

Cultivating peace through education

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In a world marred by conflict and division, education emerges as a beacon of hope to instil empathy and cultivate a society capable of sustaining peace. Engaging with disciplines such as economics, political science, and international relations empowers the youth to advocate for ethical governance, promotes

and widely taught social sciences, teaches resource allocation, trade, and development. Students develop analytical skills and learn to identify systemic injustice, formulate policies that promote inclusive growth, and bridge socioeconomic divides that often fuel conflict. Armed with this understanding, future leaders can help build economies that are sustainable and serve the needs of all, not just the

They learn to decipher historical enmities and craft diplomatic solutions that prioritise cooperation and mutual respect rather than confrontation and violence. Studying this discipline paves the way for the youth to become future ambassadors of peace who foster dialogue, overcome cultural differences, and masterfully negotiate a future that benefits all.

Institutes of higher education play a critical role in training the youth to promote peace. UCSI University, a leading institution in Malaysia, recognises the importance of addressing global challenges through specialised courses. "The programmes we offer are directly related to building economies in Bangladesh. Our students are encouraged to explore these themes through interdisciplinary studies, class projects, and community engagements through the student affairs and alumni in various clubs and societies. This approach ensures graduates have a holistic understanding of societal challenges and possess the skills necessary to contribute positively to their communities," said the UCSI Bangladesh Branch Administration.

The key to building a more empathetic society is not just academics. School and university communities, with their diverse array

Azneef Chowdhury, Vice President of the Chittagong Grammar School MUN club, said, "At MUNs, you are exposed to ideas from delegates of varying experience levels, so you get to process different perspectives whilst still having to reasonably uphold your own."

He also added, "MUNs are realistic to a certain extent, but they're also simulations, and that shows. As a delegate, you only have to deal with one side of the agenda, and you don't have the overwhelming pressure that real diplomats do when situations get to their worst."

Likewise, debate clubs provide forums for the youth to articulate their ideas, challenge assumptions, and defend their perspective with logic and fervour. By engaging in respectful discourse, students acquire critical thinking skills, learn to build compelling arguments, and instantly brainstorm responses, all important skills for navigating the complexities of the globalised world.

"Debating might be one of the best ways to develop critical thinking and diversify your perspective. In debates, sometimes you have to support a side you don't agree with. For example, if you are a left-leaning person, you might sometimes have to defend conservative

come up," he added.

As one of the most prestigious and challenging ECAs out there, there are numerous avenues to participate. Many schools have debating clubs and often have in-house coaches to train those looking to pursue competitive debating at the national or international stage through the World Schools Debating Championships (WSDC) or the World Universities Debating Championship (WUDC).

Robiah shed light on how to get started with debating. "One of the best ways to get into debating is through your institution's debating club. In Bangladesh, most of the tournaments aren't open, so you need to be in a school club. There are a few open tournaments on the international stage, but the vast majority of them are institutional. There are tons of YouTube videos by the best debaters in the world, and you can improve your skills by watching them."

It is also important to venture out of institutions and into the real world. Participating in community service and local initiatives that combat social issues instils empathy and provides a real-world perspective into pressing challenges. UCSI University Bangladesh Branch Campus has taken the steps to promote just that. The UCSI Bangladesh Branch Administration said, "We are deeply committed to engaging with local communities and addressing social issues. Our plans and initiatives include partnering with local NGOs and community organisations to develop impactful projects. These projects address social challenges like healthcare accessibility, education, and environmental sustainability. Through ongoing awareness, our students and faculty will have the opportunity to participate in these initiatives, whether physically or in hybrid mode, with other UCSI campuses, applying their knowledge and skills to make a meaningful difference in the lives of individuals in Bangladesh."

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of extracurricular activities (ECAs), programmes, and workshops can provide the opportunity to cultivate the skills and values essential to becoming global citizens.

