

Transformational education

INTERVIEW WITH HE MARÍA FERNANDA CAMPO SAAVEDRA

MINISTER OF NATIONAL EDUCATION, COLOMBIA



MARÍA FERNANDA CAMPO SAAVEDRA graduated as an Industrial Engineer from Los Andes University, and has a Master of Science degree in Finance from the American University. She has worked in banking, and was Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1998/99. She became the first woman Chief Executive of the Chamber of Commerce of Bogotá. She developed with the Bogotá City Hall the programme “Bogotá Emprende”, which promotes entrepreneurship culture and contributes to the generation of employment. Through this centre, more than a million entrepreneurs sprung up in four years.

British Council Colombia signs an agreement with the Ministry of National Education in the presence of the Minister and Jeremy Brown MP

What are the current priorities for your Ministry?

The current priorities for the Ministry of Education are the development of the quality of education in the country, and to develop an education of quality that produces better human beings, citizens with ethical values, competitive, and respectful for public matters, who practice human rights and wish to live in peace.

The Ministry has many programs that are running and is taking action in education for early childhood, elementary, secondary and higher education.

The integral education in early childhood is one of the main programs in our Education Policy. The transformation in the Quality of Education is one of the main programs in elementary and secondary education that we are developing in the country's different regions. Also, higher education reform is one of the priorities for the Government in the field of education currently.

What progress is being made in extending the period of compulsory education, and its reach?

The Law 115 of 1994 in its article 11, incorporated preschool education as a compulsory level in formal education, to decrease the number of children that were entering primary schools directly, and to decrease the repetition rate in elementary school as well as improving the quality of education.

As a result of this, between 1998 and 2008 the repetition rate in elementary schools decreased by 2.8 per cent, from 6.4 per cent in 1996 to 3.6 per cent in 2008, which is represents a significant achievement.

Also, students have alternative activities to make good use of their free time as a complement to their education, through the strategy of Complementary Scholar Days, which, in cooperation with the voluntary and private sectors, looks for the incorporation of recreational, sport and cultural activities.

During 2011, this strategy allowed 635,000 children to benefit from this programme, and resulted in the extension of the number of hours of attendance in schools. The Ministry is also developing a policy within the extended school day to concentrate on the compulsory knowledge areas with an emphasis on Maths, Language and Bilingualism, according to the Law of the National Development Plan.

With the extended programs of the school day it is expected to strengthen knowledge capabilities and the integral, physical, cognitive, social and emotional development of students, using the human, technological and infrastructure resources provided.

How do you assess the exchange of higher education students with the United Kingdom?

For the National Government, one of the priorities is to promote the internationalisation of higher education in Colombia, and in this respect the United Kingdom is one of the priority nations in this field. From the Ministry we have been strengthening cooperation through academic mobility, the development of programs in master's degrees and doctorates; the development of investigation projects through university networks and the internationalisation of the curriculum through postgraduate and cooperative qualifications, especially in doctorates.



In this way, we've reached significant goals, such as the visit, from June 23rd to the 25th this year in Bogotá, of a delegation of United Kingdom university delegates (Universities of Southampton, Leicester and Swansea and the Brunel University) to hold talks with delegates of six accredited universities in Colombia (the National, Sabana, La Salle, Rosario, Los Andes and Javeriana Universities) advancing the educational cooperation between institutes, with the intention of establishing academic mobility processes.

Also, last May, the Ministry of Education subscribed to a Memorandum of Understanding of Cooperation in respect of Education with the Government of the United Kingdom. With this instrument, we are looking for the expansion of academic mobility between both countries, mobility that, to this day, has allowed the qualification of Colombian students in the UK in areas such as Innovation, Science and Technology, and this means for Colombia a qualified human capital capable of promoting the investigation and innovation process.

How do you assess the progress of 'Colombia Bilingual', and the contribution made by the British Council in education?

The National Ministry of Education established the National Program of Bilingualism towards the end of 2004 and since its beginning, the role of the British Council has been fundamental in the formulation of education policies and paths, directed towards the teaching and learning of English in the country. In its advisory role, it has achieved, among others, the coordination of the next macro-strategies:

- Design of the study of the base line to establish the progress in English teaching and learning in the country (2005).
- Development of the *Foreign Language Basic Standards: English* (2006).
- Structuring of the evaluation project to line up with the English component in the Icfes state exam with Cambridge ESOL Examinations (2007-2008).
- Development of teacher training in language and methodology (since 2005).
- On-line content offering for teachers and students of elementary and secondary education.
- Development of the outline of the strengthening of English Teaching programs.
- Development of the outline of the strengthening of English components in the tourism programs in technical and technological institutes.

What is the track-record of British education consultants in Colombia? Which aspects of education provide opportunities for further trade and development?

The British Council has been one of the Ministry's main allies in the process of educational policy design, formulation and implementation that looks for a consolidation of Colombia as a bilingual country. Since 2004, the joint work between the National Government, especially the Ministry of Education, and the British Council and its advisory team has assisted in the strengthening of the Ministry technical team, and the design, formulation and implementation of educational policy destined to promote the learning of the English language.

As a result of this joint work, Colombia has consolidated some clear action lines to identify the educational needs of Colombian teachers in the bilingual field. Additionally, training plans were drawn up to fulfil these needs, and monitoring mechanisms were designed and implemented for the teaching and learning processes of English. Also, the country has defined English standards in elementary and secondary education and implemented an evaluation system that certifies the efficiency level of teachers and students in their command of the English language, that relates to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

These activities have allowed Colombia to make progress in our integration with world structures of education, through policies that enable access to the international education community at the appropriate levels. E

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School children in Florida Valle, Colombia