



The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Education for All

A debate on donor support to low cost private schools as a strategy to increase educational participation in developing countries

Committee Room 15, Wednesday 5th December 2012

Parliamentarians in attendance:

- Chris Heaton-Harris MP (Hosting the event)
- Lord Low of Dalston
- Annette Brooke MP
- Mark Durkan MP

Speakers:

- Sean Coughlan, BBC News Education Correspondent (chairing the debate)
- Sir Michael Barber, Chief Advisor, Pearson Education
- Professor Keith Lewin, Centre for International Education, University of Sussex

Opening

Chris Heaton-Harris MP welcomed all attendees on behalf of the APPG on Global Education for All. He welcomed the broad range of organisations represented in the room, including parliamentarians, the Department for International Development (DFID), academics, companies involved in the provision of low cost private schools, civil society, and the media. Chris said that ensuring every child can receive a quality education is a vital goal for all countries, yet with only a few years to go until the 2015 deadline for the Education For All goals and Millennium Development Goals, we know that progress is stalling. The UN recently reported that there remain 61 million children of primary school age out of school around the world, and UNESCO said that “the world is not on track” to achieve universal primary education. Chris said that in this context, he welcomed a debate on the most effective means to ensure education for all. He said his own interest in the topic of low cost private schools stemmed from a visit to Uganda three years ago (his constituency is twinned with a Ugandan town). He said he visited both private and public schools in Uganda and realised how different these were from schools in the UK. He went on to research the topic and read James Tooley’s book *The Beautiful Tree*. Chris said he was keen to listen today and looked forward to learning.

Introduction to the debate

Sean Coughlan (BBC News Education Correspondent) introduced the topic. He said a key question was ‘can the private sector reach the parts the public school systems haven’t?’. He observed that in the UK we hear lots of debate about education, but for 61 million children worldwide, there is no education. He said that this was not a new problem – in 1990 the international community committed to universal primary education – yet the most recent evidence is that MDG 2 will be missed. He noted that it was a sad reflection of our world that so much technological change can happen so quickly (mobile phones, the internet, space travel) and yet we still don’t have enough schools. Sean said it was important for us all to think about new solutions for achieving education for all – can the private sector provide a solution?

He welcomed the forthcoming debate, highlighting some of the key questions – are fees in low cost private schools a problem for the poorest? Or are fees an important representation of the value of education? What does donor support to low cost private schools mean for national governments? Does it let them off

the hook? He noted that access to education is not just a problem in the poorest countries, but also in countries with significant wealth. Should we be blaming national governments more for this? He also observed that the division between private and public education is probably too simplistic in the developing world context. Perhaps the debate is more about how to get the best from private providers? Finally, he noted that quality of education is also a key issue, not just access and volume. Too many children who have attended school for years still do not learn much.

Sean introduced the two speakers:

Sir Michael Barber is [Chief Education Advisor at Pearson Education](#). He is a leading authority on education systems and education reform. Over the past two decades his research and advisory work has focused on school improvement, standards and performance; system-wide reform; effective implementation; access, success and funding in higher education; and access and quality in schools in developing countries. Prior to Pearson, he was a Partner at McKinsey & Company and Head of McKinsey's global education practice. He is also Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He previously served the UK government as Head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (from 2001-2005) and as Chief Adviser to the Secretary of State for Education on School Standards (from 1997-2001).

Professor Keith Lewin is [Professor of International Education and Development at the University of Sussex](#) and Director of the DFID funded [Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity \(CREATE\)](#). A specialist in educational planning, economics and finance of education, teacher education, science and technology education policy in developing countries, and educational aid and project evaluation. He has extensive experience in South/South East Asia, China, and Sub Saharan Africa. He is a senior advisor on planning, finance and access to education to DFID, World Bank, UNICEF, and UNESCO and Governments in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia; and Technical advisor to the Commonwealth Ministers Working Party on Education post-2015.

The debate

Sir Michael Barber, speaking in favour of the proposition *"is support to for-profit low cost private schools an effective way for donors to help expand access to education for the poorest?"*

Sir Michael started by declaring his interests by noting that he is an unpaid representative in Pakistan for DFID. He said he was also chairman of the Pearson Affordable Learning Fund which invested in low cost private schools (www.affordable-learning.com). He said that through this website Pearson summarise research on low cost private schools from around the world, as well as examining the debates on this issue.

