



**House of Commons**

**International Development Committee**

## **DFID's work on disability inquiry**

**Written evidence from The British Council**

**22 February 2019**

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### **Summary**

- We welcome DFID's commitment to disability and the ambition for UK to play a leading role in disabled peoples' inclusion globally.
- We welcome the renewed focus on inclusive education. The British Council has significant experience in capacity building for inclusive pedagogies internationally and would be happy to support DFID on this strand of work.
- We also welcome DFID's commitment to developing disabled people's leadership and ability to shape change, in particular amongst disabled women and girls.
- In July 2018, the British Council signed the global Charter for Change at the Global Disability Summit and made two commitments, focused on increasing disabled peoples' inclusion in our workforce and programmes, and on inclusive education.
- We believe the British Council can support and bolster DFID's existing work through our work in disability in the areas of the arts, inclusive education, skills and employability, civil society, justice, gender and social enterprise.
- The British Council promotes the social model of disability in line with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy<sup>1</sup>
- We work with UK disability stakeholders to inform our approach, and we connect UK disability stakeholders with counterparts internationally to share learning and practice.
- We welcome working with DFID, the FCO and other HMG departments on disability and inclusion to deliver soft power benefits for the UK.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/how-we-work/equality-diversity-inclusion>

## **1. The British Council, disability and development**

- 1.1 The British Council's work in developing countries makes a positive contribution to the people, institutions and governments we work with – creating opportunities, building connections and trust. We also make a lasting difference to the security, prosperity and influence of the UK and contribute to the stability, development and connections of the places we work. We work in partnership for the long term. Our work contributes to the role the UK has to play in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.
- 1.2 The British Council's contribution to UK Official Development Assistance (ODA) is long-standing and has been formally recognised since the 1970s. As a Non-Departmental Public-Body, the British Council contributes holistically to the development agenda by working with HMG, overseas governments, organisations and directly with the people who benefit from our programmes. We manage our ODA through our core grant-in-aid (via the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and through contracts and partnerships with government, including with DFID, DCMS and BEIS.
- 1.3 By supporting the development of robust, accountable institutions; strengthening civil society and governance; and providing opportunities to improve personal economic success through education and the creative economy, the British Council helps developing economies grow and prosper.
- 1.4 This work has the added benefit of strengthening links with the UK, via building collaborative relationships and investing in the development of English language skills, education reform and research collaboration, professional and vocational skills, and expertise in the cultural and creative industries. As well as making an important difference in countries globally, these areas could lead to a significant payback for the UK in future exports, investment, influence and learning.
- 1.2 Our work in disability contributes to the development agenda by focusing on addressing the barriers that restrict disabled individuals' access and active participation, which may result in poorer outcomes and inequality, particularly in ODA eligible countries. The majority of our expertise in disability and inclusion lies in inclusive education, inclusive arts and inclusive routes to employment. We work in line with the social model of disability which is underpinned by the understanding that people are disabled by the way in which society is organised, rather than their impairment/s.

## **2 The role the UK should play on disability inclusion within the global humanitarian and development community**

- 2.1 We welcome DFID's renewed drive for improving the lives of disabled people<sup>2</sup>. We welcome the leadership position proposed by DFID in its Disability Strategy, provided

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<sup>2</sup> We use "disabled people" in line with the UK social model approach and guidance from our external Disability Advisory Panel but recognise that "persons with disabilities" is widely used in international development settings aligned to the United Nations Convention.

that disabled peoples' organisations and disability stakeholders are central to its approach.

- 2.2 The British Council broadly agrees with commitments made at the Global Disability Summit. We signed the Global Charter for Change at the Summit and agree that we must strive for real change through the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- 2.3 We announced two global commitments of our own at the summit which reflect our vision for the role the development community should play on disability and inclusion. The first is to increase the numbers of disabled people involved in our work and workforce and increase their voice, skills and agency to influence others and shape change. The second is to support countries to develop more inclusive education systems based on the principles of access, engagement, empowerment and enablement aimed at ensuring the highest quality of education for everyone.
- 2.4 In terms of the commitments from the summit, the British Council is best-placed to comment on the commitments on inclusive education (4), leadership and diverse representation (2), and routes to economic empowerment (5). However, the arts can play a crucial role in raising awareness and challenging stigma around disability internationally, and so we will also comment on this, using our extensive experience of working in disability arts.

### **Inclusive Education**

- 2.5 The British Council believes that ensuring disabled people have access to education, can engage in education and have good quality learning outcomes should form an important part of the UK's approach to disability inclusion within the global humanitarian and development community. It is an important means of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4: to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.
- 2.6 In terms of special educational needs and disability, the British Council's approach is in line with the 1994 Salamanca Statement which recognised the necessity of providing education "within the regular education system". It argues that "regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society" and was signed by 92 governments and 25 international organisations.
- 2.7 The British Council has significant experience in encouraging inclusive pedagogies internationally. We work to improve understanding and build the capacity of education professionals in three areas of inclusion: access to education; engagement in the classroom; and measuring and tracking learning outcomes and the quality of their learning.

