Global Learning and Educating for Global Social Justice

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A 21st century education system must equip children and young people with the knowledge, skills and values to understand and engage with today's global challenges. And the Prime Minister, Andy Burnham, has talked about bringing about a sense of hope. So, is the education system doing enough to ensure children and young people have a sense of hope that enables them to engage with today's global challenges?

Evidence in recent years suggests that many children and young people feel anxious about their futures and the state of the world, be it global change, the number of conflicts, climate breakdown or increased inequalities.

As one young person has stated:

> *"I don't want to die, but I don't want to live in a world that doesn't care for children and animals…It's different for young people - for us, the destruction of the planet is personal."*[1]

What many young people are asking is where is the fairness, the sense of caring in the world and the concern about challenging climate change and global inequalities?[2]

With the rise of extreme nationalism and criticisms of equality and diversity policies, it is imperative that all schools promote inclusion, racial equality, the value of broadening horizons and are encouraged to have a vision of global citizenship and hope.

Terms such as global learning and global citizenship education have become part of the life of many schools in England over the past twenty years. In 2005 the DFE produced a curriculum guidance document including the following themes: global citizenship, diversity, human rights, social justice, conflict resolution, values and perceptions, interdependence and sustainable development.[3]

From 2012 to 2018 the UK government funded a major programme in England called the Global Learning Programme which engaged over 8000 schools.[4] Today a diverse range of organisations from professional bodies, NGOs, teaching unions and the community organisations under the umbrella of the Global Learning Network continue to provide a wealth of expertise including planning advice, deeper curriculum engagement, professional development, and resources for teachers.

In 2025 over 40 organisations came together to produce *The Case for Global Learning* calling on the UK government to develop a consistent strategy that embeds global learning and global citizenship themes within all aspects of children's education. This document includes evidence of the contribution of global learning and global citizenship makes to raising standards within schools.[5]

There is an international consensus shown through the Sustainable Development Goals and the UNESCO 2023 Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development that all children and young people have not only a right to learn about global issues but that it is recognised as a core entitlement within all forms of learning. [6]

Within Europe over fifty national education ministries have supported the Global Education to 2050 initiative. This document states that education should enable:

> *People (of all ages) to reflect critically on the world and their place within it; to open their eyes to the reality of the world at local and global levels. It empowers people to understand, imagine, hope and act to bring a world of social and climate justice, peace, solidarity, equity and equality, planetary*

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[1] Harrabin, R (2021) 'Climate Change: Young people very worried -survey', *BBC News*, 14 September, available: **https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-58549373** (accessed 20 May 2025).

[2] Chaaraoui, L (2023) 'Young People are Worried About Climate Change, and Rightfully So', *Harvard Political Review*, available: **https://harvardpolitics.com/youth-climate-worries/.** See also Childline (n.d.) 'Worries About the World', available: **https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/anxiety-stress-panic/worries-about-the-world/**

[3] DFE/DFID (2005) Developing a Global Dimension to the School Curriculum, London, DFE

[4] Hunt,F. (2020) Characteristics of a Global Learning School, in D.Bourn (ed.) The Bloomsbury Handbook of Global Education and Learning, London, Bloomsbury,342 -55

[5] https://www.thegloballearningnetwork.org/the-case/the-case-for-global-learning/

[6] https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-education-peace-and-human-rights-international-understanding-cooperation-fundamental

sustainability, and international understanding. It involves respect for human rights and diversity, inclusion and a decent life for all, now and in the future.[7]

In February 2026, the International Development Select Committee further recognised the need to broaden young people's horizons, encouraged support for the Sustainable Developments Goals and recommended the promotion of global citizenship education within schools.[8] This recommendation by parliamentarians has prompted our call to action.

Many teachers and schools continue to support global learning and global citizenship themes, which promote a sense of fairness, empathy and social justice. But in a crowded curriculum, with many pressures on teachers' time and an absence of formal support, preparing children and young people to develop a vision of living in a just, peaceful and sustainable world often becomes a low priority. Meanwhile children and young people are bombarded with information from a wide range of sources, yet they often feel ill-equipped to critically analyse this material and make judgements on what is most important and relevant.[9] Many teachers also feel ill-equipped to address controversial and difficult issues in the classroom.[10]

There is evidence that many young people are asking for their voices to be heard. In response, the government has agreed to the calls for votes at 16. There has been recognition that this has an impact upon the teaching of citizenship, which will need to have a higher profile within schools.[11] Citizenship goes beyond local and national issues. To enable young people to make sense of the world around them, there must be a global dimension to this curriculum area including at primary as well as secondary level.

Initiatives such as UNICEF UK's Rights and Respecting Schools Award programme also demonstrate the educational value of empowering children and young people to have a say on issues that concern them and feel a sense of belonging and empowerment.[12]

The government's calls for greater investment in technical education, including providing skills for work, is highly relevant to the theme of global learning. Young people need global skills to enable them to understand, engage with and to be able to find suitable employment in our global economy. This means developing skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, cooperation and collaboration alongside the development of oracy and digital skills.

To address these challenges, the signatories of the attached letter call on the Department of Education to:

- **Set a clear expectation** that young people engage with global issues, sustainability, social justice and democratic participation as part of a broad and balanced education. Young people should be able to expect these themes to be part of the daily life of all schools.
- **Convene an expert global learning stakeholder group to establish and share best practice** in embedding global learning across the curriculum and wider school life. The need is for guidance and support for all schools, encouraging them to equip their pupils to see themselves as active global citizens and to provide learning about global issues across a wide range of subjects.
- **Ensure implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment Review** promotes cross-curricular global learning rather than locating responsibility within a single subject.
- **Support teacher confidence and capability** through appropriate and relevant professional development support that build teachers' capacities to address global learning themes in their classroom practice.

Properly implemented and resourced, and located within a 'pedagogy of hope' perspective[13], these initiatives would help children and young people to understand, address and engage with the global challenges of today and tomorrow.

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[7] https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f6decace4ff425352eddb4a/t/6982093b5c81dc19773ff9d2/1770129723476/GE2050-declaration.pdf
[8] UK Parliament (2026) International Development Select Committee Report on UK Aid and Development Assistance in a Fractured World, London, HMSO.
[9] https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/blogs/2022/how-to-talk-to-children-about-the-climate-crisis
[10] https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/hard-questions-learning-to-teach-controversial-issue
[11] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/representation -of-the-people-bill-policy-summaries/votes-at-16
[12] https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/how-we-create-change-for-children/impact-of-rrsa/
[13] Bourn, D., (2021) "Pedagogy of hope: global learning and the future of education", *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning* 13(2), 65–78. doi: https://doi.org/10.14324/IJDEGL.13.2.01