

Research report

Respect, equality, participation: exploring human rights education in Great Britain

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The EHRC is the National Equality Body (NEB) for Great Britain and an 'A' Status National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), sharing our human rights responsibilities in Scotland with the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC). In line with the Memorandum of Understanding between the SHRC and the EHRC, the SHRC provided consent for this research to be conducted in Scotland. We would like to thank the SHRC for their input.

Acronyms and abbreviations

AoLE	Areas of Learning and Experience
ASN	Additional Support Needs
ALN	Additional Learning Needs
CCfW	Children's Commissioner for Wales
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission
GIRFEC	Getting it Right for Every Child
GTCS	General Teaching Council Scotland
HRE	Human Rights Education
ICESCR Rights	The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
LfS	Learning for Sustainability
RRSA	Rights Respecting School Award
RSE	Relationships and Sex Education
SEN	Special Educational Needs
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNDHRET	The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training

Executive summary

The Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) vision is a society where people's rights are upheld, diversity is valued and intolerance is challenged. A priority aim in our strategic plan 2019–2022 is an education system that promotes good relations with others and respect for equality and human rights. We believe that human rights education (HRE) is an important component in achieving these aims.

This research presents examples of good practice in HRE across Great Britain. It explores: how a human rights approach has been implemented in schools across the three nations; the challenges and opportunities that schools face in implementing such an approach; what best HRE practice looks like; and the impact of HRE on schools and pupils.

The research involved 10 secondary schools that have adopted a human rights approach: four in England, three in Scotland and three in Wales. To identify examples of good HRE practice, we invited schools which were accredited with the UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA) to take part in this research. Data collection comprised three strands: semi-structured interviews with teachers and head teachers, an online pupil survey and a review of school documents.

Overview

Our research identifies several key benefits of HRE. Upon adopting HRE, teachers reported improvement in attainment and attendance; improved pupil behaviour and well-being; a reduction in prejudice and discriminatory attitudes; and improved teacher recruitment and retention. To make a human rights approach work, schools must change their culture, foster pupil participation, incorporate human rights into their teaching and create an environment where all pupils are treated equally and fairly.

Our research findings also illustrate the challenges in developing this approach. Strong leadership, capacity, money, buy-in, knowledge and a curriculum that is supportive of HRE are important for successful implementation. Crucially, the findings show that local and national government support is important to overcome these barriers, but highlight that there are stark differences in progress and support for HRE across the three nations. If HRE is to be developed across the sector, more must be done to promote it and illustrate its benefits. Further evidence of the impact of a human rights approach is important here, particularly its long-term impact, to provide a strong evidence base for both practitioners and policymakers.

What is human rights education?

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UNDHRET, 2011) states that HRE encompasses education:

- a) *About* human rights, which includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection;
- b) *Through* human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners;
- c) *For* human rights, which includes empowering people to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others.

How do schools implement human rights education?

Teachers in all of the 10 schools reiterated the importance of teaching *about*, *through* and *for* human rights through a ‘whole-school approach.’ Our research outlines four main steps that schools took to deliver this successfully:

- 1. Create a rights-respecting ethos** Teachers adapted school policies and plans to reflect children’s rights, visually represented the ethos across the school and trained other teachers so that they were familiar with a human rights approach and the UNCRC. The rights-respecting ethos was promoted, both internally and externally, and incorporated into teaching standards; contracts and appraisal cycles; and job adverts and job interviews.
- 2. Integrate human rights across the curriculum** Schools adopted a whole-curriculum approach and integrated human rights across all subjects, areas of learning and key stages. Tutor time, assemblies, school-led charity events and campaigns were also key learning spaces.

- 3. Foster pupil participation** Measures were implemented in schools to facilitate pupils' right to be heard. These included pupil councils, leadership groups, pupil parliaments, pupil surveys, pupil-led training and pupil-designed school charters and rules.
- 4. Create an inclusive and fair school environment** Schools created facilities to support a broad range of pupils and to eradicate barriers to learning. These included inclusion units, learning support centres and strong pastoral programmes. Schools also adopted restorative approaches to conflict resolution in order to reduce exclusions.

What do schools need to successfully implement human rights education?

Our research findings show what is necessary to implement this approach and the barriers and opportunities school staff experienced while doing so:

- **Strong leadership** Support from the head teacher and senior leadership team were crucial in each of the schools to make the necessary changes and ensure buy-in among staff and pupils.
- **Sufficient resources** Teachers were given time and capacity to implement HRE, particularly in the face of competing priorities. Without this, and without financial resources for pupil support facilities, teacher training and the UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award, implementation may prove difficult.
- **Knowledge and engagement** Knowledge of the UNCRC and HRE, among staff and pupils, aided a human rights approach in participating schools. Some teachers reported that knowledge of the UNCRC was patchy among staff and pupils before a human rights approach was implemented, while others acknowledged resistance among some staff.
- **Government support** The Scottish and Welsh Governments have introduced some measures which encouraged schools to adopt HRE and created buy-in among practitioners. Notably, Scottish Government has stated a commitment to introduce legislation to incorporate the UNCRC into domestic law and the UNCRC is partially incorporated in Wales through the Rights of Children and Young Persons Measure (2011). In response to national government policies, local authorities in Wales and Scotland have provided funding, training and strategic support to schools. This was not the case for the participating schools in England, where a lack of government support made it more challenging.
- **A national curriculum that supports HRE** The presence of human rights in the Curriculum for Excellence and Education Scotland's inspection framework has encouraged schools in Scotland to see HRE as part of their remit. In contrast, teachers in England and Wales reported that, unless HRE is made mandatory in their national curricula, most schools will not prioritise it. The new Curriculum for Wales 2022, however, offers significant opportunities to promote and embed HRE given that HRE and the UNCRC are integrated across areas of learning and experience.