- 2.8 Through our global schools and English for Education Systems programmes, we work with ministries, teacher training colleges, head teachers and classroom-based teachers, and quality and assurance agencies to support them to create inclusive learning environments for children. We focus on the entire experience for children regardless of their individual needs, qualities or how they learn. This includes programmes implemented in Iraq and South Africa under the auspices of the European Commission, along with long-term engagement with Ministries of Education and education stakeholders in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and East Asia.
- 2.9 We provide free open-source resources to our network of English teachers around the world and offer continuing professional development for our teachers on using inclusive practice. We provide tools to develop positive attitudes towards diversity in their learners.
- 2.10 Inclusive education is also an important element of Connecting Classrooms, our schools-based education partnership with DFID. Our Inclusive Pedagogies approach provides teachers with professional development opportunities, including access to carefully designed curricula, teacher training and international school partnerships with UK schools. Evidence from teachers has highlighted that the changes they make in the classroom as they start to provide more inclusive and child-centred education not only benefit individual pupils, but the whole of their classes.<sup>3</sup>
- 2.11 We also ensure that all our teaching staff globally are equipped with the tools to deliver inclusive education. Our special educational needs (SEN) policy toolkit outlines our position on inclusion and providing information on access and engagement, theoretical models and relevant teaching resources. We have issued a global policy on disability and inclusion for use in all our Teaching Centres.

### **Leadership and diverse representation**

- 2.12 The British Council is committed to taking action to increase the numbers of disabled people we work with and support them to increase their voice, skills and agency to influence others and shape change in their own lives, the lives of others and wider society. This is reflected both in our programmes and our internal policies and should be a key pillar of the development community's work with disabled people.
- 2.13 We were pleased to partner with DFID, the International Disability Alliance and Include Me TOO to ensure that young disabled people were involved in the Global Disability Summit. As part of the conference, we hosted an International Young Disabled Leaders programme for disabled activists, policy shapers and social entrepreneurs from eight countries to ensure their voices were heard.
- 2.14 In Pakistan, we are a founding member of the South Asia Disability Forum, and a partner in the South Asia Development and Disability Initiative. We are working with young disabled women to increase their political participation, providing them with

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<sup>3</sup> *Connecting Classrooms Broadening Horizons, Enriching Teaching and Learning*, published with data verified by Ecorys UK, external evaluator in 2017

platforms to advocate and recognising their achievements in championing equality and disabled people's inclusion.

- 2.15 Through Active Citizens, our global social leadership training programme, we are supporting diverse leaders, including disabled leaders, to develop disabled people's inclusion within their communities. In Uganda, disabled women involved in Active Citizens have gone on to play a stronger role in political and civic life in Nebbi District. In 2016, despite barriers and opposition she faced, former Active Citizen participant Owiny Grace, contested and was elected to the position of Nebbi District Woman Councillor, representing two sub-counties with 13 parishes and 82 villages, in the Ugandan general elections in Uganda. She went on to be elected as the Deputy Speaker to the District Council. Grace continues to advocate for the rights of disabled people and hopes to contest for Nebbi Municipal Women Member of Parliament in 2021.
- 2.16 We promoted inclusive approaches to decision-making in partnership with disabled people's organisations and disabled people in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Lebanon and Jordan through the IDEAS project, co-financed by the European Commission. The project drew extensively on the UK's history in disabled people's inclusion, connecting people to UK disabled people's organisations. In Armenia, it led to new legislation requiring local government to use access checklists. In Ukraine, the Municipality of Vinnytsia established the first independent living advice centre in Ukraine. In Lebanon, where the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) had yet to be ratified, we developed a strategy of influence which enabled the Lebanese Persons Handicapped Union to work within 19 out of 27 ministries to raise awareness about the social model and CRPD, and to build the capacity of government staff in order to undertake duties required under current legislation in Lebanon.
- 2.17 We work with disabled people's organisations so that they can model good practice in disabled people's inclusion in our programmes and can position themselves as partners for change. In the European Commission-funded WeAlmaty programme in Kazakhstan, we have been working in partnership with the Disabled Women's Association of Kazakhstan to develop the leadership skills of disabled women and to support them to play a strategic advisory role to the Mayor's Office and Almaty Development Centre, the executive agency for urban development.
- 2.18 Our Future Leaders Connect programme, which supports future leaders in policy and politics in 11 countries, also supports diverse leadership. From the 2017 and 2018 cohort of 50, we had three participants that identified as disabled. Since taking part in the programme, they have been involved in campaigning for disabled people's rights, having gone through a comprehensive leadership development programme at the University of Cambridge, having learnt from policymakers in the UK Parliament, and having shared best practice with their global peers. One of these young disabled leaders facilitated the young international disabled leaders programme at the Global Disability Summit.
- 2.19 The British Council's own vision of an inclusive organisational culture drives our work to improve organisational policy and practice in relation to employing more disabled people and increasingly accessible workplaces. Our Executive-level Global Disability Champion, an internal UK Disability Working Group and external Disability Advisory

Panel all help us to identify ways in which we can achieve this. We achieved Disability Confident employer status in 2018, a scheme developed by the UK government with employers, disability charities and disabled people to support employers to make the most of the talents disabled people bring to the workplace. Our Diversity Assessment Framework helps us assess and measure effective adjustments made across the organisation and the meaningful involvement of disabled people.

