which is the largest amount, I think, and that is 25% of the total funds. We are also providing expertise through a senior DFID adviser working with them.

I do not have a figure here, Richard, to say what percentage this is aiming to meet. There is also the No Lost Generation initiative, and that is working particularly in relation to Syria. I do not have anything that cumulatively adds all that up in relation to the proportion of those 75 million.

Ian Attfield: Just to clarify, Education Cannot Wait has been set up specifically as a fund to try to very much improve and co-ordinate the provision of funding to educational emergencies. It has been acknowledged that, in humanitarian and other crises, not enough attention is given to education. The estimate is that only 2% of funds go to education. In a sense, there has very much been an attempt to show in very large numbers the 75 million children in need, but it is not as if all humanitarian funding for education, emergency appeals etc., will be routed through Education Cannot Wait. Clearly, it currently does not have that absorption capacity. DFID is a bit like the GPE that started off as the Education For All Fast-Track Initiative in 2003, which the UK very much helped to launch. We seconded people in to the original secretariat. Education Cannot Wait currently exists as a relatively small secretariat housed in UNICEF in New York. Long-term decisions have not yet been made about where it will be hosted and how exactly it will be structured. It is very much trying to prove its worth.

Alistair Burt: The ambition I see here is $3.7 billion in five years for Education Cannot Wait. That is its ambition and, again, it falls into that category of many significant ambitions all around this area and funding challenges that are not being met in various places. That is its ambition but it is relatively new, and we are giving it the most support we can.

Q42 **Richard Burden:** I suppose the comparison with GPE is an apposite one here, is it not, in that we have stepped up on that? There is a substantial amount going into Education Cannot Wait, but what are we doing to try to ensure that others do the same?

Alistair Burt: The Secretary of State sits on the steering group of Education Cannot Wait. There was a meeting of that steering group in New York just last month. It has significant supporters, such as Julia Gillard, who are beating the drum around the world. It is another one of those where the need is great but a new need has been identified, there is a new demand, and the pockets are all the same. The Secretary of State is very committed to this—that is why she is on the steering group—and she is doing all she can to raise the profile of this. We have the individual areas that we know very well, whether it is South Sudan,

Uganda or Syria, where so much work has been done, and in terms of the comments made earlier about trying to make it easier for people to find money to fund things, we want this to be right up there. However, it will compete with the other challenges for funding that are there. We are as engaged as we can be on the steering committee, giving it the most money, helping in the launch. We are doing all we can.

Q43 **Chris Law:** I want to turn our attention to the recent publication of the results of the Partnership Schools for Liberia. Some of it makes for some shocking reading. It does show some learning gains with low-fee schools but with a large price tag attached, and it has obviously been in the press recently, especially with some providers in particular; Bridge spending is $663 per child. Is this good value to the taxpayer? What has DFID made of these results?

Alistair Burt: DFID does not bilaterally support education in Liberia. We are not involved in supporting this initiative or the evaluation but we are interested in the latest findings that have come out. The quality of Liberia public schools is awful, and the need to provide more resources and to improve them is critical, so we understand the purpose and the need to experiment with public-private partnerships like PSL. I believe PSL did show learning gains to students but at considerable extra cost in comparison to the public schools. However, it is not an initiative with which we are involved.

Q44 **Chris Law:** Just to be clear, is DFID's assessment and support for public-private partnerships a good thing? In other words, are you going to continue down that avenue?

Alistair Burt: As you have mentioned Bridge, let's get into this a little. 95% of DFID's education funding goes to public state school services. The quality of public state school services around the world is far from uniform, as you know very well. In a number of countries—and I knew this before I came to the department through being in Africa a number of times and going to some of these schools—paying a small sum to go to school is the norm. The UK recognises the importance of the cultural background of education in places where the state school system simply cannot provide it. Will we go on supporting low-cost private education in places where children would not otherwise get an education? Yes, we will. Is it the answer to everything? No, it is not. That is why 95% of our funding goes to state school provision. We are not ideologically going to say that we are not going to support low-cost private education initiatives.

Q45 **Chris Law:** I fully appreciate the points you have made. 95% is commendable indeed. However, when we are talking about $663 per student being paid, how can that be sustainable compared with government spending of $50 in the same trial?

