

## **Speech**

### **From the Department for International Development**

**November 23, 1999**

### **The Hugh Gaitskell Lecture**

**By the Rt Hon Clare Short MP, Secretary of State for International Development**

### **University of Nottingham**

The subject of my speech today is education - a subject very close to the heart of Hugh Gaitskell. In his acclaimed biography, Brian Brivati noted the long-lasting effect on Gaitskell of the brief time he spent teaching in the Nottinghamshire coalfield for the Workers' Education Association. It brought home to the privileged Gaitskell - public school boy and Oxford graduate - the true power of education to transform the lives of working class miners - to give people the chance to improve their life conditions and opportunities and those of their children. It was an insight that stayed with him for the rest of his life. And it was one reason why education became such a central part of his political philosophy. I was only a child when Gaitskell was in his political ascendancy in the 1950s and early 60s. Who knows where I would have stood in the battles of those times. I am a passionate egalitarian. But I believe that the Labour Party exists to help transform life opportunities rather than to protest. Would this have made me a Bevanite or a Gaitskellite? I am tempted to say that I would have been angry with both for squabbling with each other rather than taking our values forward. But that is another story.

I am absolutely certain that Hugh Gaitskell - as an egalitarian and as a passionate believer in education - would have approved of what I have to say today. For the insights that Gaitskell gained from working class Nottinghamshire in the 1920s have many parallels with the focus of my speech this evening - the need to extend access to education across the developing world, and the role of education in lifting the world's poorest people and countries out of poverty.

I have two main objectives for my speech today. First, to stress the overwhelming priority of securing universal primary education across the world - as not just a basic human right for all children important as that is, but - equally significantly - as the absolute precondition for progress in development and the reduction of poverty. I want to suggest how together - development donors, international institutions and developing country governments - we can get serious about the objective of education for all, and commit ourselves to delivering on it in the early years of the new Millennium. But I want to stress, too, that achieving this goal requires not just political will - though political will is crucial - but refocusing quite fundamentally our support for education in developing countries. The old ways have failed. We need a new approach.

My second objective is to encourage a wider debate about education in the higher levels: the secondary and tertiary sectors. It is essential that we have an informed debate about the most appropriate way in which development donors like Britain can work in co-operation with poor country governments to ensure that they have the skills they need for their development. And I will be making a major announcement today on my Department's new initiative - our "Skills for Development" programme.

### **Universal Primary Education**

Let's start with primary education. In this, the penultimate month of the 20th century, 130 million children around the world do not or cannot go to school. Two-thirds of these are girls. And the children who do not attend or drop out of school are overwhelmingly from the poorest households and communities.

The figures from Africa are particularly terrible. Unless we improve on current trends, in fifteen years time, over 50 million children will still have no schooling. But in south Asia, too, the problem is immense. While the overall prospects look better than in Africa, the gender gap - the gap between levels of boys and girls enrolment - is much wider, and drop out rates from school even higher.

Faced with statistics like these, a common response over the years has been to denounce this as a gross denial of the rights of these children - and of course it is: a denial of the individual right of each child to develop to their full potential. But we have sometimes overlooked a second truth - that denying education to children places a massive bloc on the development prospects of their countries. In some quarters, this second argument may be more persuasive than the first. But the reality is that human rights for the poorest and economic development for the country go hand in hand. Countries simply cannot develop properly if they focus - as far too often they do - on the education of elites, at the expense of the education of the majority. If a country is to develop, it needs all its children, all its future adults to have at least the basic skills of literacy and numeracy.

The development case for investing in primary education is now unanswerable. Education helps people to become more productive and to earn more income; it leads to improvements in health, nutrition and child mortality; people are enabled to transform their own lives and society; and they acquire the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, as well as the capacity to utilise knowledge and information.

These benefits are even more pronounced in the case of girls education. Research on the education of girls shows that women with as little as four years of education are more likely to have smaller, healthier families, to work their way out of poverty, and to send their own children to school. And World Bank research has suggested that the education of girls is the single most valuable development intervention a country can make.

I believe that this research, this evidence about the development benefits of investing in primary schooling, should help us to forge greater political will behind the goal of universal primary education (UPE). Not all of you will know that this government has focused the whole of its development effort around what are called the international development targets. These are targets for development and poverty reduction which come out of the great UN conferences of the last decade - Jomtien on education, Rio on the environment and sustainable development, Cairo on reproductive health, Beijing on women's rights, the Copenhagen social summit, and the Istanbul conference on sustainable livelihoods. These are targets which have been agreed by the major governments of the world. The main target is to reduce by half the proportion of the world's population living in abject poverty by 2015. Associated targets, for the same date, include universal primary education, basic healthcare and reproductive healthcare for all, and sustainable development plans in each country, to reverse the loss of environmental resources and to manage those resources sustainably into the future.