What is the impact of human rights education?

In all 10 schools, teachers reported that HRE had a positive impact on schools and pupils. The five most commonly perceived benefits were:

- **Improved attainment and attendance** Teachers reported a noticeable improvement to previous years but acknowledged that this was hard to attribute solely to the HRE approach.
- **A reduction in prejudice and discriminatory attitudes** It was reported that pupils were more outward-looking and had greater knowledge and respect for human rights following the adoption of a human rights approach. Schools with diverse populations reported a more integrated and cohesive pupil body and reductions in racist incidents and homophobic language.
- **Improved pupil behaviour** Most schools saw a reduction in exclusions and some reported a reduction in bullying. This was the result of a more respectful and inclusive school environment, the adoption of restorative approaches to conflict and increased pupil input into the creation of school rules.
- **Improved pupil well-being and engagement** Teachers noticed an improvement in pupil well-being, as measured through internal pupil surveys. Responses to our pupil survey also described improved confidence, knowledge of human rights and independence among pupils.
- **Improved teacher recruitment and retention** Teachers attributed this to an improvement in the school's working environment and improved teacher–pupil relationships as a result of a human rights approach.

Introduction

Aim of the research

The aim of this report is to explore good practice in human rights education (HRE) across Great Britain. It looks into how a human rights approach has been implemented in schools across the three nations; the challenges and opportunities that schools face in implementing such an approach; what best HRE practice looks like; and the impact of HRE on schools and pupils.

One of our goals, as set out in our strategic plan 2019–2022 (EHRC, 2019) is to ensure we have strong foundations on which to build a more equal and rights-respecting society. Schools play an essential role in shaping attitudes, and we recognise the potential to tackle prejudice and enhance respect for diversity through early interventions. This research stems from our commitment to understanding the best ways to prevent and change prejudiced attitudes (EHRC, 2019).

In addition to this, a priority aim in our strategic plan (EHRC, 2019) is to achieve an education system that promotes good relations with others and respect for equality and human rights. We will know we have achieved this when schools: reflect the communities they represent in terms of diversity; uphold the highest standards of equality and human rights in their treatment of pupils and staff; and promote equality and human rights through the learning environment and the curriculum content. These values are at the heart of a human rights approach to education.

We also want to ensure that the United Kingdom (UK) complies with its international obligations on this issue. A number of key international human rights instruments have enshrined the right to HRE, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). While some progress has been made on integrating HRE into schools and national curricula, there is still much work to be done to ensure that education systems across England, Scotland and Wales reflect and promote equality and human rights.

We hope this research will raise awareness about this approach among governments, inspectorates, schools, guardians and civil society organisations.

Background

National and international obligations to promote HRE

The UK Government is obliged under international law to implement the rights set out in the treaties that the UK has ratified. A number of key international human rights instruments have enshrined the right to HRE. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, article 26) states that ‘education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.’ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, article 29) further sets out that education should develop respect for human rights and prepare the child for life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all people. In ratifying these, the UK Government has accepted that HRE should be a part of every child’s learning.

The UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments have responded differently to calls for the UNCRC to be incorporated into domestic law. Incorporation of human rights treaties and instruments into domestic law is important to translate human rights into domestic policy and enhance legal accountability. Despite numerous calls from UN treaty bodies to incorporate the UNCRC into domestic law, successive UK Governments have refused to do so. This means that the rights guaranteed under the UNCRC do not bind the UK Government and are not enforceable by domestic courts.

In 2018, the Scottish Government committed to incorporate the UNCRC directly into Scottish law (Robinson, Quennerstedt and l’Anson, 2020). Direct incorporation involves transforming an international human rights treaty into domestic law by making it part of a national constitution or national legislation (Hoffman, 2019). If this legislation passes through Scottish Parliament, the UNCRC will bind the Scottish Government and public authorities in law, and individuals will be able to rely on their rights before Scottish courts. This built on the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 which placed a duty on Scottish Government ministers to consider how they might ‘secure better or further effect in Scotland of the UNCRC requirements.’

In 2011, the Welsh Government indirectly incorporated the UNCRC into national law through the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure. Indirect incorporation means that a human rights treaty is given some legal effect through domestic legislation, but it does not bind governments or public authorities, nor is it enforceable in domestic courts (Hoffman, 2019). The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 placed a duty on Welsh Ministers, in exercising their functions, to have 'due regard' to the UNCRC. While this falls short of direct incorporation, the measure is an important step forward in giving the UNCRC statutory force within Wales and legitimising the language of Convention rights in policy discourse (Hoffman and O'Neill, 2018). The measure has also introduced an expectation of compliance with the Convention (ibid). A further duty was placed on the Welsh Government in 2017 to promote the UNCRC throughout society and institutions.

Requirements to teach HRE across national curricula

The curricula across the three nations provide different opportunities to teach HRE (See Annex for more detail on each national curricula). In England, it is not mandatory to teach human rights as a distinct stand-alone subject. However, rights are referenced in the curriculum documents across various compulsory subjects (Robinson, 2017). The citizenship curriculum states that teaching should develop pupils' understanding of democracy, government and the rights and responsibilities of citizens (DfE, 2014, pp. 83-84). It also states that pupils should be taught about 'human rights and international law' and 'diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding' (ibid). The relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum further states that pupils should know the legal rights and responsibilities regarding equality and their rights, responsibilities and opportunities online (DfE, 2019, p. 28).