Alistair Burt: I understand that but, as I say, we are not involved in that particular project. We will make rational decisions on what is best,

whether it is provided through Bridge or anything else. Bridge is interesting, as you know, and I saw the comments about it. I have done some looking up on the arguments about it. There is a very good *New York Times* Pulitzer Prize winning columnist called Nick Kristof, who has written a very strong defence of Bridge answered by those fundamentally opposed to private education, it appears, from another point of view criticising it.

Anybody who has been in British politics for more than three minutes knows that this is the issue that we have all dealt with: private sector provision in education. It is big everywhere. There is an ideological issue, it seems to me, which is at the heart of part of the argument. There should be a debate on the specifics. Is good-quality education being provided? Is it being provided honestly and fairly, both to those who are providing it, as teachers and their salaries, and to those who are benefiting from it? It seems to me that the judgment should be made on that rather than generically "is this a good or a bad thing?". Bridge seems to have slightly crossed that divide. From what I am reading, there are arguments not just on the specifics of Bridge but on the concept. For some reason, Bridge has been the target. It is the responsibility of the United Kingdom not to make judgments on that basis.

If state school provision is not adequate, we want to support it and strengthen it, hence the bilateral programmes, hence the support for GPE, which is all about strengthening state systems. However, in the time it takes to improve a state system, to improve teacher training and to make sure that the facilities are there for another generation of children, I do not want to see a generation of children miss out if there is something in between that helps them, because they have only got those years, bridge the gap.

Again, bearing in mind that in a number of these countries paying a small amount for school is something they have always done and something families have always been prepared to do, I do not think it is necessarily wrong that we also invest in similar systems if that provides a better quality of education without detracting from the larger amount of work we would do to support and build a good state school system.

Ian Attfield: You mentioned the Liberian example of a public-private partnership but it is a very isolated one and, as the Minister has confirmed, DFID and the UK have not had any direct involvement with it. When the Committee visited Uganda they went to see the Peace School, which is a really good example and one, in fact, where a Girls' Education Challenge initiative has now been scaled up with additional money.

Stephen, we arranged a policy seminar retreat, together with Ark/EPG, around this very topic to try to collectively move forward on ethical principles around supporting working with this mixed market provision and public-private partnerships including low-cost private schools. Some

really great examples came up there, particularly from Pakistan, where there are PPPs at scale getting millions of extra children into schools and establishing new schools where there are not any with a really mixed model. Liberia has very specific and acute problems from its recent history, but there are some really incredible examples that are worth looking at in other countries where DFID engage at a much larger scale, and we can provide more information on those if requested.

Chair: Please do, thank you.

Q46 **Chris Law:** I will park Bridge for a minute in that case, because there is a really pertinent point that has been raised by civil organisations. Just to clarify, you said that it could bridge the gap where state schools are clearly failing or are non-existent. Are you saying that the private-public partnerships really are a short- to medium-term measure so that governments in those nation states can get on and also be supported to get into a position to provide free education?

Alistair Burt: I do not think it is an either/or. If we want to see a global improvement in education, we know that the heart of it is the state school provision in almost all countries. Accordingly, that is where the bulk of attention goes, and quite rightly so. However, there are places where there has been another tradition. I was reading that 22,000 children are in private education in Kenya. 22,000 children go to private schools in slums where there is no state provision. Not to try to assist that process would seem to be a shame. It is not an either/or. The bulk of world resource goes to building up the education systems that governments want to provide for their children. It will take some countries longer than others in order to provide it effectively. If, in that time, there are other opportunities for children, you would want to take them, particularly where it can be provided at low cost, where it fits in culturally and, above all, where it is giving children a chance they would not otherwise have. Being entirely pragmatic and non-ideological about it, I hope that that is how you would like us to approach this particular dilemma.

Q47 **Chris Law:** I will make this my last question. You talked about the pragmatism and about trying to bridge the gap but, if we look at some of the comments made by other organisations about this, the Global Campaign for Education talks about it being a contradiction. It states that, "For the poorest families, even low fees can make education unaffordable." ActionAid has made the point that DFID should always be focusing on free education, because otherwise it excludes those who are the most marginalised. UNESCO has made the point that it contributes to the stagnation of state efforts to expand free education. Lastly, the University of Cambridge also points out that the vast majority of available evidence shows that these schools do not promote equity—that is the private schools that we are funding with taxpayer support. If you take these on board, these are criticisms. Are those kinds of criticisms helping to push to make sure that the pragmatic steps you are trying to take are

speedy and swift?

