

**John Fallon, CEO
Pearson Board**

The undersigned are deeply concerned that in an effort to expand and increase profits, Pearson PLC is turning its back on free public education for all. The company's activities around the world indicate its intention to commercialise and privatise education at all levels. From fuelling the obsessive testing regimes that are the backbone of the "test and punish" efforts in the global north, to supporting the predatory, "low-fee" for-profit private schools in the global south, Pearson's brand has become synonymous with profiteering and the destruction of public education.

Pearson's efforts in the global south to make education a commodity to be bought and sold is a serious threat to democracy and will ultimately increase segregation and marginalisation. Access to education is a fundamental human right and must not be based on a family's ability to pay. By supporting the expansion of low-fee private schooling and other competitive practices, Pearson is essentially ensuring that a large number of the world's most vulnerable children have no hope of receiving free, quality education. As reported by Kishore Singh, the United Nations' special rapporteur on the right to education, to the U.N. General Assembly in September 2014, "States should put an end to market-driven education reforms that provide subsidies to private education. They should not allow or promote low-cost private schools and the provision of school vouchers, nor should they allow for-profit institutions in education."

In Africa, low-fee private schools maximize profits by exploiting parents' desire for a better future for their children. In Kenya, Bridge International Academies, with support from Pearson, uses classroom scripts, very large classes and poorly prepared teachers to control costs and ensure profits. The Omega Schools in Ghana operate on a "pay as you learn" system in which parents must pay approximately US\$0.65 per day per child for school. This means low-income families in Ghana have to expend 25-40 per cent of their income on daily fees to send one child to an Omega School. Like the Bridge schools in Kenya, a principle strategy for increasing profit margins has been to employ unqualified and poorly trained teachers and pay them very low wages. Omega teachers earn roughly \$3 per day, which is approximately 15-20 per cent of a teacher's earnings in the public sector in Ghana. In South Africa, Pearson is exacerbating existing inequalities using business strategies that expand privatised education. This effort includes a network of primary schools called SPARK, monopolising school publishing, privatisation of post-schooling institutions and the training of teachers for profit. These practices will destroy public education and lead to more hardships for the most vulnerable and must be stopped.

In the global north, high-stakes testing actively supported by Pearson is out of control and now threatens the basic tenets of democracy and free speech. The most recent example is Pearson's clandestine efforts to monitor the social media accounts of parents, teachers and even students. We understand the need to protect intellectual property, but why were these efforts done in secrecy and not announced prior to testing? The American media recounted the incident as spying on children, which is just another in a long line of efforts by Pearson and its partners to suppress open discussion on the merits of high-stakes testing in order to protect profits at all costs.

In the United Kingdom, Pearson-owned companies include Edexcel, the only one of the UK's big three exam bodies to be run for profit. In addition to marking and certifying GCSE, AS/A Level and vocational exams, the company administers and marks Key Stage 2 SATs tests taken by pupils aged 11. Children in the United Kingdom are among the most tested in the world, and the World Health Organization has found that 11 and 16-year-olds in England feel more pressured by their schoolwork than in the vast majority of European countries. Many teachers harbour growing concerns about the impact on children of standardised testing and the commercialisation of education. They feel that companies should not be allowed to profit from a testing regime that is narrowing children's educational experience and contributing to high levels of stress, anxiety and disaffection among children and young people.

We call on Pearson to reverse its position and publicly support free public education for all children. In addition, Pearson should lead the private education industry by adopting and adhering to stringent, ethical and transparent business standards that are designed to support the work of educators and ensure equity-driven educational opportunities for all.

We look forward to Pearson's reply to these and other issues related to the company's efforts to privatise and commercialise public education around the world. We ask that the board move quickly to address these serious and emerging threats to its brand, business model and ability to generate long-term value for shareholders.

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