The Welsh national curriculum similarly includes some elements that reflect human rights principles and values, but supporting pupils to learn about their rights is not mandatory (CCfW, 2018, p. 3). While some progress has been made by schools locally, the practice and teaching of rights remain patchy and inconsistent across Wales (ibid). The Welsh Government is, however, introducing a new curriculum, which places a much greater emphasis on HRE. The Curriculum for Wales 2022 gives schools and teachers more flexibility and autonomy and has six 'Areas of Learning and Experience' (AoLE). The UNCRC is incorporated as a cross-cutting theme across these AoLE with a particularly strong focus under the Humanities AoLE and the Health and Wellbeing AoLE. Pupils are taught that they have rights and must be given opportunities to develop an understanding of the UNCRC (Welsh Government and Education Wales, 2020a). Learning about, through and for rights has also been integrated into descriptions of learning in different subject areas. The latest curriculum guidance published by the Welsh Government guides schools on how to integrate HRE (Welsh Government and Education Wales, 2020b).

In Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence, introduced in 2010–11, provides a framework for learning and teaching rather than a prescribed national curriculum. Schools and local authorities are granted flexibility and autonomy to enable young people aged 3–18 to become 'successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors' across specific curriculum areas. While responsibility for what is taught rests with councils and schools, they must take national guidelines and advice into account. The eight curriculum areas are Expressive arts; Health and well-being; Languages; Mathematics; Religious and moral education; Sciences; Social studies and Technologies (Education Scotland). Three of the curriculum areas (Literacy, Numeracy and Health and well-being) are particularly important and all staff are responsible for providing these experiences and delivering these outcomes. Education Scotland, the Scottish Government executive agency charged with supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education, provides 'Benchmarks' and 'Experiences and outcomes' (E's and O's) to support the delivery of curriculum areas. These are a set of clear and concise statements about pupils' learning and progression in each curriculum area. Human rights are integrated into E and O's and Benchmarks. Outcomes for the 'Health and well-being' area of the curriculum, for example, refer to pupils being able to explore the rights to which they and others are entitled, exercise these rights appropriately, accept the responsibilities that go with them and show respect for the rights of others (Education Scotland, p. 3). Benchmarks for the curriculum area of Social Studies at Third Level include 'I have compared the rights and responsibilities of citizens in Scotland with a contrasting society and can describe and begin to understand reasons for differences' (Education Scotland, 2017).

Learning for Sustainability (LfS) is also an important component of the Curriculum for Excellence and an entitlement for pupils in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2013). Learning for Sustainability is a cross-curricular approach and includes sustainable development education, outdoor learning, global citizenship and social welfare (ibid). Human rights are an integral part of these four aspects. The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) Professional Standards also require that every practitioner, school and education leader demonstrate LfS in their practice (GTCS, 2012).

While the Curriculum for Excellence provides opportunities to teach about human rights, this does not always translate into practice. Existing research demonstrates that HRE is delivered on an ad hoc basis within schools in Scotland (BEMIS, 2013 p. 56). While there is a willingness among teachers and other educators to promote HRE, teacher training, political leadership and more explicit curricular guidance is needed to ensure it is delivered to all pupils (ibid). The Scottish Government recently committed to review the Curriculum for Excellence, which may offer opportunities for reform (Scottish Government, 2020), however at the time of writing this was on hold due to coronavirus.

Methodology

The research adopted a qualitative case study approach involving 10 secondary schools across Great Britain. Data collection comprised three strands: semi-structured interviews with teachers and head teachers, an online pupil survey and a review of school documents.

Sample

Human rights education is important in all educational settings and we recognise that early years and primary education play a vital role in the development of a child's outlook. However, in the context of limited resources and capacity, the research focused on secondary schools to ensure the feasibility of the project and because this is a critical phase of education in terms of preparing children for adulthood and exercising their rights in future.

Given the research was interested in identifying good practice, a purposive sample of schools in Great Britain which were accredited with the UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA) were invited to participate in the study. The UNICEF RRSA recognises a school's achievement in putting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into practice within the school and beyond.¹ It is the only HRE-related accreditation scheme offered to schools across Great Britain.

The school sample was selected from the population of those which had received 'gold' or 'silver' RRS awards. An initial shortlist of potential schools was drafted to represent a mix of schools by geography, urban/rural location; inspectorate rating; and pupil population. The final sample included 10 secondary schools in total, four in England, three in Scotland and three in Wales. We invited schools to participate and those that agreed were asked to circulate the online survey to pupils who were involved in the rights-respecting work through pupil groups.

¹ For more information about UNICEF's Rights Respecting School Award see: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/>

Interviews

Within each school, we invited the head teacher and one other teacher, usually the rights-respecting school (RRS) lead, to participate in interviews. For ease of reading, we refer to the interview participants collectively as ‘teachers’ throughout the report. Interviews were carried out with one or both, depending on their availability and capacity. In total, we conducted 16 face-to-face interviews in schools between December 2019 and February 2020; each one lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Interviews were semi-structured and followed a pre-determined discussion guide (see Appendix 1), which focused on why a rights-respecting approach had been adopted within the school, how it was implemented, the challenges and opportunities which shaped the process and the impact the approach had on schools and pupils. There was a particular emphasis on teasing out good practice and exploring how this could be expanded across the sector. We then carried out a thematic analysis of interviews using Nvivo software and the emerging themes were used to structure the findings of the report.

Pupil questionnaire

To supplement the main findings, participating schools shared a short questionnaire with two pupils per school (see Appendix 2). The aim of this was to understand the role of pupils in implementing and supporting a human rights approach and to ensure pupils’ perspectives were included in the research findings. The questionnaire contained closed and open-ended questions, thus enabling pupils to provide in-depth responses to some questions. Though small-scale, the survey provided some limited data to support our conclusions. We received nine pupil responses to the survey.