Alistair Burt: Let me give the ministerial answer and then I will let Ian come in. This is not dissimilar, in a way, to where you are looking at broader development generally and a country's economy is moving and it says, "We can move at a certain pace but there will be greater inequality. The overall pace of development will move but there is a risk there will be greater inequality. We can make certain economic decisions and we will move at a slower pace but with tighter equality bands." Some countries want to move in different directions as they move away from the very poorest, and they have to be allowed to make those choices. There are times when equity itself is not the only consideration. You have to look at the individual life chances of some of the children involved as well. These are difficult dilemmas.

It is my reading of it that a certain amount of the criticism is ideological; it comes straightforwardly from the line you take that, unless you are helping everybody absolutely equally, you should not be helping any section of the population.

Q48 **Chris Law:** I am not suggesting that, Alistair. What I am saying is that we do not want to see a generation of excluded people who are the most marginalised in terms of access to education because of the cost.

Alistair Burt: I understand that but, again, there is an argument that, in some societies, the payment of a small amount is something that people do budget for, it is something that they have always done and it makes a difference to them and, in the absence of anything else, that is still very valuable. Ultimately, should there be great, available, free state school provision that is of the highest quality? Of course. That is the standard to which we would all reach. However, on the assumption that that is not there in some places and it will not come quickly, what do you do to try to help it? If the argument is that mass support of private education would stultify the development of the state system, I would understand that argument, but I do not think that is where we are. That is why the bulk of support goes in a different direction. Finding space for the sorts of examples that Ian was mentioning seems to me to be a valuable thing that the United Kingdom should stay engaged with.

Chair: We have four more questions and 15 minutes, so I will move us on to the next issue. Just for the sake of clarity, you rightly reminded us, Minister, that the UK has not been involved in funding the PPP in Liberia but it is of course true, for the record, that the UK has provided support to Bridge elsewhere via CDC and directly in the case of the private programme in Nigeria.

Ian Attfield: In Lagos, yes.

Q49 **Chair:** Yes, in Lagos specifically. Can I take us back to something that Ian spoke about earlier: the education advisers? Certainly when the predecessor Committee visited countries, we were very impressed with the work of the education advisers, but we were concerned that, in some

cases, they seemed to be either being shared across countries or being replaced by regional advisers. We saw that in Kenya, where there was a move, as I understand it, from a national adviser to a regional adviser. Would it not make sense to try to have an adviser in every country in which the department is doing work on education?

Ian Attfield: There is a question here of both supply and demand. Our information suggests that there has been quite a significant increase in the overall number of advisers over the last few years. I think the number is now up to 41.

Q50 **Chair:** Can you send us those figures? You said something earlier suggesting that it had increased and I thought that it had maybe dropped off slightly. If it has gone up, that is great. Can you supply us with those figures?

Ian Attfield: I am not sure what the starting point for that metric is. In particular, the place where it has grown very significantly has been in the Middle East and North Africa, where I think there are now six or seven advisers in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt.

Q51 **Chair:** That is very welcome and, as I mentioned earlier, we were impressed with some of the programmes we saw in Kenya, but it felt as though the ability to sustain and support that would be weakened if the adviser was regional, not national.

Ian Attfield: Kenya is obviously a country where the bilateral programme has been scaling back although the actual resources spent in Kenya are still very significant through the Girls' Education Challenge and some higher education programmes that have been awarded through the SPHERE programme. There has not been a huge shift, in a sense, to regional advisers. There are perhaps only two or three out of the total. I would have to double-check. The overall message is that there have been some increases.

The Global Partnership for Education's model requires advisers to be in-country, and we are currently taking on the grant agent role in three countries: Ghana, Rwanda and Zimbabwe. I think it is only Zimbabwe and Zambia where there is a very obvious case where one is shared, but that, in a sense, is because the Zambia programme was almost entirely supported through sector budget support, which has now come to an end, and GPE support.

Chair: Thank you.

Q52 **James Duddridge:** The 2016 DFID research analysis said that there would be more spending on education research. Has that flowed through? What is the level? What is it going to be? I know numbers are not everything, Minister, but I am conscious that more money was promised, and I wondered what money was being received and what it is being spent on.

Alistair Burt: DFID has increased spend on education research each year over the past five years and proportionally increased education research spending after the Research Review of 2015. We recognise that our commitment to the global goals requires investment by the whole global community to expand and improve the quality of the evidence base. Since 2013, we think we have established a leadership role in the international community's efforts to raise the rigor, availability and use of education research. The education research team worked closely in 2015 with the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity; the consequence was a strong evidence base in the published report that drew on DFID's strategic thinking on systems, and we will continue to lead on research. We have recognised the need and we are spending more.

