



KPMG Impact Podcast

Celebrate the International Day of Education

Interview with Professor Stephen Parker AO. For (public) release on website Friday 22 January 2021

Welcome to our KPMG IMPACT podcast.

I am Ruth Lawrence, a Senior Executive with KPMG IMPACT (which is a global initiative designed to build a more sustainable and resilient future)

Before we begin our conversation today, I would like to acknowledge that many of us are meeting on land of our first nation's people.

I would like to pay my respects to Elders past, present, and emerging leaders and recognize their continuing connection to land, waters, and culture.

Today our podcast celebrates the International Day of Education declared by UNESCO. The third *International Day of Education* is on Sunday (24 January).

As could be expected this year, the theme in the midst of a global pandemic in 2021 is:

'Recover and Revitalize Education for the COVID-19 Generation'

Ruth:

Today I have great pleasure in talking with Professor Stephen Parker AO who is KPMG's global lead on Education and Skills.

Stephen, a good place to begin a discussion on education is the Sustainable Development Goals (the SDGs). One of the 17 SDGs focuses exclusively on Education – SDG 4 which is concerned with 'quality education'.

Ruth:

Can you tell us about some of the aspirations that are included under SDG4?

Stephen:

This particular goal is to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'.

It has 10 targets across all stages of learning; and the central themes include access to free primary and secondary education, equality of access, improving skills, eliminating discrimination and promoting global citizenship.

Ruth:

Some people may think of education as access to 'schooling' – why is education so important and what are some of its long-term impacts?

Stephen:

- Well, access to good quality schools is certainly vital, but if we are to lift more people out of poverty whilst at the same time preparing them for technological revolutions, we need to focus on the whole lifespan of learning.
- In saying this, it isn't guesswork. Since the middle of the last century, millions of people around the world were lifted out of poverty through education. One estimate is that within a space of 40 years the lives of 80 percent of the world's population were transformed through education [Surjit Bhalla, *The New Wealth of Nations*, 2018]. Nothing is ever finished, of course. Today, still, 258 million children and young people do not attend school. Less than 40 percent of girls in sub-Saharan Africa complete lower secondary school. Nevertheless, we do know that education is amongst the most effective drivers to end poverty.
- Unfortunately there is a real risk of us slipping backwards, partly because of emerging technologies for which many countries are unprepared, partly because of conflict, but partly because of the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has interrupted the education and training of some of the world's most vulnerable people.
- Education to shape the next generation of leaders is also important. The world needs leaders with knowledge, vision and values. Maybe some leadership qualities are innate, but many, if not all, are founded on strong and continuing education.

Ruth:

So given that lifelong learning is so important and that Education can lift people out of poverty, can you tell us more about some of the impacts of COVID-19 on Education that you have referred to?

Stephen:

The disruption has been pervasive; probably in every country in the world. It's estimated there has been disruption for 1.6b students in over 190 countries¹ through the closure of schools and other learning institutions. Unfortunately, the disruption has not been even, and it is likely that those who were already disadvantaged have been disadvantaged further; their disadvantage has been amplified.

One obvious reason for this is that the response from governments has been to go digital, which has been a good and necessary response. But all countries have their own digital divides, even highly developed ones like Australia, where I am based, which publishes a digital inclusion index every year, charting the inequalities of access and ability to use digital technologies.

Globally, therefore, the impact has been uneven.

- At least one third of the world's students do not have access to remote learning²; that is 500 million children and youth³.
- Students from low and lower middle income countries lost 4 months of schooling compared to 6 weeks in higher income countries⁴.
- The current crisis risks pushing 100–110 million people globally into extreme poverty (IMF, 2020).
- About 24 million students are at risk of not returning to education institutions in 2020⁵.

Ruth:

So there has been fundamental disruption and a degree of adaptation but the effects are uneven. Given these fundamental and pervasive impacts in the midst of COVID-19, what is needed?

Stephen:

Three priorities are outlined in a recent UNESCO report⁶:

1. *Leave no one behind* — we need direct and targeted support to vulnerable populations in order to mitigate massive numbers of dropouts, while international aid must prioritize countries most in need of support.

2. *Build skills for economic recovery* — We need to prepare for a new economy; equip people with the right skills for newly created jobs and evolving economic activity.
3. *Create smart investment in education and training* — Investment in education needs to be seen as human capital. Education budgets need to be protected and quarantined in the short term with increased investment for economic growth in the medium to long term.

