

## **Burma (Myanmar) – The Education Reform Process**

Since the official dissolution of the ruling military junta in 2011, the government of Burma has launched an extensive programme of liberalisation and democratisation. An important part of this programme has been increasing internationalisation, which has led to many development agencies, national governments and universities bringing forward proposals to aid in the improvement of education in Burma in a variety of ways.

Education is one of Burma's main development priorities. Over the last two years, a number of initiatives have opened the debate on the role and the future of education in the country.

### **The Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR)**

The CESR was officially announced and launched in February 2012, with an aim to bring Myanmar's education system to be on a par with ASEAN and international standards. Its main objective is to develop a body of knowledge about the existing education system, in order to identify strengths and challenges and prioritise key areas for reform by collecting data, evaluating education policies and curriculum, learning from other countries, understanding education financing, and relating with different stakeholders in education.

The decision to initiate the CESR was undertaken to deepen socio-economic reform and further develop human resources in the country. This is in line with both the vision of the MoE – *“to create an education system that will generate a learning society capable of facing the challenges of the Knowledge Age”* – as well as the Ministry's motto – *“to build a modern developed nation through education”*. In order to meet such aspirations, access to quality education for all children has become a top priority for the Myanmar Government as a whole.

The CESR is led by the Myanmar Government, and also relies on the participation of numerous education partners and stakeholders, international as well as domestic. The British Council (as well as DFID) sits on the Working Group that oversees the whole of the CESR process. This body is made up of government and international development partners, including ADB, AusAID, JICA, Save the Children, UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank.

For specific analysis of different education sectors, the CESR is formed of five working groups, comprised of Myanmar government, as well as local and major international development partners (multilateral, bilateral, INGOs, NGOs). The five working groups cover:

1. Basic Education (including ECD and Secondary Education)
2. Technical and Vocational Education and Training
3. Higher Education
4. Non-formal Education
5. Policy, Legislation, and Financing

Phase 1 of the CESR was completed and a Rapid Assessment Report was circulated to partners in October 2013. Phase 2 of the Review, which focusses on in-depth sector analysis, was completed in February 2014 and we are waiting to receive translated copies of all the reports. We are working with DPs and the CESR members more widely in the drafting of ToRs, recommendations and practical measures moving forward and which will be taken at the end of Phase 3 (Costed Education Plan), in principle scheduled to be finalised in June 2014. There are questions about the ability to meet this deadline, especially in light of the creation of the Education Promotion Implementation Committee (EPIC) – see more about that below. It is now estimated that Phase 3 will be completed by the end of October 2014.

*Susana Galván, Director Education – updated on 20 May 2014*

## The Education Promotion Implementation Committee (EPIC)

At a CESR meeting held in October 2013, Dr Myo Myint (then Acting Minister of Education) outlined a key recent high-level development in the sector reform process. On 7 October 2013, HE Union President U Thein Sein addressed a Seminar on Education Reform, in which he emphasised that in order to be successful, reforms need to be practical, and guidance was given on a number of points, such as the need to create sustainable national education for development, sustain cultures and values of all national races, reach the level of international education systems, ensure that education supports economic development, and others.

To take these points forward, an Education Promotion Implementation Committee (EPIC) was established, led by U Tin Naing Thein (Union Minister for the President's Office), tasked to provide advice on the kind of reforms which can be done in as short a time as possible. The EPIC Committee, we were assured, was not to replace other Committees, but has direct access to government and to the Office of the President to enforce its work and create a *fast track* (or a number of *quick wins*) for reform.

This Committee has three components:

- **Task Force**, consisting of Deputy Ministers from 13 Ministries involved in education, supported by relevant DGs.
- **Advisory Group**, consisting of academics, retired faculty members, local experts
- **18 working groups** in specific areas, with two co-leads for each, one from Government, and one from the academic side.