In terms of today's speech, the key target is the education one. The International Target on education has its origins in the Jomtien conference on education held in Thailand in 1990. This was the conference which launched the 'Education for All' decade. At the end of this decade, however, we are still a very long way short of this target. That's why I say that our first priority is to get serious, high-level political commitment from across the international system to deliver on this target of universal primary education. There have been far too many grandiose declarations in international development and too little implementation.

There is no better time than now, on the eve of a new Millennium, to make a new commitment to turn fine words into action.

As a British contribution to this task, my Department is producing a range of papers over the next year on the action needed by the international community to deliver on each of the international development targets. We call these papers Target Strategy Papers. Our Target

Strategy Paper on education will be ready for external consultation in the next few weeks. I hope very much that people here will comment on the paper and contribute to the evolving debate about how we achieve this key international development target. We aim to have a finalised version of this paper ready before the education community meets again in Dakar next April to review progress on Education for All since Jomtien.

As I've said, political will is absolutely crucial - but it is not enough. We also need to look afresh at the ways in which we support basic and primary education in developing countries. In this speech, I want to highlight four key things that I think that we need to do if we are to make gender equality and universal primary education a reality, and if we are to achieve the education target by 2015.

First, we need a real and sustained commitment by the governments of developing countries to securing universal primary education. Donor countries, the UN system, the World Bank and the IMF cannot provide the commitment if it is lacking locally. We need strong commitment from developing country governments to primary education for all children - including girls. We need to work with those governments committed to reform, and help them to put in place the structural changes necessary to deliver quality primary education for all their children. If there is no will from the government, the task of making progress is infinitely harder if not impossible. But there is political will in many countries. And this political commitment will grow if we can show how success can be achieved. Countries like Uganda and Malawi have made real strides towards UPE.

There is also great variation in performance within regions. In Africa, for example, low levels of enrolment in the Sahel countries stand alongside enrolment levels of nearly 90 per cent in countries like Zimbabwe and Botswana. While in Asia the depressing figures for girls enrolment in Pakistan are countered by high levels of gender equality in Bangladesh. We need to celebrate the successful countries, and to spread best practice more widely. Second, we need to address the issue of resourcing for education. There is a clear need to increase the level of resources that developing country governments commit to primary and basic education. It is easy for all of us to call for reallocating resources away from less productive areas like military spending. But there is also considerable reallocation that can be achieved within the education sector, away from the tertiary level towards the basic and primary levels. Too often, the needs of the primary sector are not funded because the university sector has more vocal and politically influential constituents. In Africa, for example, the public subsidy for a university student is 20 times that of a primary school pupil. In some countries the figure is over 100.

It is also often overlooked that many poor countries are deeply unequal, with powerful elites who are good at pre-empting public resources for their own priorities at the expense of the poorest. Better use of education budgets, more effective systems of management, and, above all, a clearer priority for basic and primary education would make a huge difference.

It is also crucial that governments should not impose costs or fees that deter access to primary and basic education for the poor. While some cost-recovery (payment for education) is necessary - indeed something that we have accepted here in Britain with university tuition fees - these are best confined to the tertiary sector, where the returns to the individual are higher. Certainly no child should be denied access to basic and primary education because their families are poor. On the contrary, we need to focus resources on the basic and primary education sectors, to increase access and improve quality.

There is also, of course, an important role for development donors. Investing in primary and basic education should be a vital priority area for development assistance. This would mark a change from much of the focus of recent decades. While in recent years the emphasis on primary education has increased, for much of the last three decades development donors considered that universities provided the best links with developing countries' education systems. It was felt that primary education was the business of developing country governments on their own. As a sector, primary education was seen as too big; it used

different languages; it worked in mysterious ways to teach small children to read and write; it operated in remote, rural areas, out of our reach, not our concern. Things have begun to change. But we need a further shift of emphasis across the whole donor community towards primary and basic education.

The British Government, through my Department's development budget, has committed some £800 million to education. 77 per cent of this is for basic and primary education, and two-thirds of these resources are concentrated in eleven of the poorest countries of Sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia. And we hope that other donors will do likewise. It is important that overall aid levels should be increased, and that a growing proportion should be spent in support of basic and primary education otherwise the poorest children of the world will never be given the chance to take control of their own fate.