Ruth:

These priorities sound like a good direction but implementation and what happens on the ground is really what is important: what are some of the levers that can be used to move us forward to achieve these aspirations?

Stephen:

- Developing **new partnerships**; UNESCO's Global Education Coalition has rallied 160 partners since its launch in March 2020. Public and private sectors, for-profits, not-for-profit and NGOs all need to collaborate. It's in all our interests, as well as being the right thing to do.
- The pandemic has sharpened our focus providing clarity of **policy objectives**, goals and trade-offs. With a seismic shift there has been opportunity for a re-examination of public health, economic and education policy and how these areas are all inter-related.
 - A problematic area is skills training, where many countries have vocational systems which were failing them in the old economy let alone the new economy;
 - Another area is gender dimensions which have been amplified under the COVID-19 crisis. The UNESCO Coalition is focusing on gender disparities in education working with country level actions to understand and addressing gender gaps.
- **Investment** has also been re-imagined. There is opportunity to consider the quantum of investment, the areas for investment, and the type of investment models:
 - We can consider what level of investment should be made into education to level the playing field, bring the next generation (both girls and boys) out of poverty; and lead our countries into adapted economic growth.
 - With policy trade-offs being a stark reality more than ever, specific areas for investment need to be able to demonstrate effectiveness and value for money.
 - Globally, different types of investment models have emerged with a mix of Public, private, donor and investor pending models.

¹ International Education Day 2021 <https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/education-day-2021-concept-note-en.pdf>

² Ibid

³ 2020 SDG report <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ UNESCO (2020) Education is not a cost, its investment for recovery <https://en.unesco.org/news/education-not-cost-its-investment-recovery>

⁶ Ibid

Ruth:

Sounds like there is a lot of activity and rapid change — Stephen can you tell us a bit more what role KPMG is playing?

Stephen:

- KPMG is one of the private sector founding members of UNESCO’s global education coalition to support countries in scaling up their best distance learning practices and reaching children and youth who are most at risk. (Other partners are Microsoft, GSMA, Weidong, Google, Facebook, Zoom and Coursera). KPMG firms will be donating pro bono resources and expertise to strengthen capacity building. It is a great example of KPMG living its purpose, building on its longstanding citizenship commitment to SDG 4 on ‘Education and Lifelong Learning’ and on its expertise as a learning provider for clients and our own people⁷.
- KPMG’s Global Board is committed to supporting SDG 4 ‘Quality Education and Lifelong Learning’ globally. We’re currently establishing quantified and measurable impact-focused targets that we will track, measure and report.
- We have numerous specific examples of commitment to this goal.
- In Australia, for the last 15 years we have been active in the Australian Business Community Network, aiming to empower students in disadvantaged schools through mentoring and the donation of laptops. The data shows a much higher Year 12 completion rate amongst the students we have helped.
- In India, KPMG’s Aspire program empowers disadvantaged girls who are also first-generation learners in their family. We support girls with technology and English classes, ‘soft’ skills development, career counselling, mentoring, educational visits, extra-curricular activities and funding for school and college fees.

- The UK KPMG firm has developed several education initiatives:
 - Providing academic support and mentoring to more than 45,000 young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to help prepare them for the world of work.
 - Assisting 54,000 people in 2020 to work towards improved numeracy through founding the National Numeracy Day.
 - Providing online classrooms and developing more than 10,000 online lessons to support children’s learning at home and guard against further disruption together (The Oak National Academy). In Oak’s first term, 20 million lessons were delivered to 4.7 million Oak pupils.

The list goes on around the world as KPMG member firms deliver programs targeted at and tailored for their own communities.

Whilst we can be proud of all this, no one should be complacent. The enormous challenges facing the world now, as a result of the pandemic yes, but also as a result of technological change which threatens to leave unprepared countries a long way behind, can only be addressed by multi-pronged strategies with education at its core. KPMG will continue to play its part.

Ruth:

My guest today has been Professor Stephen Parker AO discussing the third International Day of Education — Thank you Professor Parker.

Thank you for listening, and take some time to consider International Day of Education and how we can work together towards quality education in your country.

⁷ Global Education coalition. <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/global-education-coalition.html>