

## The impact of UK aid cuts on international education

### About us

The British & Foreign School Society (BFSS) is a grant giving organisation founded in 1808 by Christian social reformers to carry on the work of Joseph Lancaster, a pioneer of school and teacher education. Today we spend approximately £1m each year supporting education projects around the world. We know from our work with international charities the harmful impact of government aid cuts on children across the world.

The BFSS funds small to medium sized UK registered charities to run projects to improve access, quality and sustainability of education in marginalised and deprived communities. Our 52 international projects (costing BFSS £1.8m in total) are currently supporting 88,000 beneficiaries in the most marginalised and deprived communities around the world.

### UK Aid grants rescinded

In November 2020 the government announced that it would reduce its commitment to aid spending from 0.7% to 0.5% of GDP, and this was confirmed in a House of Commons vote on 13 July 2021. The impact on small and medium sized organisations has been devastating. Almost all of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) funding streams have been cut, with several pulled altogether, including UK Aid Direct and Small Charities Challenge Fund (SCCF) which exclusively support small and medium sized organisations.

BFSS recently became aware of how these cuts were being managed by the FCDO and the devastating impact they are having on 22 of our grant holders and their delivery of life-changing educational projects across the globe. The cuts are affecting 60% of our international grant holders. BFSS is not a campaigning charity, but on this occasion the society feels it is our civic duty to share the data we have gathered from our grant recipients on the manner in which the FCDO cuts have been implemented.

### Funding cuts to projects underway

The government had made a commitment of £221,000 to jointly fund 4 projects with the BFSS, and 18 other BFSS grant holders had over £3 million government funding promised for work related to our projects. The FCDO has withdrawn all of this funding, despite the fact it had been already committed.

There is a common theme amongst our charity partners. They were informed by FCDO that funding had been delayed for several months earlier this year before receiving an email in May 2021 to say that FCDO funding was being pulled altogether. Many have been given 90 days to terminate

projects that are already well underway, thus destroying delicate relationships built on the ground with local communities, politicians and decision-makers, not to mention the instant loss of experienced local staff delivering the projects and the harmful impact on the young people who would have benefitted.

Thousands of hours of planning and negotiations expended by these small charities has now been wasted. The loss of both project and core funding to these organisations comes at a time when the Covid pandemic is causing damage on a catastrophic scale to years of hard-won educational gains in some of the world's poorest nations.

## **Examples of the impact**

### ***1. Education to prevent conflict in Rwanda***

'A Partner in Education' run a school aimed at delivering education with a specific focus on preventing renewed conflict in Rwanda. They were expecting a £50,000 grant from FCDO as matched funding for a BFSS grant (£29,990) for an 18-month educational project to train 33 head teachers and principals; 132 in-service teacher and 3,000 trainee-teachers. 6,650 children in primary and secondary schools were to benefit during the first year, from education increasing their potential to become productive, active citizens and advocates for peace in Rwanda. The FCDO grant payment was delayed by several months and then cut in its entirety in May 2021.

A Partner in Education commented: "Our organisation has been more broadly affected by the cuts as FCDO has been a significant funder of our work. With funding no longer secured for 2021-2022, the effects on A Partner in Education could potentially be devastating."

### ***2. Boosting literacy in Ghana***

Teach 2 Teach International (T2T) had secured £49,270 from SCCF for a 2-year educational project in Ghana jointly funded by BFSS (£50,701) which was scheduled to start in May 2021. They planned to develop and broadcast a radio show for parents, headteachers and community leaders to increase participation in a region with low functional numeracy and literacy rates of 5% and 6% respectively; high pupil-teacher ratios (1:85); where 25-32% children were not attending primary school prior to COVID-19 closures, and provision for children with disabilities is particularly poor. 40 unemployed young people were to receive training to support their work as Community Volunteer Teachers in underperforming primary schools and additional training in communication and advocacy skills so that they could share their learning over the radio and beyond the school gates, reaching more people in more inaccessible communities. Founder and CEO of T2T was awarded the Point of Light Award by PM Boris Johnson in recognition of the valuable and impactful work T2T has delivered.

In May 2021, FCDO advised T2T that the SCCF funding had been withdrawn. The project cannot now be fully delivered and expanded into new areas as planned. As well as this award affecting the radio project, T2T was also notified that two other projects which had been shortlisted for SCCF funding were subsequently rejected when the remaining rounds of the SCCF funding programme were withdrawn by FCDO. The loss of this funding is devastating for an organisation with an average annual income of £230,000.

### ***3. Support for girls in Uganda***

Irise International was awarded £49,899 from the UK Aid Direct funding stream, towards a 3-year educational project in Uganda jointly funded by BFSS (£60,000). It planned to train and support 36 teachers across 9 schools to reach 5,850 girls through teaching and give 1,800 girls free menstrual products to stop them missing school or dropping out. The first payment was expected in April 2021 when the project started, but at the end of April 2021 the FCDO advised Irise that the entire funding stream had been withdrawn and there would be no payments.

### ***4. Hope for vulnerable young people***

SCCF was supporting Raising Futures Kenya by funding the salaries of teachers (£25,000 a year) at a vocational training centre where a BFSS teacher training project is based. Their three Seed of Hope vocational training centres (Muranga and Kitui Counties, Dagoretti slum in Nairobi) work with more than 250 vulnerable young people in Kenya each year (80% young women), most aged between 18 and 25 where high youth unemployment and poverty often result in limited/risky choices including early marriage, early pregnancy, transactional sex, drug abuse and criminal activity, causing trauma and poor mental health. 240 young people (80 a year) will benefit from the use of the Educational Business Hub in the 12 months after they graduate from their Seed of Hope training course. The project was expected to be adapted and expanded and run for another 2 years. This funding has been cancelled.

The charity commented: "As this isn't a new project and it's for teacher's salaries it hasn't been easy trying to find alternative funders. We are considering cutting the number of courses we offer in January 2022 if we can't secure the teacher's salaries. In terms of the impact on our organisation, for the last year we have only had one member of staff, the FCDO applications take around 7-8 days of staff time to create as they are so detailed, so having the last three funding rounds cancelled means we've wasted almost a month of staff resources creating the applications. The funding cuts will now make it even more competitive to secure international development funding as many more organisations will be reliant on the same pool of funders."

### **Call to restore vital support**

BFSS believes it is imperative to ensure small charities can continue to apply for FCDO support despite the withdrawal of the UK Aid Direct and Small Charities Challenge Fund funding streams.

BFSS also adds its backing to calls for the government to urgently reverse the cut or commit to reinstate aid spending of 0.7% as soon as possible, so that the most deprived and marginalised people around the world receive support.

BFSS, July 2021