The directive is that these new groups are to work alongside the CESR teams and processes, and that the CESR's Phase 1 Rapid Assessment Report recommendations and the recently completed research in Phase 2 will guide the work of the groups, and form the basis of Quick Wins, as well as longer term actions to accelerate the pace of reform. Key staff from CESR and EPIC staff as well as Development Partners, are meeting regularly to discuss progress. Coordination, however, has been fairly ad-hoc and informal and DPs see it as critical that this becomes much more formalised, well established and effective so that the two processes are joined up, and the research work carried out by the CESR is fully taken into account and not wasted, and that the CESR process is completed to the agreed standards and deadlines.

A key focus for EPIC is to develop a National Education Law, as an overarching framework for all sub-sectors (Higher Education, Basic Education, TVET, Private Education). This legislation is in development now, with a number of stakeholders and Development Partners involved in the consultation process, and is due to be presented to the Pyithu Hluttaw (Parliament) by June 2014 (delayed from the initial deadline of April 2014).

The plan now is that the CESR will present a 2014-16 two-year and a five-year Costed Sector Plan to be finalised at the end of Phase 3 (initially scheduled for June 2014 but likely to be delayed to October 2014). EPIC will be presenting a 2014-15 budget (which we haven't seen yet) and is developing policies, planning and laws based on initial findings of CESR. Their recommended and approved "Quick Wins" were supposed to be implemented from April 2014.

The situation is volatile and in constant flux. Four areas in constant discussion in order to provide strategic directions for the CESR and EPIC work going forward are:

- How the teams of both groups work together to avoid duplication and gaps;
- How their plans will be merged into one unified plan and incorporated into the Government's budget cycle;

*Susana Galván, Director Education – updated on 20 May 2014*

- The Technical Assistance needed in the areas of planning, costing, and scenario modelling;
- Clarification on specific Government plans post CESR (after October 2014?)

The assistance and input from the Development Partners with these issues is expected and seen as essential.

### **A new Minister of Education**

The former Minister of Education, Dr Mya Aye, passed away on 29 November 2013. He had been ill for quite some time, and Dr Myo Myint, Deputy Minister, acted on his behalf for a number of months.

The President's Office of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, announced on Friday 14 February the appointment of **Dr Khin Sann Yi** as the new Union Minister for Education. Dr Khin Sann Yi, formerly Deputy Minister of Planning and Economic Development, and prior to that Deputy Rector of the Yangon Institute of Economics, will be the second woman in history to serve as a Minister within the Myanmar Government.

Her nomination has been put forward Dr Kan Zaw, the Union Minister of National Planning and Economic Development, after the death of her predecessor Dr Mya Aye. The appointment was generally welcome, both in terms of increasing the number of women in senior government positions, as well for her experience and academic background.

Dr Khin Sann Yi was a tutor at a regional college from 1987 to 2012 and then Deputy Rector at the Yangon Institute of Economics, until she was appointed, in April 2012, to the post of Deputy Minister at the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Commerce, Accounting and Auditing, a Master's of Commerce in Trade and Marketing from Yangon Institute of Economics, and a Doctorate in Economics from the University of Göttingen in Germany.

As one would expect, there is already some debate about the suitability of her appointment, with some questioning her expertise beyond the pure academics (despite her Ministerial experience), and hence her ability to implement major public education policy and reform.

**Dr Myo Myint**, who was Acting Minister in the interim period between Dr Mya Aye's illness and demise and Dr Khin Sann Yi's appointment, theoretically returned to his previously held position of Deputy Minister of Education, although it is rumoured he will be moving to a different Ministry. Dr Myo Myint has been a good friend of the UK and of the British Council, and has attended a number of events we have organised, the most recent, the Education World Forum in London in January 2014.

### **The British Council's overall support to the reform process**

The British Council has been supporting the CESR since its formation, as one of the core Development Partners in the Joint Education Sector Working Group) and we are also in close liaison with the MoE in order to be able to support the EPIC process as well. So far, under the CESR, we have provided **consultancies** on three key areas:

- Language of instruction with specific reference to English (Phase 1)

- Assessing and making recommendations for English language learning materials in Myanmar (Phase 2)
- Reviewing the assessment system in basic education in Myanmar (Phase 3)

Two different technical specialists from the UK worked on these consultancies.

