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Mr. John Fallon
Chief Executive Officer
PEARSON
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Brussels, 7 April 2016

Dear John,

The adoption of the UN Sustainable Goals (SDGs), and in particular the adoption of SDG 4, to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, and related Targets, represents a great achievement by the international education community.

However, Education International, like many others, is very concerned by the threat that the growing commercialization and privatization in and of education will pose to its realization. As the global voice of the teaching profession and of other education workers, Education International is very vocal in its criticism of governments which abrogate their obligation to properly and adequately fund quality free public education for all and which in too many instances are allowing or indeed facilitating and encouraging the growth of commercialization and privatization of education. We are equally critical of the growing influence and negative impact that global education corporations are having on the provision of quality education for all.

As one of the leading global education corporations, Pearson is different from most others. It is becoming the subject of increasing interest, scrutiny and criticism by Education International affiliates in the Global North and South including the USA, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, India, the Philippines, Brazil and Colombia - to name but a few. Similarly, serious concern and criticism is being voiced by leading academics and researchers.

Whether it relates to the sale and provision of for-profit education and education services, such as standardized testing, curricula and teacher evaluation tools or support for the introduction and expansion of Low Fee For-Profit Schools, through lobbying and PR efforts, Pearson is exerting great influence over policymaking and policymakers in many countries. Of particular concern in these developments is how many aspects of education governance are being privatized, and how education systems are being reshaped and informed by private, commercial, rather than public, interests. The respected academics Jünemann and Ball note: "as Pearson is contributing to the global education policy debate, it is constructing the education policy problems that will then generate a market for its products and services in the form of the solutions. Pearson is involved both in seeking to influence the education policy environment, the way that policy 'solutions' are conceived, and, at the same time, creating new market niches that its constantly adapting and transforming business can then address and respond to with new 'products'."

On one level, this is not surprising. As a listed company, Pearson's primary responsibility is to its shareholders.

That said, it may explain why many would argue that there is a conflict of interest when it comes to the modus operandi of Pearson. It also may explain why there are some serious contradictions in public positions taken by Pearson.



An example of these contradictions comes in the form of Pearson's support in the Global South for the introduction and expansion of low-fee for-profit private schools. Apart from the fact that such chains are hardly affordable to the poor and contribute to deepening inequality and segregation in the provision of schooling and society, these schools employ underqualified and/or unqualified staff delivering scripted "lessons". Yet, Pearson seeks to position itself as a supporter of the 'quality teachers' agenda in the Global North.

EI is of the view that this kind of profit-making in education undermines the right of all students to free quality education, creates and entrenches inequalities in education, undermines the working conditions and rights of teachers whilst also contributing to the revisualization and de-professionalization of teachers, and erodes democratic decision-making and public accountability in relation to education governance. These developments constitute one of the greatest threats to education as a public good and the achievement of inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

The issues I have referred to above are the subject of our ***Pearson Stakeholder Report***, prepared at the request of our affiliates, which I attach hereto. It concludes, *Pearson needs the conviction to stand up and truly invest in its claims that it is a socially responsible business committed to empowering all lives through learning. If this were true, Pearson would be calling on all governments throughout the world to invest in public education. It would truly believe that schools should not be used as a marketplace for commercial self-interest. And, it would promote the principles of educational access and equity for all young people and protect the democratic rights of teachers and students.*

I am certain that you share our view that the achievement of quality education for all is a shared responsibility.

Kind regards,

Fred van Leeuwen,
General Secretary

ANNEX: 1