

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

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11 May 2004

Dear Professor Boucher,

HIGHER EDUCATION LINKS PROGRAMME

Thank you for your letter of 22 March to the Secretary of State for International Development about the future of the Higher Education Links programme. I have been asked to reply since I have responsibility for education issues.

2. We have now finalised the outcome of the review of the programme. You will be pleased to know that DFID has decided to continue with a redesigned higher education links programme, maintaining current levels of annual investment but with some modifications to the existing scheme (which will end in March 2006). We expect the new scheme to commence in April 2005, with commitments being made over the following seven years (until March 2012).

3. The review report identified a number of strengths of the current scheme, especially its capacity to:

- Mobilise resources from other sources, notably UK higher education institutions, towards DFID objectives;
- Promote innovative initiatives that evolve into broader programmes;
- Foster partnerships;

- Exploit and promote enthusiasm and goodwill in both UK and overseas countries' partner institutions; and
- Transfer knowledge and skills from the UK to developing countries, and also in some measure from those countries to the UK.

4. Some areas for improvement were also identified. The existing scheme is not sufficiently focussed on the Millennium Development Goals and DFID's Public Service Agreement targets. It could be better aligned to DFID country strategies and give more focus to DFID priority countries. Other areas for improvement are:

- Projects could be better linked to broader development plans, either of the university link partner or of the higher education sector in a particular country;
- Mechanisms to promote sustainability;
- More attention to disseminating and replicating best practice.

The new scheme will tackle these issues.

5. The successor scheme will include the following features:

(i) Objectives: The overall goal will be the reduction of poverty and promotion of sustainable development in poor countries; and the purpose the development of human capital and skills (capacity building) in those countries. Link proposals should further the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

(ii) Priority Countries: Only countries where DFID has bilateral country programmes will be eligible for funding. There will be more emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa and low-income countries.

(iii) Other Issues:

- Greater synergy between Higher Education Links and other DFID programmes (including country programmes) will be developed. For example, the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) and other similar schemes which promote the development of human capital and skills in poor countries.
- Collaboration with other development agencies promoting capacity building will be encouraged.
- The scheme should support South-South links and links between Southern partners and non-UK partners in the North.
- More attention should be given to science and technology links.

- A more systematic means of learning and replicating best practice.
- An independent evaluation will take place after five years.

6. The British Council has done an excellent job managing the existing scheme, demonstrating the importance of continued good management for a successor scheme. However, our procurement rules require that the management contract for the new scheme is awarded by a new competition.

7. Governance arrangements for the new scheme will also be reviewed. The Steering Committee, involving representatives from the UK higher education sector, the British Council and DFID, has proved effective and is likely to continue, albeit with a possibly revised membership. Given its international interests and experience, we believe the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) should be more closely involved with the future scheme. I hope therefore that you will feel able to support DfES membership of the new Committee.


8. I am sure that members of the current Steering Committee will want to read this letter and discuss next steps. John Moye and David Levesque from DFID's Policy Division (both members of the Committee) will be responsible within DFID for taking forward the new scheme. I hope that it will be possible to finalise the design of this over the coming months, so that DFID can approve the new scheme before the end of this year. We expect the new scheme to begin in April next year.

9. DFID values its partnerships with UK higher education institutions and the contribution which they make to our development agenda. We look forward to strengthening that partnership in the new scheme.

10. Finally, I want to thank you for your leadership of the Steering Committee. Your contribution has been valued by both UK and developing country partners. I hope that the new scheme will continue to benefit from your considerable expertise.

11. I am copying this letter to Alan Johnson, Minister of Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education in the DfES, and to those responsible for higher education in

the devolved administrations. It will also be placed on DFID's website, as our response to the review report.

Yours sincerely,


GARETH THOMAS MP

CC

Jim Wallace MSP, Scottish Parliament

Jane Davidson AM, National Assembly of Wales

Jane Kennedy MP, Northern Ireland Office