Apart from our support to the CESR and the provision of the specific consultancies mentioned, we are also closely supporting the review of the **Higher Education sector** (see chapter on Higher Education below).

At the same time, the **National Network for Education Reform** (linked to the opposition party – the National League for Democracy or NLD, with Aung San Suu Kyi as its Chair) has carried out its own consultation, and is making policy recommendations and working with Government as part of the wider consultation process taking part under the CESR and EPIC.

**In 2014**, we aim to continue to support the Education Reform process in these areas:

- **English language education and teacher training** – in addition to our work supporting English teachers across the country (both in state as well as in the non-formal and private sectors), this year we will be launching the **EfECT programme**. This is a 2-year programme, co-funded by the British Council and DFID, and in partnership with the VSO, where we will be placing two ELT teacher trainers at each of the existing Education Colleges and Institutes of Education in Burma.
- **Higher Education** – we will continue to support the reform of this sector, by working in partnership with the MoE, the institutions and other agencies (such as UNESCO). Plans in 2014 included securing UK participation at a major conference on consolidation organised by UNESCO earlier in the year, a Global Education Dialogue (as part of the East Asia series) hosted in Burma in July 2014 and a possible conference around Science collaboration and public-private partnerships (more information in the Higher Education chapter of this paper). We will also continue to support the Parliamentary Committees involved in HE reform, and UK institutions with the relevant expertise and with the desire to support capacity building of the HE sector and establish partnerships with Burmese institutions.
- **ICT in Education** – in partnership with Microsoft, we will be delivering a Policy Dialogue looking at use of ICT in the classroom and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills in September 2014, with a specific focus on Schools.
- **School Leadership and School Links** – we are exploring how we can bring the British Council and the UK's expertise to existing efforts in this area, with a pilot training programme for school leaders scheduled for September 2014. Consequently, we would also like to extend our successful Connecting Classroom global project to Burma.
- We will scope our involvement and support to the **Vocational Education & Skills** sector, with a specific focus on Skills gaps in the Cultural Sector, following some research conducted in Burma at the end of 2013.
- **Consultancies** – we will continue to provide UK expertise to support the reform process when appropriate and possible.

## **The British Council's support to the reform of the Higher Education sector**

The British Council, as part of our commitment to supporting the education reform agenda in Burma, mainly via the CESR and EPIC channels, has taken a particularly active role in helping with the revitalisation and reform of the Higher Education sector.

In addition to working with the MoE and the Development Partners as part of the CESR (and now also EPIC), we have also been actively supporting the **two parliamentary committees** which have been tasked to redraft the legislation for higher education and to revitalise Yangon University. Both these committees are chaired by **Daw Aung San Suu Kyi**.

In early May, a delegation representing each of the parliamentary Committees and led by Dr Myo Myint (then the MoE's Deputy Minister, and soon after Acting Minister, until the appointment of the new Minister of Education in February 2014) undertook a ten-day **study tour of British higher education bodies and institutions**. The tour culminated in a **Policy Dialogue – Policy Insights into Higher Education: Recommendations for Myanmar** – held in London and supported by the University of London, which explored the challenges of higher education reform. The report of the tour and the first Policy Dialogue is available here: <http://bit.ly/RQHcDp>

Following the May visit, the British Council organised and delivered **Empowering Higher Education – A Vision for Myanmar's Universities**, a **second Policy Dialogue** which took place in Naypyitaw on 29-30 June 2013. This second dialogue brought the initiatives described above together with an aim to deepen the consultation in the spirit of the Naypyitaw Accord.

*Empowering Higher Education*, organised by the British Council with support from ADB, AusAID and UNESCO, was set out to define a contemporary vision for the sector, based on national priorities. The outcomes of this meeting, which was attended by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Dr Myo Myint, a number of international speakers and consultants involved in the CESR and a wide range of Burmese stakeholders from the HE sector, will help to inform policy and planning as Burma continues to push ahead with its ambitions and efforts in education reform.

