

UK government and global businesses in new £20 million partnership to educate girls in developing countries

- to mark International Women's Day [8 March], Prime Minister Boris Johnson will launch a new global partnership with 11 businesses to improve girls' access to education and employment in developing countries
- the UK government is contributing an initial £9 million, with businesses providing £11 million in total
- the programme aims to provide high quality skills training to around 1 million girls around the world
- improving girls' access to education is a key part of the UK's foreign policy, to ensure we build back better from the pandemic and prevent a lost generation. Investing in education helps lift communities out of poverty and protects girls from early marriage, forced labour and gender-based violence

Prime Minister Boris Johnson is launching a new £20 million business partnership as the UK continues to lead global efforts to improve girls' access to education in developing countries.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of children did not have any access to school – and girls from disadvantaged families are particularly vulnerable to missing out on education, whether through poverty or prejudice. The pandemic has created even more barriers to education, with a peak of 1.6 billion children around the world having faced school closures.

In the UK's first education partnership of its kind, the UK government is joining forces with the private sector to boost girls' access to education in developing countries. Partners include Unilever, Pearson, PwC, Microsoft, Accenture, Standard Chartered, United Bank for Africa, Coursera, Vodafone, BP and Cognizant. The UK Government will be working in partnership with UNICEF's Generation Unlimited (GenU) to help deliver the programme, with key partners funding GenU being Accenture, Standard Chartered, Unilever, Microsoft, and United Bank for Africa.

Last night [7 March], a reception was held in No.10 Downing Street to mark the announcement and International Women's Day, which was attended by partners, including: Jill Huntley, Global Managing Director, Corporate Citizenship at Accenture; Dr Betty Vandenbosch, Chief Content Officer at Coursera and Marissa Thomas, Chief Operating Officer at PwC.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

The United Kingdom has long been a proud and mighty champion of this fundamental cause and today we take one leap further through

our first Global Partnership of its kind – opening the opportunity for one million girls across the developing world to have access to high quality skills training.

Ensuring every girl and young woman across the globe receives 12 years of quality education is the greatest tool in our armoury to end the world's great injustices.

Delivering on this mission will be one of the best defences against ignorance, ensure the greatest protection from prejudice and put a rocket booster behind our hopes and dreams for global development in the years to come.

Businesses, charities, schools and colleges will shortly be able to bid for funds from the programme. The partnership wants to support projects that will improve access to education for girls, with a focus on providing the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) skills needed to find work in key sectors such as technology and manufacturing. This could include funding new skills training programmes, improving teaching or redesigning training to make it more relevant to business needs. Initially bids will be encouraged for projects in Nigeria and Bangladesh, two countries where significant barriers to girls' education remain.

Funding from the programme will also help expand GenU's 'Passport to Earning' (P2E) platform. This digital skills platform will provide girls with free, certified education and skills training which they can then use to support future employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. UNICEF's precursor to P2E was listed among Time Magazine's 100 Best Inventions of 2021.

Some of the businesses involved will be contributing a range of resources including books, computers and other technology, mentors, advice and access to their networks, skills and training programmes. The private sector involvement will help ensure that education and learning opportunities provide girls with the skills for the future that employers need.

The UK is playing a leading global role to improve girls' education in developing countries. During the UK's G7 Presidency last year it secured agreement to help get an additional 40 million girls into school by 2026; and secondly to help 20 million girls to learn to read by the age of 10 by 2026. In 2021, the UK hosted a successful Global Education Summit, which raised \$4 billion in pledges from world leaders to support schools through the Global Partnership for Education. Between 2015 and 2020, the UK supported at least 15.6 million children in developing countries to gain a decent education, including 8.1 million girls.

We have already seen considerable success with similar skills programmes such as the Alternative Learning Program (ALP) in Bangladesh. This involved training up marginalised young girls with the skills they needed to be able to secure jobs within demand sectors, which gave these young girls more economic, social and personal freedom. As a result, the programme saw a 62% reduction in child marriage among the girls and families involved.

Similarly, the 'Educate!' programme across Uganda and Rwanda has provided industry-specific (agriculture and tourism) sessions for girls, as well as sessions to boost their literacy skills. This programme saw a 120% increase in income among the female participants.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

Supporting women and girls is at the heart of UK foreign policy. We want women to have agency over their own lives and to be free to succeed.

Investing in girls' education is vital for a more sustainable, peaceful and prosperous future. That's why we are partnering with the private sector to help girls in developing countries access education and job opportunities.

Helen Grant, Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Girls' Education said:

Every girl everywhere deserves to have an education.

From school right the way through to the workplace, our partnership will help give women and girls the skills they need to reach their full potential.

Kevin Frey, Chief Executive Officer of Generation Unlimited said:

The Girls' Education Skills Partnership exemplifies the commitment of the UK government and the private sector in addressing the critical gap in skilling girls for 21st Century opportunities.

P2E is an innovative skills platform designed with partners to reach the girls everywhere, every time, preparing them with in-demand market relevant skills.

- the programme is called the Girls' Education Skills Partnership
- the £11 million provided by businesses is a mixture of funding and resources
- GenU (housed within UNICEF) will manage the funding that will be open for bids
- the companies providing funding to GenU are Accenture, Standard Chartered, Unilever, Microsoft, and United Bank for Africa
- seven countries have been identified for the Passport to Earning (P2E) platform: Brazil, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria, Niger, Egypt and India