Anna Wechsberg: The numbers I have here say that our education research budget has grown from £500,000 in 2012 to nearly £11 million now. That is a very significant increase.

Q53 **Chair:** When the predecessor Committee visited Lebanon, we were very impressed by the work that was being done to support data analysis and learning from outcomes in Lebanon. Some of us met with the Education Minister from Lebanon, who was here earlier this week. Is that a programme that is potentially replicable in some other recipient countries on education?

Alistair Burt: It may be. The Minister for Education in Lebanon was so impressed with you and all the rest that he has invited me to go to Lebanon. I am going in a couple of weeks and I am hoping to see a little bit of this work. He is really appreciative of what DFID has contributed there. Again, as I mentioned right at the start, you talk about the shift-system schools and what Lebanon is doing to cope with the refugees that have come over; but, yes, he was particularly impressed with the work we had done that you highlighted. I am going to follow that up. If it has application elsewhere, that would be great. I thought he was a very good voice for education in Lebanon.

Chair: I did too. James, did I cut across your question?

James Duddridge: Not at all.

Q54 **Chair:** We will finish with a really important area—and we have taken a lot of evidence on this—which is the benefits of early childhood investment in education and broader work with children at a very young age. Do you agree that it is very important and, if so, might there be plans to increase the amount of funding that goes into early years' education by DFID?

Alistair Burt: Without reading the note, the short answer, of course, is "yes". The recognition of the importance of early years' education, building on that first 1,000 days and everything you do with the child at the earliest stage, is very important. It has not been funded well enough

in the past. It has been an area that has been neglected. It does bring the highest returns in the future, and the returns are greatest for the most marginalised children, including those with disabilities and those living in conflict and emergencies.

We need to work with countries to improve. We are already supporting some programmes in scale in Myanmar, which of course we have been supporting. The Rohingya crisis has come recently but we have had programmes in Burma/Myanmar for some time. We have enabled 150,000 children to access quality pre-school education and via BRAC in Bangladesh—and I went to see that not too long ago—DFID has supported nearly 2.1 million children through pre-primary schools. Do we take it seriously? Yes, we do. I am not sure about where the budget is going but, as part of in-country programmes, it now has a very high priority.

Q55 **Chair:** Can I welcome very warmly the answer that you have given to that question? When Lord Bates was here, the figure that he gave us was that 0.3% is spent. I totally appreciated what you said earlier, Minister, that it is how the money is spent as well as the quantum; but I welcome the fact that you have said in this instance the quantum is too low. I do not think I am putting words into your mouth.

Alistair Burt: No—it is. As we have all indicated, all of us have worked to some degree, such as the Minister of Health with primary care, looking at the opportunities that can be given. The need to devote that time and attention to the very youngest pays huge dividends in education as in health, and it is a point that I know the Committee has focused on, which has helped us. The work that you do really is funnelling into the new policy strategy and the like—you can be sure of that. This is an area of real interest.

Chair: That is really good to hear.

Anna Wechsberg: I was just going to add, Chair, that, in looking at this, we are also looking—and I think you have made this point too—at the really critical join-up with other interventions in early years, whether that is very young children who are coming to mother-and-baby clinics or whether that is, critically, nutrition—some of these other things that are really fundamental in getting children ready for school. You will see in the nutrition position paper that the Secretary of State launched on Friday that the focus is absolutely on the early years.

Q56 **Chair:** That is very welcome, thank you. In the remaining couple of minutes, can I ask a question on another matter? In DFID questions this morning, the Secretary of State was asked about the Geneva conference next week, and her response was that officials would represent the British Government at the Geneva conference on the Rohingya. Is this something the Government could reconsider? My understanding is that Mark Lowcock's invitation to governments is for it to be government Ministers who are represented at the Geneva conference, not officials.

This may be something you have to take away.

Alistair Burt: It is, Chair, if you do not mind. I do not know the answer to that question, but I take the point and the importance of it, of course.

Q57 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. We have covered a lot of ground in just under 90 minutes. We are hugely grateful and we look forward to seeing you again soon, Minister, in your very wide-ranging portfolio.

Alistair Burt: Thank you for the work that is done on this. I found it really helpful coming in to this to read through what you have already done and the detail of your letter of April. I found the response of the department very strong on it, and I am quite sure this is a good relationship between us that we will continue and develop for some time to come.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.