The report of the *Empowering Higher Education* Policy Dialogue is available here: <http://bit.ly/1p8hVQd>

The British Council in Burma has also supported participation of the then Deputy Minister Dr Myo Myint, the current Deputy Minister Dr Zaw Min Aung, and other senior officials from the MoE and other Ministries, and from public institutions, to attend some of our most important **regional and global Education events**, such as Going Global in Dubai in 2013, the Education World Forum in London in 2013 and in 2014, Going Global in Miami in 2014, or some of our East Asia Series Policy Dialogues in the region.

Earlier in 2014, we helped **UNESCO** to secure a UK speaker for a **conference/workshop looking at the experience of other countries in the consolidation of universities** (Yangon, 24-25 February 2014). Currently, plans are being made to consolidate 168 universities in Myanmar under 12 Ministries into approximately 20 autonomous National and Regional Universities. So University governance and University autonomy are areas of great interest for the development of the sector here. UNESCO is organising another workshop to look at issues around autonomy, funding, governance and quality assurance of Myanmar Universities at the end of May 2014, and the British Council will be invited to attend.

UNESCO have also committed to support us in the organisation of one of the **Global Education Dialogues under the East Asia series in Burma** on 4 and 5 July 2014, under the title **From**

*Susana Galván, Director Education – updated on 20 May 2014*

### ***national industry to regional player to global system - What is the role of the ASEAN University?***

We are also exploring the possibility of a **conference to look at private-public partnerships in Higher Education, especially around Science collaboration and R&D**. This might be done in partnership with the Royal Society and a number of private Oil & Gas companies.

We are currently working with organisations and institutions such as the Charles Wallace Trust, Oxford University, the Victoria and Albert Museum, Jardines, Prospect Burma and others to introduce a number of **scholarship and fellowship opportunities** for Burmese nationals for further studies and/or training at HE and other institutions in the UK.

We are also one of the British Council countries offering the **British Council's SIEM** (Strategic International Education Marketing) services, in an effort to support UK institutions' internationalisation, marketing and partnership goals in the country. This is a new endeavour for Burma, but we have had an increasing amount of interest from UK institutions and have observed increasing opportunities in this area. In March 2014, we organised and delivered our first Education UK Exhibition (recruitment fair) in Burma in more than seven years, with a very successful outcome both in terms of UK education providers participation, attendance numbers and quality of enquiries.

### **UK institutions' ongoing support to the HE sector reform, with the assistance of the British Council**

#### **Oxford University**

Oxford is uniquely placed to be involved in the current education reform process in Burma. As the alma mater of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (St Hugh's, PPE, 1964), unquestionably the most famous and respected citizen of Burma and a key political player in the country's new more liberal era, the University enjoys and unparalleled reputation, envied by American peers who also hope to play a role in the country.

Upon receiving an honorary Oxford degree in June 2012, Daw Suu personally challenged Oxford to find ways to support the development of Higher Education in Burma. The central University, St Hugh's, LMH and other departments and colleges, as well as the student body have taken up this challenge, creating a range of responses which have been advanced to varying degrees. Colleges, departments and individuals are designing their own projects, and there is a desire from Burma for Oxford to be involved in additional areas.

In 2012, Daw Suu specifically called for aid in restoring Yangon University, once Asia's leading higher education establishment, and for assistance in developing English, Law and Medicine teaching and research. More recently her representatives have suggested that assistance in the sciences would also be appreciated. Ministers from the current government of Burma suggested at the British Council and University of London's Policy Dialogue in London on 9 May 2013 that assistance in business/economics and science research was needed.

PVC Nick Rawlins paid two official visits to Yangon University in May and in November 2013, meeting vice-rectors, department heads and other professors. Following his visits and further discussion with the team at Yangon University, Oxford has drawn a proposal of assistance

programmes for education in Burma, in support of Yangon University, and to coordinate its implementation.

As part of this proposal, a number of senior staff from Yangon University travelled to Oxford in March 2014 for a three-week residential programme, which included training sessions on curriculum design, research programmes and student support services, as well as department-to-department discussions on specific areas of collaboration.