Document review

We conducted a documentary analysis of school documents to determine how a human rights approach had been integrated across the schools and to contribute to the overall findings. This data was collected from school websites and/or supplied by schools upon request. They included school inspection reports, curriculum plans, UNICEF RRSA reports, business and strategy plans, school handbooks and behaviour policies.

Limitations

The research looks at 10 secondary schools across England, Scotland and Wales. Due to funding and time constraints, a more systematic and large-scale evaluation of HRE was outside the scope of this research project. While the findings are not statistically representative of all schools in Great Britain, they give a snapshot of what works in practice based on participants' views.

The sample was chosen from schools who are accredited with the UNICEF RRSA. The findings, therefore, reflect one specific approach to HRE and are based on schools that have been considered by UNICEF to have successfully implemented HRE. There are a number of ways to adopt a human rights approach and schools that are not part of the RRSA may also exhibit best practice. We acknowledge that this report provides only a partial picture of overall school practice and experience. In the absence of a control group of schools, respondents were encouraged to discuss how the school ethos has changed over time as a result of a human rights approach being adopted in their school.

The sample of pupils and teachers who were invited to take part in this research were heavily involved in leading a human rights approach in their schools and were encouraged to give examples of best practice. This may introduce an element of positive bias in the way they perceived a human rights approach. We recognise that their experience is not statistically representative of all teachers and staff and that further research is needed to look at how a broader range of pupils and teachers experience HRE across a diverse range of educational settings.

Finally, the research findings reflect limited engagement with pupils. The survey was not intended to be representative of the whole pupil body, the aim was to understand the role of pupils in implementing and supporting a human rights approach. Accordingly, only two pupils per school were invited to participate in the research, which mirrored the number of participating teachers. However, we received a very low number of responses to our pupil survey: nine out of a possible 20. We acknowledge that this is an important limitation of the report and that further research is needed which engages a larger section of pupils.

1 What is human rights education?

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UNDHRET) provides the most comprehensive definition of HRE. article 2(2) (UNDHRET, 2011) states that human rights education (HRE) encompasses education:

- a) *About* human rights, which includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection;
- b) *Through* human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners;
- c) *For* human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others.

We asked teachers about their interpretation of human rights and what they felt were the key features.

1.1 Children's rights are the focal point of the school

It's about putting children's rights at the heart and centre of all of our policy. We try to use the convention, the language of the convention, the philosophy of the convention to inform and direct our practice. It's on our walls, it's in our policies, it's on our doors, it's in our lesson plans so it's everywhere. – Teacher in England

HRE in each of the schools was child-focused and children's rights were at the centre of decision-making. Teachers reported that the best interests of the child must be a top priority in all actions. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was the blueprint for school practice and teachers were quick to reference specific articles as the justification for particular decisions. For example, the establishment of pupil voice groups was linked to article 12, the right to be heard, while the provision of extra-curricular activities was linked to article 31, the right to leisure, play and culture.

Within most schools, more emphasis was placed on children's rights, as detailed in the UNCRC, rather than human rights more broadly. This may be reflective of the fact that UNICEF's Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA), which has supported these schools, also emphasises the UNCRC. Staff acknowledged, however, that the two are indivisible and that teaching about children's rights provided a platform to discuss human rights and encourage pupils to act as rights bearers.

1.2 Whole-school approach

Even if it's not explicitly taught every single day, we're still using the values of the UNCRC. A whole-school approach is definitely key. – Teacher in Scotland

Teachers from all 10 schools reiterated the importance of teaching *about*, *through* and *for* human rights through a 'whole-school approach.' As well as pupils being taught human rights through the curriculum, teachers stressed that a human rights approach must also be embedded across every aspect of the school and at the heart of the school's ethos, policies and practices. HRE was not, therefore, the responsibility of one person or subject, rather, it was a series of practices, schemes of learning and behaviours which made up the culture of the school. HRE was also based on the premise that children's rights are upheld within the school and that learning takes place in an environment which is based on human rights principles of participation, inclusivity, respect and dignity.

Teachers were critical of 'bolt-on' approaches, where HRE is not meaningfully embedded across the school and stressed that each component of HRE needs to be embraced to ensure that it is impactful and sustainable in the long term.

2 Why do schools adopt human rights education?

We explored the reasons why schools decided to adopt a human rights approach and why they sought the UNICEF RRSA.

2.1 To empower pupils

I want every child to feel passionate about something, that they find something in the world that they want to change or make better or do differently, and to go out and do it. [...] It's our job to make the kids see bigger. – Teacher in England

Teachers spoke about HRE as a way to empower pupils to act on their rights and to create change in the world. By embedding human rights into education, teachers intended to empower pupils with knowledge of their rights and of the wider activities that are happening in the world. Helping pupils to see the 'bigger picture' of education and the environment in which they live was important to some teachers. This was particularly important to teachers from schools in more socially deprived areas who wanted to foster aspiration and help pupils see the positive role they could play in wider society.

2.2 To create a culture of equality and inclusivity

We have a multicultural community here, and we needed to embrace that and raise awareness of people's different religions and values, and cultures [...] And I would say that was the drive. That would have been the start for me, that we have such a diverse cohort. We needed to do that work. – Teacher in Wales

The desire to create a culture of equality and to challenge prejudice contributed to the decision made by a number of schools to adopt HRE. In some cases, HRE aligned with the existing ethos of the school, which sought to promote equality and respect. In other schools, however, it was also acknowledged that not all staff and pupils fostered this ethos and a step towards embedding it through HRE was seen as a driving force to tackling these behaviours. This was particularly important for schools with a culturally diverse intake of pupils. For example, two schools had high numbers of refugee pupils who had recently arrived in the country and a HRE approach was adopted to help promote inclusive practices and ensure the school was fully inclusive and understanding of the new pupils' culture and background.