Sir Michael began by summarising the argument he would lay out. Firstly, he said that it is vital that we deliver EFA – universal, high quality education for all. Secondly, he believes what we're doing currently isn't working and we need to try different things. Thirdly, that parents have 'voted with their feet' by choosing low cost private schools (LCPS). And fourthly, that to achieve EFA we need bold system reform in every country, with a combination of public and private sector, and donors need to be ambitious about getting behind this reform. He observed that 'the road to hell is paved with false dichotomies', and he believes we need the energy and commitment of both sectors to achieve our goal. He said we need to speak plainly about the barriers to achieving education for all. In donor communities he believes we find people afraid to name corruption when they see it. We need to be honest about this. He also emphasised that he really believes in government and that governments have a fundamental role in solving the EFA problem – but we need good government.

He emphasised again that education for all is vital, and what we are doing currently isn't working. He said that we are not on track to meet MDG 2 and even if we were, the quality of education many children are receiving is very poor. He noted that the problem is not just the 61 million not in school, but that 70% of those going to school were not completing even primary education. Plus 250 million more are in school but not learning anything. Girls are disproportionately disadvantaged. He said that while some progress has

been made over the last 20 years, it is nowhere near good enough. He noted that in his report for the CREATE project Professor Lewin called this “a tragedy”, and Sir Michael agreed with that. He went on to note that teacher absenteeism is a big problem, as is school infrastructure, use of corporal punishment, and a general sense of resignation about state schools. Inefficient, corrupt governments were also part of the problem. More of the same is not the answer.

Sir Michael said that as a result of the poor state of public education, parents have voted with their feet and millions have chosen LCPS. He said parents value education highly and even in tribal areas of Pakistan education is highlighted by parents as their number one issue. These parents scrape together local currency and choose LCPS because they see them as the only future for their children. He believes that while we in the international community might be able to wait to solve EFA, these parents can't. In Pakistan, he said the shift to LCPS had been massive - in Punjab – 9 million children are in LCPS. 70% of all children in Delhi are in LCPS. He said that the data showed that children going to LCPS get a similar or better education than in a public school. He also highlighted that 80% of public school teachers in India choose private schools for their children. He said the cost per pupil in LCPS is lower than public schools yet results are better. Teachers are present and children are making progress, even if it is not brilliant quality education. And while perhaps the very poorest can't afford the fees, he noted that 10-20% of pupils in LCPS are subsidised. He also emphasised that the very poorest also can't afford public schools because of informal fees such as school uniforms and books.

Next, Sir Michael talked about the need for bold whole system reform. He said no public-only or private-only solution will work – a combination approach is needed, and different choices will need to be made in different countries. He believes the central question for governments should be how do we get every child a good education regardless of where they go to school? He said bold reform was needed to improve all schools, provide better facilities, quality textbooks, ensure teachers were trained and showing up for work and students attending. He said we need much improved governance, removing corruption and ensuring reliable data is available for measuring success. Good school managers who were well trained and in the right place. Then he said LCPS should also be improved eg. The Punjab development agency is working to improve LCPS, monitoring performance and offering vouchers to the poorest children.

He said that donors need to get behind bold reform and be ambitious, seeking transformation rather than incremental change. He said it was no good setting modest targets so that we can hit them. We need to do better. We need whole system reform for all children. Sir Michael emphasised that aid should act as a catalyst, not as a dependency. Donors need to be blunt about corruption, and where governments are corrupt we shouldn't work with them – we should work with agencies and NGOs instead, or give money direct to families and children.

On how donor aid should support LCPS, Sir Michael said he didn't want direct subsidy to LCPS, he wanted loans, micro-finance, vouchers, equity stakes. Investment in innovation. He urged dialogue with governments about combinations of public and private providers.

In concluding, Sir Michael re-emphasised: (1) that there is a big problem with education and the world is not on track; (2) He believes LCPS are part of the solution; (3) Neither sector alone can solve the problem - More strategic whole system reform is needed; and (4) Donors need to get behind major reform and be ambitious.

