



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

23rd August 2021

Dear Constance,

RE: OVERSEAS AID – GIRLS’ EDUCATION

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of UK spending on overseas aid, otherwise known as Official Development Assistance (ODA) and specifically in relation to supporting girls’ education globally. I have read your comments on this issue with interest.

This country has been, and always will be, open and outward-looking, leading in solving the world’s toughest problems and striving to be a force for good in the world, whether it is stepping up to support desperate Syrians and Yemenis in conflict zones, leading the fight against Ebola and Malaria, or supporting millions of children to gain a decent education.

Nevertheless, we must be honest about where we are. The UK is currently experiencing its worst economic contraction in 300 years because of the pandemic, with a budget deficit double that caused by the 2008 financial crisis. At this time of unprecedented crisis, tough choices must be made, which is why the Chancellor announced a temporary reduction in the UK’s ODA budget from 0.7 percent to 0.5 percent of the UK’s Gross National Income (GNI).

However, the UK will still be spending more than £10 billion in 2021 on its seven ODA priorities, as set out by the Foreign Secretary - on climate change and biodiversity; global health security, including COVID-19; girls’ education; responding to humanitarian crises, such as those in Yemen and Syria; science and technology; resolving conflicts and defending open societies, including human rights; and promoting trade.

As one of the most generous aid donors in the G7, with a commitment considerably higher than the OECD average, and coupled with our expertise and convening power, the UK remains a development superpower.

Girls’ education is a particular priority for the Prime Minister, and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) will spend £400 million on girls’ education in 2021, which will help achieve the global target to get 40 million more girls into education, and 20 million more reading, in the next five years – an ambition now adopted by the G7 under the UK’s Presidency.

The pandemic has caused an unprecedented global education crisis, with 1.6 billion children around the world out of school during the height of school closures. Girls have been hardest hit as the pandemic compounded the obstacles to education girls already face, including poverty, gender-based violence and child marriage. I am proud that the UK has put these issues at the forefront of the global policy agenda this year as part of its Presidency of the G7.



To manage the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, I am informed that the FCDO has adapted many of its bilateral education programmes, as well as providing additional funding, including £5 million to Education Cannot Wait. The UK has also provided £20 million to UNICEF to protect vulnerable children and £5.3 million to the UNHCR to fund the salaries of over 5,500 teachers in refugee camps in ten countries.

To be clear, our £430 million funding pledge to the GPE is separate to the £400 million of UK aid which will be spent this year on bilateral efforts to increase girls' access to education.

The UK's flagship 'Girls' Education Challenge' (GEC), launched in 2012, is the world's largest global programme dedicated to girls' education. The GEC operates in some of the world's poorest nations and has supported over a million girls to receive a quality education. In Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania, for example, the GEC has helped over 315,000 girls from poor communities to learn and transition to the next phase of education, training, or employment.

Furthermore, my colleague, Helen Grant MP, was appointed as the UK's Special Envoy on Girls' Education in January, tasked with championing every girls' right to twelve years of quality education. As part of the agenda, I welcome the Prime Minister's announcement earlier this year of £55 million for the What Works Hub for Global Education; a programme which will drive crucial research into education reforms, turbocharging efforts to get girls into school and learning.

Moreover, in July 2020, the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel was established: an independent body composed of leading education experts from around the world. Its mandate is to provide succinct, usable, and policy-focused recommendations to support policymakers' decision-making on education investments in low- and middle-income countries. It is jointly convened by the FCDO and the World Bank, and its first report was released in October.

I hope this has provided some reassurance that, when it comes to improving education around the world, the UK is leading the way.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**