3 How do schools implement human rights education?

We asked teachers who participated in the research how they implemented a human rights approach and to provide examples of best HRE practice. Teachers suggested that creating a rights-respecting ethos and integrating human rights across the curriculum are crucial features of a human rights approach. Fostering pupil participation and building an inclusive and fair learning environment were also considered key to ensuring that pupils' rights are upheld and that learning is based on human rights principles.

3.1 Creating a rights-respecting ethos

It's how you role model it from the top, and how then that culture spreads out across the school community. You just need to talk about things explicitly, 'this isn't how we do it here, this is what we believe in. – Teacher in England

Creating a rights-respecting ethos was a key part in implementing a human rights approach in all 10 schools. To begin the process, a **full school action plan** was developed within each school, setting out their aims and priorities, and a steering group made up of staff, guardians and pupils was established. These aims and priorities were integrated into long-term planning by senior leadership teams and were reflected in school development plans and evaluation plans. School policies were also adapted so that each one made reference to one or more articles within the UNCRC. For example, anti-bullying policies frequently referred to article 19, the right to be protected from harm.

Explicitly talking about and promoting rights was perceived as central to creating a rights-respecting ethos. Schools promoted themselves as rights-respecting schools and this formed a key part of communication within the school community. Rights were also referenced in lessons, staff meetings, all-staff communication and letters and emails from the school to guardians. Staff had an active duty to promote the UNCRC and school leaders ensured that teachers were aware of this expectation by integrating this duty into teaching standards, contracts and appraisal cycles. Job adverts and job interviews also highlighted this expectation to promote the UNCRC.

Visually representing the ethos across the school was considered a good way to reinforce it. Each school created or changed their school charters to reflect the articles of the UNCRC and these were displayed in classrooms and on noticeboards across the school. In one school, the UNCRC was printed in school diaries, while in another school, UNCRC articles were printed on teachers' lanyards. In some schools, staff facilitated 'acts of craftivism,' which involved pupils creating visual aids about political or social causes that are important to them. This allowed pupils to feed into the school ethos, reflect upon it and have their thoughts visually displayed across their school.

Embedding a human rights approach also involved educating and **training staff**, as well as pupils, about HRE and the UNCRC. Schools provided varying degrees of training to their staff. Several started with an information day to discuss the planned approach with staff. Other schools provided ongoing teacher training through whole-staff in-service training (INSET), curriculum INSET and pupil-led INSET. New teachers were also given some training during staff induction, although it was recognised that only a little time was devoted to this. UNICEF were key providers of training, with some schools drawing on local authorities and third sector organisations. While some level of training is necessary, teachers also considered learning an ongoing process and acknowledged that staff learn alongside pupils through the ongoing events, speakers and initiatives throughout the school.

It was acknowledged that building a rights-respecting ethos takes time and that progress was made through several small steps which slowly built up to create a culture. Several teachers spoke about how their human rights approach was initially 'bolt-on' and how they were overly fixated on learning each of the UNCRC articles. Over time, however, the approach became more embedded and part of the culture of the school. **A gradual approach** was considered key to this.

3.2 Integrating human rights across the curriculum

We have a curriculum tracker where we'll look at every single curriculum area in all faculties and make sure that at some point during the year teachers are talking about rights, engaging with rights, are educating people on rights.– Teacher in Scotland

Teaching about human rights was another key step in implementing HRE. 'Human rights' was not taught as a distinct, stand-alone subject within participating schools. Instead, rights were integrated across subjects and key stages. Thus, a **whole-curriculum approach to HRE** was adopted. Within most schools, a full school audit of existing subjects was conducted and heads of departments or curriculum area heads mapped articles from the UNCRC to schemes of learning and work units. In practice, this involved making connections between rights and the existing curriculum. For example, in history, teaching about the gravest abuses of human rights, such as the holocaust, served as the catalyst for broader discussions about the right to be safe and the right to hold religious beliefs. In geography, lessons on inequality and housing were linked to article 27, the right to an adequate standard of living. Several teachers noted that human rights content was already present in the curriculum prior to adopting a human rights approach. The task was making it explicit, framing it using rights language and asking different questions about existing content. One teacher remarked that 'they were doing a lot of it anyway,' and suggested that a human rights approach just helped them to 'pull everything together.' There were different opinions on whether this was a significant workload for teachers and schools. Some participants reported that it was a big exercise to begin with, but acknowledged that it eventually it became part of the culture. Others considered this to be their responsibility as duty-bearers and stated that annually reviewing the curriculum was something that already happened in schools. Using what is already in the curriculum was perceived as a way of reducing the workload for teachers and creating buy-in.

While all the schools adopted a cross-curriculum approach, there was a reluctance to 'shoe-horn' it into all subjects. Articles from human rights treaties were included where they were relevant, and where they enhanced learning. Participants explained that instructing teachers to cover it in every lesson could cause resentment. It was acknowledged that it was easier to make connections in some subjects and rights were more heavily concentrated in certain parts of the curriculum, for example, the humanities which readily lend themselves well to human rights content. However, none of the schools found it impossible to integrate rights across the curriculum. Maths was frequently mentioned as an example of a subject where schools were able to incorporate rights despite initial problems, for example, by using statistics and databases relating to inequality.

Outside of lessons, pupils were taught about rights in tutor time and assemblies with every assembly based around an article or a goal. Specific **rights-respecting days and weeks** were also held where every lesson was dedicated to a specific theme or right. For example, one school hosted a human rights day and an ethics and tolerance day, while another hosted a refugee week. Teachers noted that targeted days are important to refresh the work and keep it focused. Some responses to our pupil survey stated that more still needed to be done to integrate rights into everyday learning across the curriculum, rather than designated rights-respecting days and weeks.