Professor Keith Lewin with opposing arguments

Professor Lewin began by highlighting that the CREATE project he directs (www.create-rpc.org/) had broken down the '61 million children out of school' into more specific categories – children who never have and never will attend school (which he estimated was 40 million children); a larger number of children who started school but did not finish (eg. half of children in north India and in Sub-Saharan Africa don't finish the primary school cycle); large numbers of silently excluded children who are in schools but not learning anything; and finally there are many who don't make it into lower secondary school. He said when all

categories were taken into account the number of children below 15 years excluded from education was more like 300 million.

Professor Lewin said he agreed with some of Sir Michael's points. However, he said that he thought DFID were already thinking big and being ambitious about education. He said that his experience being involved in the Dakar process and in the development of the Education For All goals was that the emphasis was on free universal education, and that Ban Ki-Moon had reiterated this recently as a commitment of all UN member states. While he said he had no problem if some people who could afford to pay for education choose to do that, he said most families can't be in private schools because they can't afford to be. He said his focus was on the families and children in the 'dollar a day' countries. He also dismissed Sir Michael's arguments about teachers being overpaid – he said in his experience teachers were frequently paid very little in low price schools.

Professor Lewin said he does not believe Fee Paying for Profit Private schools (FPFPs) reach the children that state funded schools don't reach. Rather, he believes that 'low cost private schools' really mean 'low price private schools', and that unregulated private systems are not the way forward. He observed that pre-school in most poor countries is unregulated privatised, and because of this access to pre-school is also highly inequitable. He disagreed with Sir Michael that vouchers could be used successfully to counter the inequity of private schools, pointing to recent student riots in Chile over voucher systems. In China, he highlighted that it is common in private schools for 'slower' students to pay more in fees than 'brighter' children. He questioned whether this is the world we want. He also said microfinance to support the poorest to use private schools can put people in unsustainable debt with interest rates of more than 40%.. He also highlighted evidence of some of the problems – in case studies of drop outs from two private schools children had been caned to incentivise their parents to pay fees.

He emphasised the need to be precise in the definition of a private school. He said he was talking about for profit private schools paid for by the fees from children and parents. He was not talking about publically subsidised schools, faith schools or those run by not for profit organisations. He believed they will never reach the poorest children whose families are on less than a dollar a day who could not afford to pay fees.

Professor Lewin noted that historically no OECD country went down the education route that Sir Michael was promoting. He said Finland, Singapore, China, Japan and many other developed countries – none of them look like Sir Michael's model where the poorest are educated in fee paying, for profit schools so why promote this path for the poorest countries?

He said we need to be clear about the pattern of demand for different types of education. The demand is for low price, not low cost private schools because the poor cannot afford high fees. He believes much of the demand is differentiated demand, with parents competing with each other for advantage in a competition between households, not schools. Where there is excess demand it is because governments haven't built enough schools. Growing demand is often associated with informal settlements of urban migrants. Established communities did not want to pay for new schools for immigrants - in desperation migrants set up their own schools. For profit private schools in these communities will disappear as soon as government schools are opened as is happening in Beijing.

In terms of performance, Professor Lewin accepted that sometimes fee paying schools do get better results, but equally, sometimes they don't. He said there were no conclusions yet from the data available and results vary by country. He questioned Sir Michael's assertion that 70% of children in Delhi go to low price private schools. The evidence is that not much more than 30% attend such schools which are typically small and often unstable. He said that Sir Michael was exaggerating the growth of private schools which reached the poorest.

On teachers, he said that LCPS pay teachers very little and this is a major issue. He said in the UK Sir Michael's work at McKinsey had talked about getting the best teachers by paying well. He said you won't get the best teachers by paying a dollar a day to unqualified school leavers.

Ultimately, Professor Lewin felt that fee paying for profit private schools disadvantage the poor. He noted that 30-40% of children are stunted in the poorest countries and suffer from undernutrition and debilitating diseases. He said every dollar households spend on school fees is a dollar less to spend on health, clean water, food, and shelter, and thus fee paying private schools, no matter how low price, actually increased poverty directly and undermined wellbeing.