But - and this is vital - we also need to spend that money in new ways.

This brings me logically to point three - the need to shift from a projects-based approach to a sector wide approach to basic and primary education, and the need to pull together the work of all the different donors around a focused, agreed strategy drawn up by the government of the country concerned. Too often, aid for education is used to support isolated projects which crumble when external funding comes to an end, or which fail to fit into any coherent strategy for the educational needs of the country as a whole. What is more, hundreds or even thousands of individual projects impose massive administrative burdens. Tanzania is an example. A poor country with 30 donors, 1000 projects and some 2000 aid missions a year. Each project with their own accounting and procurement systems, and their own agendas. The result is that Tanzania's frail administrative system spends so much time accounting to donors, that there is precious little time left to administer its own services. And this problem is widespread across the developing world. If we are to increase the effectiveness of international development efforts, governments and international institutions have got to put away their flags and labels and genuinely collaborate behind the leadership of the local government.

This concept of greater coherence and collaboration is central to the thinking of the World Bank's Comprehensive Development Framework, the OECD's Shaping the 21st Century Strategy and the UN agencies' UNDAF proposals. But implementation is still very slow. Development remains a plethora of agencies and donors all with their own motives, all looking for individual credit, and our effectiveness is far behind what is possible.

On education, it is essential therefore that we drive forward with this new, collaborative agenda. That means getting all the relevant donors working together in a much more joined-up way with developing country governments to deliver on universal primary education. It means encouraging and supporting a sound macro-economic framework which ensures a sustainable flow of resources for primary education. And it means help with reforms to ministries of education, to systems of management and teacher training, book producing, public finance management and taxation systems. It is crucial, however, that our role be an enabling one. Our contribution, as a development donor and partner, is to support reforming governments; not to usurp their role but to help them create the conditions for providing education for all their children. Our aim is to work in partnership to invest in sustainable systems so that when our partnership ends, a quality primary education system will remain locally run and locally funded.

My Department is adopting this sector-wide approach to primary and basic education across our development work. We have major educational partnership on this basis with Uganda, South Africa, Ghana, Malawi, China, Vietnam and in India. And we are also increasingly integrating our funding with the funding of other donors. In India, for example, we co-finance the large and promising District Primary Education Programme with the Government of India, the World Bank, the Netherlands and the European Union. And in Uganda, we are part of a group of six donors supporting the Ugandan education sector programme. I consider this to be a small revolution in the way my Department works. We no longer seek

simply to fund 'our' projects, or seek to put a British flag on them. What matters is progress on extending access to primary education and towards gender equality in primary education - not who pays for these changes.

The fourth thing that we need to do if we are to achieve UPE by 2015 is link our approach to education to our wider development effort, to our policies on health, sanitation, livelihoods and rural transport. Countries cannot and will not secure universal primary education by focusing exclusively on the education sector. Developing country governments and donors need to address the serious obstacles that often exist to enrolment, as well as the causes of drop out from school. This is particularly vital in the case of girls, who often face barriers of prejudice and discrimination, as well as economic disadvantage.

### **Beyond Primary**

I want to look now beyond the primary level. Universal primary education is the fundamental building block of our support for education in developing countries - but it is not the whole of it by any means.

Primary education cannot stand alone within an education system. It does not provide the work-related skills that many people need to lift themselves from poverty or gain employment. It does not lead to higher education or scientific research. It does not even provide the growing numbers of trained teachers needed to staff the expanding primary sector. So we need to take a balanced view of the whole education sector, including provision of adult literacy and lifelong learning. In many developing countries, it is not unusual to find a workforce where less than 5% have some form of secondary schooling. This lack of skills is clearly a drag on the development of the economy, as well as on the individual's earning capacity.

But the answer is not for development donors to invest large sums in building secondary schools, or to provide expensive bricks and mortar with no recurrent funding to pay for teachers and books. We have been down that road before.

We need to look with governments at different ways of providing education at this level, which are more efficient and less costly than before. I am very interested, for example, in the possibility of distance learning, where possible using new technologies to expand access to secondary education and skills training.