### **University of Manchester – eTekkatho Project**

After many years of isolation, there is an overwhelming demand for up-to-date digital educational resources in Burma. The eTekkatho project is an exciting collaboration between researchers from the University of Manchester and a network of Burmese universities, culminating in the creation and commitment to providing a new digital library freely available to students, teachers and researchers in Burma.

This first edition of the library covers resources relating to geography including physical geography, human geography, earth sciences and the environment, and the enabling subjects of mathematics, information literacy and English language. The content is selected to support university curricula in the partner universities and is selected and approved by at least two specialists.

The project was officially launched in the UK at the House of Lords, on 17 October 2013. The launch event shared the programme coordinators' experiences in setting up the digital library at six partner institutions in Burma during a period of rapid reform, and will set out the impact and future aims of the project. More information at [www.etekkatho.mimas.ac.uk](http://www.etekkatho.mimas.ac.uk)

Starting from June 2014, Manchester University will have a full-time coordinator for this programme based in Yangon, based at the British Council offices.

### **University of London – *Future Directions for Higher Education in Myanmar: Turning Policy into Action* Policy Dialogue (Yangon, 28 & 29 October 2013)**

This event in Yangon was the follow up to the Policy Dialogue organised by the British Council in May 2013 (supported by the UoL), which explored the challenges of higher education reform. This first Policy Dialogue was organised as part of a ten-day study tour of a delegation representing each of the parliamentary Committees (led by the MoE's Deputy Minister).

This high-level symposium built on some of the extensive work already undertaken and further investigated future directions for higher education in Burma, with Burmese and UK perspectives strongly featured. A key focus of the event was to consider practical measures and solutions that will support local reform in the sector.

Key areas addressed included dual degrees and institutional cooperation, science and research policy, educational partnerships, quality assurance, educational leadership and governance, and regulation. The programme sought to incorporate comparative experiences of institutions in other ASEAN countries. Led by the University of London International Programmes, the symposium also provided other UK HE institutions (see below) the opportunity to engage directly with senior Burmese stakeholders on these vital development issues, opening up partnerships to support both the aims of the parliamentary reform committee, and ultimately to help the sector reach ASEAN and international standards.

The University of London International Programmes also run a workshop on the subject of dual degrees and institutional cooperation, with special focus on quality assurance, leadership and regulation. The University of London operates a framework for institutional relationships that facilitates the offering of dual degrees and provides academic support and enhancement for the partner institution. The UoL already have such relationships across 40 countries with around 100 institutions.

**UK institutions involved:**

- University of London International Programmes
- British Council, Burma
- University of London Undergraduate Laws Programme
- Leadership Foundation for Higher Education
- Quality Assurance Agency, UK
- School of Oriental and African Studies
- Institute of Education
- University College London
- Institute for Development Studies
- Liverpool John Moores University
- University of Nottingham

A report of this event is available here: <http://bit.ly/1sO0UuX>

**Goldsmiths College, University of London**

Dr Richard Shannon, Lecturer in Radio Drama and Documentary and Musical Theatre Production at Goldsmiths College (University of London) organised a seminar in London in January 2014 on UK's collaboration with Burmese HE institutions in the delivery of courses in the subjects of arts, education and media.

Dr Shannon has worked with a number of Burmese artists, he is the writer of the play *The Lady of Burma*, and set up the Burmese Arts Festival at the Free Word Centre.

The British Council assisted with identifying suitable speakers for the seminar, and our Director, Kevin Mackenzie attended and spoke at the event as well. Goldsmiths have subsequently visited Burma and are exploring ways to support capacity building of arts education and the cultural sector, especially in the areas of film, photography, media and drama.

**Other Universities and UK institutions and organisations** are active here, looking at potential partnerships with Burmese institutions, and exploring ways to support the development of the sector here, and capacity building of institutions and their academics, in a number of areas. Universities such as Liverpool John Moores, Nottingham, Wolverhampton, SOAS, or institutions/organisations such as the V&A, the British Library, the British Museum, Turquoise Mountain Foundation and others, are already involved or in the process of exploring a number of initiatives, working closely with us.