Pretending to be Deborah Meaden from 'Dragons den', Professor Lewin questioned the viability of the business model of FPFPPs. He said there would be questions about what was the core business idea of private for profit schools? Is it to sell services to poor people for profit? What are the profit margins? How can the business grow unless it makes profits from the poorest? Will successful schools raise their prices and cease to be affordable to the poor? Why in rapidly growing developing countries like India and in East and West Africa was foreign capital needed when there were plenty of domestic entrepreneurs? He said surely the Dragons would be saying that with competition the business margins would become nothing and the schools would not be a commercial proposition. Finally, he thought if the Dragons were seeking an ethical investment, they would conclude that for profit private schools would make poor people poorer, especially if they borrowed with microcredit. Deborah Meaden would say "I'm out".

Concluding, Professor Lewin questioned what the long term plan was for fee paying for profit private schools – his analysis showed that they were not sustainable. He said he greatly valued the social contract in the UK where 50% of people contribute more than they receive towards the cost of public goods and services and vice-versa. He said people should have choice of schools but it should be a free choice between schools which were free to attend. Fee paying for profit schools would never generate choice that was not rationed by price. He said he felt that DFID was doing excellent work that was ambitious but not in the ways that Sir Michael had wanted since most of its resources were directed to publically financed systems reaching out to the poorest. He noted that ultimately every dollar allocated to private schooling is likely to be a dollar less for creating a good quality state education system.

Sir Michael Barber rebuttal

Sir Michael started by agreeing that he thought DFID was thinking big and being ambitious. He also emphasised that a good education, wherever it comes from, is fine by him. He questioned whether Professor Lewin was suggesting that LCPS were immoral, or just not profitable? He noted that he had spent much of his career trying to improve the public education system so he wasn't anti-public and he hadn't said that 'all private is better than all public'. On the dispute over the Delhi numbers of children in LCPS, he said regardless of the dispute, this was still a huge number of children in these schools and that can't be ignored. On demand, Sir Michael said that parents want good schooling and at the moment the choice was frequently a bad government school and so they chose a LCPS. He said we should be concerned and responding to this demand. He re-emphasised that the combinations of private and public funding and delivery of education was complex, country-by-country and that the challenge was in getting that relationship right.

Sir Michael concluded that his biggest problem with Professor Lewin's argument was that no solutions had been offered. He said we won't make progress this way. He urged everyone to avoid these false dichotomies and to bring everyone together to solve this huge problem for children everywhere. If we focus on solutions we can really achieve education for all.

Professor Keith Lewin rebuttal

Professor Lewin denied he was being complacent about the huge problem of education for all children, but he said he had been involved in lots of post-MDGs discussions where the emphasis was on "only two years left, need to re-double our efforts". He felt it was dangerous to massively increase investment over the next two years without planning for the next ten. He said he didn't believe private schools were immoral when they were providing a service to middle income and wealthy people. This debate was about the poorest

and it made no sense to reduce the incomes of the poorest to pay school fees. He highlighted that if Sir Michael was right and private schools had grown hugely in the last 15 years, why had this not solved the problem? Professor Lewin argued that what was happening was individually rational for parents rich enough to pay fees, but a very poor basis for policy for delivering public goods equitably. He said that vouchers were clearly not a solution – they changed the relationship between purchaser and provider of services and could raise prices as they did with PFIs in the UK.

Professor Lewin commented on corruption, saying that the simplest assumption was that corruption was as bad in the private sector as it was in the public sector. Private for profit schools are not the solution to corruption. He said he wished more people would talk about good public schools since in every country the names of good public schools are well known. When parents can't get their children in that they turn to fee-paying schools if they can afford them. He said we should be promoting the best public education and scaling it up to help the poorest and provide more choice and equitable opportunities.