Shared learning, internally among teachers, and externally with other schools was important for schools. Schools made use of the different expertise that existed among teachers and teachers were encouraged to share practice and lesson plans. Working with other schools in the local area to share ideas and resources was common and was particularly important for those in rural regions, as training is often delivered in more central areas.

Schools had different ways of acquiring HRE teaching resources. Some teachers reported that many of their resources were self-generated, while others relied heavily on external providers. Schools who provided resources included the WE Charity, UNICEF UK's OutRight campaign, UNICEF and PiXL. Schools also worked with external organisations, for example, the ONE Campaign, Red Cross and their local Rotary Club. While some teachers thought more resources would be useful, others felt there was an abundance of resources from different sources and that government guidance on HRE would be more beneficial for schools.

3.3 Fostering pupil participation

Human rights is not something that is done *to* [pupils]. We're all working together to ensure we understand and value human rights. – Teacher in Wales

Pupil participation was undoubtedly a core part of HRE. Stemming from a commitment to uphold a child's right to be heard, schools have ensured that pupils can feed into the decisions that affect their school lives. Teachers acknowledged that HRE is something that is done *with* pupils, not *to* them and a collaborative approach among pupils and staff was common. Teachers were also quick to stress that pupil voice is about working with and listening to pupils in a meaningful way, rather than permitting pupils everything they ask for. While pupil voice was perceived as a core feature of HRE, some teachers noted that it is also a pupil's choice not to participate.

Pupil councils were most frequently used to give pupils a voice in decisions that affect them. These were democratically elected and representative of year and tutor groups. While pupil councils are common in most schools,² teachers spoke about the real weight given to pupil voice in rights-respecting schools and the broader range of decisions they are consulted on. For example, pupil councils contributed to school development and evaluation plans, worked with curriculum leaders on curriculum content, made budgetary decisions and attended town council meetings. Many examples were provided where pupils were involved in decision-making or campaigns for change which have been successful. One teacher also spoke about how pupil input ensured the school were forward-thinking, for example, they decided to have gender-neutral toilets before it was a prominent debate in schools.

While pupil councils were common, two schools revamped pupil councils entirely and now operate under a **pupil parliament** model. In the first school, this involved incorporating staff committees into the parliament so that all school decision-making is aligned with and included both teacher and pupil groups. The second school greatly expanded the number of pupils involved and their influence. It now has four parliamentary groups which have responsibility for different areas of school improvement: teaching and learning, standards and provision, ethos and well-being, and business and resource. The cabinet (two members from each of the parliament groups) met regularly with the head teacher and senior leadership team to present their ideas and action plans.

Pupil participation was further ensured through other **pupil leadership groups**. For example, in one school 'the green team', a sub-group of the pupil voice group, led on environmental issues. In another school, the LGBT sub-group and Girl-up group were initiated by the pupils themselves. Pupil Rights Ambassadors also led on much of the rights work, including organising events. Teachers again acknowledged that some of these groups already existed before the school adopted a human rights approach. However, doing so had led staff to link these groups to UNCRC articles and provide human rights justifications for their existence.

² School Councils made up of pupils are mandatory in Wales through the School Council (Wales) Regulations 2005 (Welsh Assembly Government, 2005). In Scotland, the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000 also requires education authorities to have regard to a pupil's views in decisions that significantly affect that pupil in relation to his or her school education (Scottish Parliament, 2000).

Pupils also played a leading role in devising **school charters and rules**. For example, in one school, class charters, whole school charters, football charters and lunchtime charters were written by pupils and reviewed by the pupils annually. Another school developed its core values through consultation with pupils, guardians and staff. Pupils were asked what they wanted their school to be like and what qualities they wanted to have by the time they leave and this was translated into the school values. It was reported that input into rules and charters created buy-in from pupils as they created the rules and values that they abide by. It also ensured these documents were accessible to pupils.

Pupil-led teaching and training were common. Pupils delivered INSET days to staff and led school assemblies. One teacher also described how older pupils were responsible for leading ‘welcome and transition days’ to new school pupils. Pupils played a further role in evaluation. In one school, pupils conducted the UNICEF RRSA curriculum audit, observing teachers in lessons and identifying where they could link their work to UNCRC articles. This not only encouraged pupil participation but also helped build the relationships between pupils and teachers in a mutually respectful way. Pupils also evaluated pupil surveys and presented the results to senior leadership teams and governors.

3.4 Creating an inclusive and fair environment

We don't permanently exclude. What we do very differently here is we have an inclusion unit at the end of the school. We are very proud to say we are one hundred per cent inclusive as a school, and that is because every child has a right to an education. You don't stand a child outside a classroom because the second you are excluding them from their learning, you are denying them that right. – Teacher in England

The creation of an inclusive and fair school environment where children are treated equally and with respect was the final step in implementing a human rights approach. Eradicating barriers to learning and **providing facilities that support a broad range of pupils** was key to this. While such facilities are present in schools who have not explicitly adopted HRE, participating schools considered these necessary in order to uphold children's equal right to an education. Teachers acknowledged their diverse range of learners including those with special educational needs/additional support needs/additional learning needs (SEN/ASN/ALN);³ emotional and social needs; and English as an additional language. Supporting all pupils was contrasted with 'zero tolerance' approaches taken in other schools, where more difficult pupils were excluded or 'off-rolled.' One teacher remarked that this often results in the most isolated and vulnerable pupils becoming marginalised.

To ensure an inclusive environment, a number of schools created and expanded **inclusion units** for pupils who were at risk of exclusion. These on-site provisions allowed pupils to receive holistic support from teachers, do SEN/ASN/ALN assessments and work with social workers and CAMHS (Child and Mental Health Services), before returning to mainstream school provision at an appropriate time. **Learning support centres** were also created for pupils who needed extra support outside of mainstream education.