Model United Nations (MUN) conferences transform classrooms into miniature world assemblies, where students turn into diplomats. Through grappling with global challenges, they hone their negotiation and conflict resolution skills.

arguments such as trade protectionism, which goes against leftist globalism. If you don't have an open mind and make yourself temporarily believe that the argument is good, you cannot convince the judge either," explained Robiah Arefin, a former Team Bangladesh debater and current debate coach of Mastermind School and Excel Academy.

"Debating also forces you to learn a lot more, because there are an unlimited number of topics that can

transparency, and challenges systems that perpetuate inequality — the foundations for a more peaceful society.

While studying these subjects at the school level provides the necessary foundations for further study, it broadens the mind to embrace diversity and foster cultural sensitivity. By exploring different countries' cultures and historical backgrounds, students shed ethnocentric biases and begin to see the world through varied perspectives. They understand power and privilege and learn to navigate the ethical minefields of human interaction. This journey fosters empathy, dismantles stereotypes and equips them with the tools necessary to navigate an increasingly interconnected world.

Economics, one of the most popular

privileged few.

Political Science, on the other hand, is not just about political theory. The discipline provides students with the toolkit to analyse power structures, historical conflicts, and the root causes of tension. They learn to champion democratic values, analyse the impact of policies on different groups, and advocate for fair and transparent governance.

International Relations is also an increasingly lucrative undergraduate and graduate degree of choice for many. With the world becoming more globalised by the day, a discipline to navigate the complex web of global interactions is essential. Through subject areas such as diplomacy, foreign policy, and conflict resolution, students learn to examine the political and cultural intricacies of the world.



Towards a peaceful and prosperous world

Education is an essential need, a fundamental human right, and has the power to set nations on the path to prosperity.

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed January 24 as the International Day of Education in celebration of the role of education in peace and development.

At the British Council, our vision is to support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding, and trust between people in the UK and Bangladesh. One of our major programme areas in Bangladesh is our work in higher education. Through our long-standing partnership with the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh, the British Council is committed to supporting the development of the higher education sector in Bangladesh.

GOING GLOBAL CONFERENCE 2023

Our landmark higher education event, 'Going Global Conference', took place last year in the Edinburgh International Conference Centre, Scotland, from November 20 to 22 with the theme "Towards sustainable, scalable and equitable partnerships in tertiary education".

It has long been recognised that tertiary education can contribute to individuals achieving their personal aspirations, to national wealth and prosperity and to tackling shared global challenges such as achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Nevertheless, most countries struggle with optimising their higher and further education systems for these purposes. Demand has risen and fair access is still an aspiration in most systems with entrenched disadvantage felt by lower socio-economic groups, women, disabled learners or students from certain ethnic groups or communities. At the Going Global Conference, international leaders, experts, and policymakers in higher education joined from different countries for a comprehensive exploration of many of these topics. From Bangladesh, a group of six delegates joined the conference, including Dr Biswajit Chanda, a member of the University Grant Commission (UGC); Prof. Dr Mesbahuddin Ahmed, Chairman of Bangladesh Accreditation Council; Prof. Dr Md Golam Shabbir Sattar, Vice Chancellor of Rajshahi University; Dr Ferdous Zaman, Secretary, UGC; Mohammad Maksudur Rahman Bhuiyan, Director, UGC and Syed Rashed Al Zayed, Senior Economist, The World Bank.

The presence of the Bangladeshi delegation added a unique dimension to the conference, as educators, policymakers, and representatives from the country actively participated in conversations that explored the future landscape of higher education on a global scale.

At the conference, different topics were discussed, including the need for a new



paradigm for lifelong learning, more work-based learning, integration of technical and vocational training, the role of industry in curriculum design, the need to produce job creators and jobseekers, the use of AI from the perspective of students and researchers; disability inclusion; women participation in terms of career advancement; and transnational education. The conference was successful in bringing together a joint agreement on some of the key issues that the sector faces and solutions on how to tackle them. The key members of the delegation that attended the conference share their reflections on their participation at the conference below.