Discussion

There followed an open discussion with questions and contributions from the audience. In discussion the following points were made:

David Archer from ActionAid noted that the rapid increases in primary school enrolment that had taken place over the last years in developing countries had been a result of the abolition of school fees. But of course this creates new challenges – big class sizes, and the need for further investment in education systems. The problem is governments not putting investment into education systems, while external aid for education is also not enough. David gave the example of Pakistan, saying that only 2% of GDP is spent on education. Sir Michael Barber responded that he believed even if you tripled the education budget in Pakistan now, it would largely be wasted because the systems simply aren't there. He said that we can't solve the problem with lots of additional money. Sir Michael also argued that fee-paying schools are part of the reality and simply by ignoring them or reducing the proportion of low cost private schools would not result in an increase in public school enrolment. David Archer urged that the debate we should be having is about strengthening education systems and their accountability for instance through school-based management committees, the role of teachers unions, holding government to account on providing education. If DFID invested more in civil society coalitions this would make a bigger difference than investment in low cost private schools.

Chris Weavers from the teachers union NASUWT questioned the focus on educational 'outcomes'. What do we mean by outcomes? How do we measure them? Chris emphasised that there isn't a global consensus about what education is and how we measure it, and he believes we seem to be moving away from consensus. There is too much focus on 'words per minute' rather than looking at more holistic things like comprehension, creativity. Professor Lewin agreed that this was a big issue and said that now was the time to speak out on this because of the ongoing work (for instance at The Brookings Institute) looking at the place of education within a post-MDGs development framework and whether there should be a 'learning goal'. Professor Lewin said he was opposed to the current articulations of global learning goals because it seemed to be missing the point of education designed to meet different needs and priorities in different contexts, and prioritising instead some form of global competition between schools, different education systems or even between parents. There is a real risk that we focus on learning as a means to getting a job, not doing a job – a focus on exam tests and selection rather than education that contributed to moving the poorest out of poverty. Sir Michael Barber meanwhile highlighted recent work on this issue, including the IPPR report 'Oceans of Innovation'.

David Edwards from Education International argued that parents may be 'voting with their feet' on low cost private schools, but not with the right information. He said that this was when choice was unhelpful – when it was uninformed. How do you guard against that? David was also concerned that low cost private schools

keep their fees low essentially by reducing teachers' salaries and working conditions. He argued that if OECD countries had not gone down that road, why should we encourage the poorest countries to do that?

The Citizens Foundation UK emphasised that in India and Pakistan, low cost private schools have grown exponentially and they believe this growth is driven by parents, who are determined and desperate to seek a good education for their children. The growth of low cost private schools is not driven by DFID, NGOs or anyone else. Low cost private schools ultimately reflect the failure of governments to provide quality state education. The Citizens Foundation argued that it is possible to provide quality education at a low price. They provide support packages to schools in Pakistan to tell them how to run a school. They believe parents don't care where their child's education comes from – they just want the best education.

Peter Williams from the Council for Education in the Commonwealth said that in many countries we are dealing with a wide spectrum of education providers and types of school, not just public or private. He argued that the two systems are inextricably linked and need to cooperate. He said his experience was that in some situations public schools are not full – why is this? Are they just not catering for demand? Peter argued that in most countries the monitoring and regulation of schools was lacking, and he believes the focus of DFID and others should be on how we can improve accountability and support regulatory systems.

Mahesh Chandrasekar from Leonard Cheshire Disability highlighted that one third of children not in school are disabled. He argued that the existing system is not working for children with disabilities. He believes public schools are more likely to support the poorest and most marginalised, while low cost private schools are not. He noted that the examples cited of low cost private schools were from big cities – what about rural areas where many of the poorest live? Here it is state schools only. Mahesh believes these public schools are more accountable in admissions, access, technologies. Private schools look at profit and discriminate. He also argued that public money supporting private schools leads to instability. Ultimately he believes prioritising support to low cost private schools will leave us in a worse situation.

Sir Michael Barber emphasised that nothing he had said was opposed to government schools – in fact he is in favour of education being provided by good public schools. But ultimately he believes the current system isn't working and we are seeing that uneducated, unemployed people create instability in many countries – these are the big problems we all need to face. Sir Michael welcomed the debate on how we can support regulatory frameworks to improve education systems, as well as the need to focus on quality of learning outcomes. On the issue of low cost private schools paying teachers low salaries, he acknowledged that this was sometimes the case, but this was because the teachers were young women in their first teaching job. He argued that low cost private schools were therefore providing an important career path for young teachers. He said that on the other side, he believes it is immoral to pay large salaries to teachers who don't show up to teach. Sir Michael emphasised that he believed all parents, no matter how poor, should have choice about where they send their children to school. He feels it's patronising to argue that the poor don't need this kind of choice and should just have local state schools. He also urged us all to focus on seeking solutions for the education crisis and not constantly delaying.

