

## The Syrian Curriculum and Certification Initiative



The last discussion evening of the 2014-2015 year was held on June 8 at Gresham's College. The speaker was Andrea Charman from Equilearn who gave a presentation on the Syrian Curriculum and Certification Initiative (SCCI) formerly known as the Syrian Virtual School (SVC). She was joined with some of her colleagues from Equilearn who contributed to the discussion and the questions asked by the audience.

As the Syrian crisis enters its fifth year, the education of young people affected by the on-going war has still not been addressed satisfactorily by world agencies and other key players. The 5 host countries for the refugees, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt are finding it difficult to cope with the education needs of the numbers of children as refugees. There are language and cultural differences in the host countries for the Syrian refugees in addition to the trauma of displacement from their homes. The Syrian refugee population in the 5 host countries numbered four million by the end of 2014 of whom 1.1 million are children. 7 out of 10 children in the host countries are not attending school. These figures do not include those who have been displaced within the Syrian territories. An estimated 4.46 million children have been affected in Syria itself with 2.26 million children out of school.

The United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) sums up the crisis caused by the war in Syria as 'a disgraceful humanitarian calamity with suffering and displacement unparalleled in recent history' Equilearn have undertaken a feasibility study for UNICEF which started as a six week project and has expanded to a six month study. The aim is to develop a whole of Syria solution. Parents who are opposed to the Assad regime as well as those who support it want a solution which is Syrian based and accredited by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Syria.

The SCCI grew out of plans to develop an SVC announced in a decree in 2013 by President Assad. A Syrian MoE accredited curriculum would be offered electronically with teacher learning support and exit point examinations offered in Community Learning Centres (CLC). The SCCI uses a 5 component structure: Policy Legal

Framework; Platform and Content; Management Structures; Regional Direction and Coordination; Operationalisation and Implementation. The aim is to deliver 4 core politically neutral subjects (Arabic, English, Mathematics, Science) to students in Grades 1 to 12 in a blended learning format.

The feasibility study looked at critical strands, from policy issues in the different countries concerned to the technological challenges and pedagogical model. Practical issues such as secure student registration, proctored examination procedures, accreditation and certification challenges. A business plan was produced with indicative costs. The proposed solution puts the United Nations (UN) at the centre of the model with a supervisory body drawn from world agencies and host countries. The system will be a cloud based service model and use simple hardware. Mobile CLCs are designed to take the school to the children in need. The risk of terrorism in the region is real but unlikely to cause major issues because the content is cloud based. The Syrian cultural heritage is reinforced by the use of Syrian images throughout the learning programme. The model offers learning to Syrian children but also to local host country students at the same time (taking an inclusive approach) through the provision of a Mena Arabic curriculum in the 4 core subjects, available to all. The technologically- enabled digitised approach supports individual child-centred learning. With teacher support children can progress at a rate suitable for them and will help students, who have lost several years of schooling, progress. A 6 module accredited CPD learning and development programme for teachers is included in the model.

The next stage is to find the appropriate funding and the system is still to be implemented. However, the need to find a solution in this region for the education of young people is important. It has the potential of a game-changing model.

Martin Gaskell, Chairman of Education Committee concluded the evening with thanks to Andrea Charman and her colleagues.