Prof. Dr Biswajit Chanda, Member, University Grants Commission of Bangladesh

"Overall, the UGC Bangladesh team found the Going Global Conference 2023 very useful and effective. Besides resourceful discourses in the conference sessions, we had some important meetings with Advance HE, UK ENIC, Eccstis, QAA, and other education teams from South Asia. These meetings clearly demonstrated how the British Council works with UK-based HE sector-focused organisations to support the reform initiatives in the HE systems in other



countries, as well as how the British Council facilitates system-to-system partnerships between the host country and the UK.

The above-mentioned meetings have certainly shown us how we, UGC Bangladesh, can widen our partnership with the British Council to make positive and impactful changes in multiple priority areas of higher education in Bangladesh. The discussions of some speakers at the conference have confirmed how India, Egypt, and other countries have made significant progress in their respective HE sectors.

I believe UGC Bangladesh and the British Council might work together on several areas, including Quality Assurance and Standards, Teaching and Research Excellence, Internationalisation of HE, and so forth."

Prof. Dr Mesbahuddin Ahmed, Chairman, Bangladesh Accreditation Council

"I was a part of the Going Global Conference and had the opportunity to share my experience with several tertiary education leaders from different countries. The conference provided a strategic forum to share knowledge and build a global network to shape the future of tertiary education across the world. This will enlighten minds and help provide solutions to global challenges. Overall, it



was a very productive and useful conference."

Prof. Dr Md Golam Shabbir Sattar, Vice Chancellor, University of Rajshahi

"I would like to convey my heartfelt thanks to the British Council for choosing me to represent Bangladesh and enabling me to join such an esteemed academic programme. It was a wonderful knowledge-sharing experience which has enriched my professional as well as academic career. As the vice chancellor of Rajshahi University, this event was a unique opportunity to understand more about contemporary education around the world.

The programme focused on fostering international dialogue, sharing innovative practices, and addressing key challenges within higher education. The Bangladeshi government has also taken steps to increase access to tertiary education, particularly for women and disadvantaged groups. Despite these developments, tertiary education in Bangladesh faces several challenges. One of the main issues is the quality of education. Many institutions lack adequate facilities, resources, and qualified faculty, which affects the quality of education. Another challenge is the low enrolment rate in tertiary education, particularly among women and disadvantaged groups. The cost of education is very negligible in comparison to other



countries of the world but is also a significant barrier, as many students cannot afford to pay for higher education. We must think about how we can offer higher education to everyone who has the potential.

On my return from the conference, I called upon our deans, academic heads, and the director of the Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) to address these issues. Now, we are preparing to work in several areas, including how to enhance the possibilities and scope of student employability and work on transnational education."

Dr Ferdous Zaman, Secretary, University Grants Commission of Bangladesh

"As we mark the International Day of Education with its focus on education for peace and development, I look back with fondness at my experience at the Going Global 2023 conference.

The conference served as a beacon for fostering international collaboration in addressing critical challenges within the realm of education. Emphasising the imperative for joint efforts among institutions and nations, the conference underscored the significance of a united front in overcoming global educational hurdles. A pivotal theme throughout the event was the commitment to inclusivity and the promotion of equitable access to high-quality tertiary education worldwide. Exploring the cutting-edge landscape of education, the conference delved into emerging trends and innovations, including discussions on online learning, artificial intelligence, and micro-credentials.

Serving as a nexus for international education leaders, the conference provided a valuable platform for networking and knowledge-sharing, promoting cross-cultural exchange of ideas and fostering collaboration among institutions from diverse countries. The culmination of this collaborative spirit resulted in the formulation of the "Edinburgh Declaration", outlining a shared vision for the future of international education with a focus on sustainability, equity, and innovative partnerships. The conference also showcased successful case studies and presentations, offering tangible examples for institutions to draw inspiration from. Additionally, the launch of initiatives such as the "Going Global Future Leaders Network" demonstrated the conference's commitment to supporting emerging leaders in the field of international education, ensuring a dynamic and forward-looking future for the sector."