Professor Lewin emphasised the need to not confuse different types of schools and providers within this debate. This debate is not about non-profits like BRAC schools. That is a different debate. On teachers, he rejected Sir Michael's argument that low-paid teachers in low cost private schools have a career path. He noted that in some schools he knew of the schools paid teachers by the day, or by the number of children who turn up to school – he doesn't believe these teachers have careers and they turnover rapidly. He had also had experiences of seeing schools collecting the school fees direct from the children and he said this had made him very uncomfortable. He said he knew of cases of children who had been unable to pay the fees didn't go back to school and either dropped out, or went to a free public school. Professor Lewin noted that adivasis and scheduled caste children, and disabled children etc. are much more likely to be in government schools, not private schools and he argued private schools would not help close the gap for these marginalised groups. On the drivers of demand for low price private schools, Professor Lewin said he believes it is often a combination of population growth, urban migration, and increased enrolment rates

which outstrip public investment and are coupled with declining quality in parts of the state system – our focus should be on addressing those state failures, not looking elsewhere for solutions.

Andrew Mamedu from ActionAid Nigeria was keen to talk about his experience in Lagos. He said the major reason for the shift to low cost private schools was about quality of education. He argued that the problem was the neglect of state schools by the government. He is concerned that the government now sees the private sector as the answer to their problems. He highlighted that there is debate at the moment in Nigeria about how to get the children of public office-holders to go to public schools. He agreed with the earlier contribution that rural areas don't have low price private schools and so the debate is different there. Ultimately he was concerned that there must be fees in low cost private schools and that children should not be made to pay these fees. Andrew argued that any donor support to low price private schools must involve withdrawing funding from public systems. He believes we should be seeking to improve public education. He also argued that corruption will only increase if we neglect the public system. Sean Coughlan noted that Nigeria has the highest number of children out of school in the world, and he wondered what was going wrong there and how it could be put right. Andrew responded that he believed a combination of approaches was needed - government reform was critical, alongside addressing corruption and increasing investment in education from the government. Andrew said the key in Nigeria is to ensure resources from the government get through to schools at the local level. In addressing corruption, he argued that corruption was just as much a problem in the private sector, and the answer was to enhance and strengthen community accountability.

Professor Martin Woodhead from the Open University highlighted his work on the 'Young Lives' research project, a longitudinal study of children in India. His observation was that the idea of 'choice' in education was selective in practice. He said in India the evidence was that the move to low cost private schools was pro-urban and not the very poorest. He said parents' choices were often forced choices of desperation. The decision to choose low cost private schools was not a simple one and it involved dilemmas, sacrifice and loans they can't afford. Professor Woodhead said that where there was choice like this, there would be inequalities. He also said the evidence from India suggested that gender inequality got worse with low price private schools. He believes that support to low cost private schools is not the issue to focus on and we should be more concerned about improving the regulatory environment for improving education.

Dr Paul Atherton (DFID)

Dr Paul Atherton, an education economist and advisor on low cost private schools at DFID, said a few words of response for DFID welcoming the valuable and constructive discussion on low cost private schools. He said that DFID were very conscious of several issues in finding the most effective ways to help expand access to education, such as equity, sustainability and marginalisation. Ultimately he said the question was about how we can get the best start for all children.

He agreed that there was substantial debate and mixed evidence on whether public schools or low cost private schools were performing better, but he also emphasised that DFID want all schools to be doing better. He said they were looking closely at all the evidence. Dr Atherton also said that DFID was committed to supporting progress towards education for all. He said education is the key to ending poverty, is fundamental to all other development, and is a human right. He said DFID were thinking big and being ambitious and thinking hard about the kind of education we want to see.

By 2014-15, Dr Atherton said DFID would be supporting 9 million children in primary schools and 2 million in secondary schools. He emphasised that they are looking closely at issues of accountability, and ways to improve data systems to better monitor progress on education for all. He said DFID were working with partner governments and NGOs to get the best possible outcomes.