For many years we have supported the Commonwealth of Learning which provides training, institutional networking, and expertise in distance course development for countries in the Commonwealth. Information technology now provides major new opportunities to increase access to these courses. For example, the Commonwealth of Learning has worked with the University of Technology in Jamaica and 11 other Caribbean countries to develop a teacher training diploma for technical teachers based on open and distance learning. This will have the effect of taking the course to the student, not the expensive alternative of moving students to an institution. In Mozambique, the African Development Bank has chosen the Commonwealth of Learning to carry out a feasibility study on a national system of distance and open learning across the country. Britain is providing funds for a pilot project by the Commonwealth of Learning and the Mozambique Ministry of Education, which is exploring the development of teacher training and secondary level materials to be delivered by distance. And we have commissioned the Commonwealth of Learning to develop distance materials to improve the teaching of reading and literacy.

### **Skills for Development**

I want to turn finally to the issue of skills for development. In every developing country that I have visited in my two and a half years in this job, I have been struck by the desperate shortage of skills that poor countries face and quite often by the unemployed graduates that subsist alongside the skill shortages.

We know that skills and knowledge contribute to higher productivity as well as the capacity to absorb new knowledge and technology from outside sources. This has been the source of

economic take-off for countries since the industrial revolution, whether in Germany, Japan or the United States. The East Asian countries and some states in India have more recently been doing the same. Capacity to absorb technology is a product of early investment in basic education and higher level skills in science and technology. And in a recent World Bank paper on "Poverty Trends and Voices of the Poor", self-employed poor people highlighted the acquisition of skills as key in helping them to succeed. But skills cannot be provided without some kind of policy framework or institutional base, whether it be a distance education system, open learning, access to a virtual database of course material, or existing technical institutions.

It is to meet this need that we have drawn up a major new programme of assistance and support. I can announce today that my Department is committing £25 million over the next three years to our new 'Skills for Development' initiative. This initiative will facilitate the stimulation of entrepreneurial skills required by the poorest countries if their economies are to grow. The programme will consist of three strands.

The first is to assist our partner countries to develop skills in the population which will enable the workforce to contribute to economic growth. We are beginning this process with several African countries, including Rwanda, which has emerged from the horrors of genocide in 1994 with a tattered education system and massive skill gaps in the wider workforce.

Secondly, for those countries where institutions exist but are not sufficiently responsive to skills development and employment needs, we have established a new programme of links between further education institutions in this country and overseas. We have set aside £4 million for this purpose. This will be additional to our Fund for International Co-operation in Higher Education. With the new commitment, we are now encouraging more vocational avenues, making links between higher education institutions and local industries. I know many in this audience will be familiar with our links: Nottingham is working with nine developing country universities in fields as diverse as law, bio-technology and catalytic converters.

Thirdly, our Skills for Development programme will support innovative and knowledge-building projects which can be used to pilot new approaches to skills development work. In Chennai (formerly known as Madras) in India, we have been supporting "Colleges Without Walls", informal learning organisations which have enabled the poor and unemployed local population to acquire skills specifically identified by local employers. So far, 85% of these trainees have found work with local employers. The Government of India is taking a close interest in how this project develops.

These priorities of our development effort of course parallel the British Government's priorities for our own country. Education is the commanding height of a modern economy. Quality is the key. The literacy hour in our primary schools has already been shown to improve the reading levels of underachievers. We are now undertaking the introduction of the numeracy hour to encourage mathematical skills. Skills training will be fostered by national and local Learning and Skills Councils to encourage the uptake of further education and the acquisition of essential skills for employment. The move to modern Information and Communication Technology in schools is well underway. Indeed, I have had Internet exchanges from my own constituency with schoolchildren in Soweto, who were stunned by the ethnic diversity of our schools. And we know that many universities now provide study on-line and feedback by e-mail, so that the boundaries of traditional higher education in the UK are being whittled away as we move towards the next millennium.

## **Conclusion**

But I want to conclude by bringing you back to the question of basic and primary education for all. While the internet and new technology are hugely significant potential tools for spreading educational opportunity, there are many people who may never learn to read, and millions of children who may not get an opportunity to go to school, unless we take

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more effective action.

In the year 2000 we have a great opportunity to take such action. In April our Japanese colleagues will call the first ever meeting of Education Ministers from the G8 countries. The British Government will be working to ensure that this is outward looking and addresses developing country needs. Also in April, I will be attending the Education for All Global Forum in Dakar. And in November, Commonwealth Education Ministers meet in Nova Scotia to look at education in the global era and what it means for Commonwealth countries. The case the British government will be making at each of these events is the same. The start of the new millennium is the moment to turn fine words into fine deeds. To bring the benefits of educational opportunity to millions of children, and to help spread skills and knowledge, so that all countries can accelerate their development, reduce poverty and give everyone the chance to realise their potential.