Strong pastoral programmes and facilities aimed at ensuring the physical and emotional well-being of pupils were also common. This was considered key to upholding every child's right to education as a child's capacity to learn is compromised if their well-being is not prioritised. Again, while some pastoral care is normal in most schools in Great Britain, some of those that participated in the research had far-reaching policies and procedures. One school, for example, implemented a range of well-being support mechanisms for pupils, including a learning and nurture team, a well-being team, a creative therapy worker, a permanent on-site school counsellor and a behaviour support worker. Teachers also had regular 'check-ins' with pupils at the beginning of each lesson where pupils were asked to rate their well-being on a scale from one to five.

³ These terms refer to the same thing but are called special educational needs (SEN) in England, additional support needs (ASN) in Scotland and additional learning needs (ALN) in Wales.

Adopting a human rights approach also encouraged school leaders and staff to rethink their approach to discipline and many schools introduced **restorative approaches to conflict** in an attempt to reduce exclusions and uphold pupils' right to be treated with dignity and respect. Restorative approaches enable those who have been harmed to convey the impact of the harm to those responsible, and for those responsible to acknowledge this impact and take steps to put it right. Staff and pupils were trained to work restoratively with each other and were encouraged to respect each other's thoughts and feelings in order to resolve conflict. One teacher described this as a long-term strategy for changing the behaviour of pupils and argued that other tools, such as excluding pupils, were not an effective long-term strategy.

Challenging prejudice was another element of building an inclusive and fair school environment. Fostering respect for diversity ran through all of the schemes of work and initiatives that schools engaged in. In one school, religious observance events were changed to be more inclusive and to reflect the religious diversity of the school. Religious observance events were originally hosted by a Christian minister, with pupils having the option to opt-out. Following the suggestions of pupils, however, the event began to focus on a school value, for example, equality. Different charities, religious groups, voluntary organisations and businesses were invited to set up stations in the school's observance room which pupils could visit to learn about that value. This has ensured 'the same experience for everyone, something that's inclusive and not designed for one particular subset of our demographic.' In another school, which has a less religiously diverse population, efforts were made to expose pupils to different cultures and religious traditions by organising trips to different places of worship.

Making human rights 'real' and relevant to pupils was perceived as important in challenging prejudice and necessary to ensure that human rights were not just theory. To ensure this, teachers made an effort to work with groups who had direct experiences of discrimination and invited speakers to share their real-life stories with pupils. Volunteering and campaigning were also perceived as ways to empower pupils to become active rights-respecting citizens and to shift rights from theory into action.

Schools also took a **local, national and international approach** to the rights-respecting work. Global learning played a key part in this. For example, schools created exchange programmes and partnerships with schools in different countries; organised fundraising events for international causes and taught pupils about the denial of rights across the world. One school hosted an annual 'international week' to expose pupils to different cultures, where each subject arranged lessons and activities which focused on a different country. Pupils received 'stamps' from each country they attended in a personalised 'global passport,' where they also wrote reflections on their learning and experiences. Other schools participated in awards and accreditations, for example, the international school awards which honours schools that show a commitment to international awareness and understanding. Another school also became a 'school of sanctuary,' which reaffirms a school's commitment to being a safe and welcoming place for everyone in their immediate and extended community. While global learning was key to the rights work, schools stressed the importance of working locally and the value of volunteering in the community. Community events and campaigns were perceived as a good way to engage the broader community in the rights work, something which teachers considered generally difficult to do. In one school, community partners and religious groups were also included on the HRE steering group so that the rights-respecting work engaged people beyond the school gates. Linking human rights to pupils' own experiences and communities was also considered a key way to ensure that rights remained relevant to pupils. To do this, a number of schools used local datasets and regional statistics on poverty and homelessness during lessons.

Schools also participated in campaigns at a national level including the Purple4Polio campaign, Children in Need, UNICEF'S World's biggest lesson and Soccer Aid.

4 What do schools need to successfully implement human rights education?

We asked teachers about what was necessary to implement a human rights approach and the barriers and opportunities they experienced while doing so.

4.1 Leadership

She [the rights-respecting school award lead] drove it with the pupils rather than for the pupils. And she helped pupils take the agency and take the lead themselves. – Teacher in Scotland

Strong senior leadership is essential to implement a human rights approach. The support of the head teacher and senior leadership team were crucial in each of the schools to 'role model it from the top' and to deliver the necessary changes. The success of the approach in each of the schools also relied upon one or two teachers leading the overall coordination of the rights work. Interview participants generally described a key person in the school who was vital to driving the human rights approach forward and noted the significance that these were senior staff members with some level of authority. While having a key person to drive the work was important, teachers warned that the continuity of certain elements can rely too heavily on one member of staff and break down if that staff member leaves. Some school leaders addressed this challenge by developing a continuity plan.

Teachers from schools in England acknowledged that academies and academy trusts often have different leadership priorities, which can make it difficult to implement a human rights approach. Academies who are part of multi-academy trusts have less autonomy than comprehensive schools to introduce their own policies and approaches, which is challenging if there is little appetite at trust level. Working with academy trusts is therefore important to expand HRE across the sector.

4.2 Capacity

You wouldn't be able to do [a human rights approach] in an extra-curricular way. It works when you've got capacity to do it, but all of this takes teachers' time. – Teacher in England

I think that such is the pressure on schools to do well academically that there is a view, I think, that we can't ask staff to do any more than they're doing. They just need them in the classroom teaching really well all the time and this stuff is just going to have to wait. – Teacher in England

Adopting a whole-school human rights approach can take a significant amount of time and planning, particularly in the initial stages of the process. Time must also be allocated for staff training to develop the language of rights and incorporate it fully into teaching practices. Teachers who participated in the research noted that they were given time by their school and were able to fully commit to implementing HRE, which led to its success. However, limited school capacity may make it less appealing to other schools. A number of interview participants reported that whole-child development and HRE often 'take a back seat' to other priorities in schools, namely, exam results and attainment. The pressure on senior leadership teams to focus on this often leaves little room for schools to concentrate on other more holistic approaches.