Dr Atherton noted that in many countries low cost private schools are part of the landscape. In Kenya the number of LCPS has tripled. In Lagos 50-60% of children are in LCPS. Alongside big programmes to support public education systems, DFID are supporting out of school children and supporting things like LCPS and

BRAC schools. He highlighted schools set up by communities and by parents to get the best education for their children. He agreed that there was no one solution to the problem of achieving education for all. He also emphasised that the education situation was different in every country, and that local circumstances needed to be carefully considered. In India, for example, he noted that entrepreneurs are doing a lot to support education. This includes NGOs who sometimes charge fees to reach children in slums and ensure they can receive an education. He said that teachers in these schools were usually hired from the local community and, as Sir Michael Barber had said, they were often female and relatively untrained but supported by a strong back office. DFID is keen to explore and evaluate these kinds of innovative models and find which do reach the poorest families. He noted that DFID-supported research into these kinds of schools in India's slums would shortly be published in the International Journal of Education and Development.

In terms of supporting the regulatory environment for education, Dr Atherton commented that this is what DFID are doing in Nigeria. They are also doing research on what is driving demand on school choice. In Kenya, he said it was a different story again where DFID was looking across all providers, looking at innovative approaches. In Kenya he said they were very conscious of the large number of children in low cost private schools in the slums and they were supporting several schools with things like textbooks. In Pakistan, Dr Atherton emphasised that DFID were taking a holistic approach across all sectors looking at how they could support Pakistan to transform education and looking at reform, working with the main political parties, the opposition, NGOs, private sector, and state governments. DFID were exploring support to public-private partnerships and focusing on ensuring minimum quality standards for the education provided.

Dr Atherton concluded that DFID were evaluating their education programmes carefully and developing a rigorous evidence base for making future decisions. They were also welcoming research and debate such as the Young Lives project and PERI Global (Privatisation in Education Research Initiative) as well as conducting their own research. The bottom line, he said, was that DFID were working hard to help get the world to where we wanted to be in 10 or 20 years' time – where all children were having high quality education.

Professor Keith Lewin final remarks

Professor Lewin emphasised that the concept of 'choice' in education was a long discussion that needed more time. As had been said earlier, parents can make poor choices because they are not informed. He said there needed to be more support to improve regulation of both private and public education because regulation was currently very under-resourced. He said that low cost private schools were not the right answer to provide access to education by the poorest and were not sustainable. It was important to look beyond 2015 and think about how to sustainably improve education systems that would reduce not increase differences in access and outcomes of the richest and the poorest, and which would not be reduced to another unsuccessful big push. He said DFID grant money was special and did not have to be linked to fees or repayments of interest and should not be directed towards for profit schools. It should play a vital role in investing in basic infrastructure, sanitation, clean water etc for schools, improving the availability of learning materials especially those available free to the user, as well as improving inspection, monitoring and public information systems on expenditure tracking, attendance, and educational performance.

Sir Michael Barber final remarks

Sir Michael reiterated that the evidence from places like Andhra Pradesh shows that low cost private schools need to be part of the solution to the current education crisis. He noted that while affordability may be a concern, it is equally true that the poorest families can't afford public schools either because of informal school fees. He agreed that equity in low cost private schools is something that needs targeted support, looking at things like vouchers to reach the poorest and most marginalised children. Sir Michael noted that India's recent 2009 'Right To Education Act' would be very interesting and we should all watch this closely to see how it is implemented. He said he believed strongly that the poorest families should have

choice in education as much as the rest of us do. He also dismissed the argument that all the global education effort needed was “one more big heave” using the same traditional approaches towards education for all. Sir Michael said that this would be too slow, and that parents of children now want more and they want it now. Worldwide, the government sector today is not yet able to meet their urgent needs. Given the urgency, we need a joint approach to solve this problem today..

Concluding remarks

Chris Heaton-Harris MP thanked the speakers on behalf of the APPG on Global Education for All. He thanked everyone for their contributions to a really interesting debate. He wondered who here had come with an open mind and who had come with their views already fixed and unchangeable? He concluded by saying that achieving education for all was a massive challenge requiring lots of solutions.