## **Routes to employment**

2.20 We welcome the emphasis on routes to employment in the commitments made at the Global Disability Summit. However, the British Council believes that DFID's Economic Development Strategy needs to be more holistic, in recognition of the wide spectrum of alternative business models that can be fostered to promote inclusive and equitable job creation, enterprise and economic growth. This would also help it to support SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities.

2.21 Social enterprise and the social economy play a significant role in economic development including in three key areas: contributing to inclusive economic development through providing employment or services for marginalised people, including disabled people, delivering public services, and encouraging social innovation in addressing key development challenges. Through our Global Social Enterprise Programme, delivered in over 40 countries, British Council works with disabled social entrepreneurs to support them to start up, scale up and influence the policy space in social enterprise.

2.22 Another key focus for routes to employment is Technical and Vocational Training. We have conducted a variety of research which explores a range of TVET models that ensure good learning outcomes associated with meaningful employment for disabled people<sup>4</sup>. It identified successful UK approaches from policy and practice which we use in our work across the world, including in Pakistan, where we have conducted two major studies in conjunction with disabled peoples' organisations and where we are launching a pilot project with the Scottish Government on routes for employment for disabled people.

## **Raising Awareness and Reducing Stigma through Arts and Culture**

2.23 We share UK arts – including disabled artists' work – taking the best of UK creativity and creating new opportunities for artists and organisations to work internationally. We have an ongoing dialogue with disabled arts practitioners so that we maintain the delicate balance between promoting excellence by disabled artists across all art forms and raising awareness and challenging stigma around disability.

2.24 Over a decade of experience of working in this area tells us that our work is not only helping to change perceptions but that it is also directly benefiting disabled artists, bringing their work into the mainstream and helping shape the cultural landscape in countries around the world.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/disabled\\_peoples\\_inclusion\\_within\\_uk\\_tvvet.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/disabled_peoples_inclusion_within_uk_tvvet.pdf)

- 2.25 At the heart of our work in disability arts is our partnership with Unlimited, which began in 2008 in the lead-up to London 2012. Working closely with Unlimited our disability arts programme spans 46 countries, from Armenia to Vietnam, and includes tours and exhibitions, disability conferences and symposia, disability awareness and access training, skills development for disabled artists and practitioners and consultancy to cultural organisations and governments.
- 2.26 We are currently piloting our Developing Inclusive and Creative Economies (DICE) programme, which supports innovation and growth in the creative industries and social enterprises working to tackle gender equality, youth unemployment and disabled people's inclusion in Brazil, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan and South Africa in collaboration with the UK. In 2018, we launched the DICE Fund to help social and creative enterprises to broker international partnerships. This fund prioritises applicants who are working with disabled people or with disabled people's inclusion as part of their social purpose. We are also prioritising those applications that have leadership teams, boards or staff who self-define as disabled.
- 2.27 Another example of our work in this area is *Telling Stories – Disabled Bodies and their Narratives*. This a collaborative arts programme involving the performing arts and creative sectors in East Africa and the UK to raise awareness about disability, inclusion and the arts and disability arts. Running from 2017 to 2020, the British Council will be working with partners in Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya, and with UK companies including Stopgap Dance Company, Candoco Dance Company and UK fashion-design company Teatum Jones with presentations through Rwanda Fashion Week, the Ubumuntu Arts Festival and 2019 East Africa Nights of Tolerance Festival.

### **Bringing UK expertise to those that need it most**

- 2.28 While we recognise that there is more to be done to ensure disabled people's equality in the UK, we feel that the UK has a considerable story to tell. The British Council works with UK disabled people's organisations and with mainstream organisations working in all sectors on disability equality in the UK to share learning internationally, which can inform policies and improve practice in that country and in the UK.
- 2.29 Whilst DFID brings the expertise of INGOs, the British Council's contribution to the UK's role in disability within the development community is sharing the expertise of inclusive UK Arts, Enterprise and Education practices internationally. Connecting the UK disability sector with partners internationally and sharing UK expertise has not only a benefit of sharing best practice, but also delivers a soft power benefit for the UK. Through building collaborative relationships and investing in the development of education reform, professional and vocational skills, and expertise in inclusive practices in the arts, the British Council is building trust and showcasing UK expertise.

### **3 Recommendations**

- 3.1 We broadly agree with the commitments made at the Global Disability Summit and feel more could be done in terms of using enterprise training to provide routes to employment. The role of arts in promoting inclusion should also be recognised.
- 3.2 In order to meet its commitment to inclusive education for disabled people, DFID could leverage the British Council's expertise and experience in promoting inclusive pedagogies internationally.
- 3.3 Our experience is that the social model of disability is not well understood. More should be done to make the case for the social model, amplifying the voice agency and skills of disabled people, and ensure disabled people are actively involved in identifying and addressing barriers.