4.3 Money

We're inclusive, and we should be inclusive. But I think what others are saying to me, it's becoming harder. So, although we have better systems and we have better culture for doing that, we also have less money. So, those are the challenges that we're working through. – Teacher in Wales

Although the UNICEF RRSA is not the only way to adopt HRE, each of the schools in this research had taken part in this accreditation process, which has associated costs.⁴ Some schools in Scotland and Wales received financial support from their local authority to participate in the RRSA, without which they would not have been able to afford it. Similar funding from local authorities was not provided to the participating schools in England, and teachers identified that money could be a barrier for different schools.

⁴ The RRSA is split into bronze, silver and gold awards. Each stage costs between £100 and £1,500 depending on the number of pupils. The fee for being reaccredited as a Gold school, which is necessary every three years, is between £138 and £1,350.

While a human rights approach to education can be implemented at low cost, teachers acknowledged that certain aspects may require resources if they are delivered comprehensively and effectively. For example, financial resources are required to provide the range of facilities which were previously outlined and to provide teacher training. While these investments were considered necessary, particularly in the face of pupils with more challenging behaviours, teachers reported that schools also have increasingly limited resources and diminishing budgets.

4.4 Knowledge of children's rights and HRE

I knew vaguely about it, the rights of the child, but I hadn't had the training, or the clear understanding about the articles and how they can be underpinned across your curriculum. So, that has been a real positive about coming here [to a rights-respecting school] and seeing what's being done. – Teacher in Wales

Knowledge of the UNCRC and HRE among staff and pupils aided a human rights approach in a number of schools. Across the three nations, some local authorities encouraged both primary and secondary schools to pursue the RRSAs, while in others this was targeted solely at secondary level. In schools that had rights-respecting feeder primary schools, teachers noted the advantage of pupils having some prior experience of this approach. In schools where this was not the case, teachers suggested that it would be useful and reiterated the benefit of engaging pupils in human rights education from an early age.

Participants also acknowledged the benefits of teachers having a prior understanding of HRE. In England and Wales, it was reported that teachers initially had varying degrees of knowledge about the UNCRC and many had felt ill-equipped to teach HRE. Some of the teachers who participated in the research expressed frustration that the UNCRC was not very well-known and promoted, given the UK's commitment to uphold it. They also recognised that there was not enough awareness of the UNICEF RRSAs.

In Scotland, there was a greater awareness of the UNCRC among school staff, given that it is explicitly mentioned in the General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS) requirements. The GTCS require all teachers in Scotland to meet professional values and make a personal commitment to become a registered teacher. One of these requirements is that teachers must be 'Respecting of the rights of all learners as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and their entitlement to be included in decisions regarding their learning experiences and have all aspects of their well-being developed and supported' (GTCS, 2012).

4.5 Buy-in from the school community

I remember when we first started we couldn't get all the faculties involved, because some of the faculties said they've [pupils] already got too many rights, we were at that stage. – Teacher in Scotland

Support from staff, pupils and the wider school community are necessary to successfully implement HRE, however, schools can face difficulty getting everyone to buy in to the approach. Some teachers acknowledged resistance among other staff members and a variety of different reasons were provided for this. It was reported that some staff members did not see the value in a human rights approach and believed that rights needed to be earned by pupils.

Teachers also reported that there was initial apprehension about the impact of HRE on pupil behaviour, with some staff holding concerns that teaching pupils about their rights would cause them to become too outspoken and unmanageable. While teachers reported that a human rights approach had, overall, improved pupil behaviour, some teachers did find it challenging to respond to pupils who were invoking their rights while being disruptive. Ensuring that pupils understood the balance of their own and other people's rights was key to resolving this issue. In a smaller number of schools, it was also reported that staff were unhappy with how the approach was managed, with one school providing an example of teachers feeling pressured to adopt the new approach in a short period of time.

Often experiences of resistance were overcome by a gradual shift in the school ethos. In Scotland, the GTCS standards for registration were a way to effectively engage teachers with HRE and gain support for the approach. School leaders were able to frame HRE as part of professional learning and something that teachers need to be aware of.

Teachers also acknowledged an ongoing challenge in ensuring that pupil participation is not something that only a select group of pupil representatives do. While schools were successful in engaging pupils in HRE, teachers acknowledged that it was difficult to reach all pupils, particularly those that were already disengaged. This was reflected in the survey responses with a small number of pupils suggesting that more needed to be done to ensure that all pupils can feed into decisions. One school suggested that providing various and varied opportunities to participate would help to overcome this.

Getting buy-in from the whole school community, including pupils, staff, guardians and school governors (in England and Wales) was also difficult at times. All schools which took part in the research were secondary schools and teachers noted that, given the relatively large pupil populations, whole-school buy-in is more challenging than at primary school level.

4.6 National and local government support

When we first launched [the RRSA], I was asked to do it at a staff in-service day [...] I was very much linking it to the Scottish Government, this is something every school has to be doing – Teacher in Scotland

Government support, both local and national, is important in facilitating schools to adopt and embed a human rights approach. Governments can encourage schools to take up this approach, provide training or funding for the UNICEF accreditation and create support and buy-in for HRE through government policies. However, there are differences in government support for HRE across the three nations and this has resulted in different experiences for schools across England, Scotland and Wales.

Scotland

Teachers from schools in Scotland acknowledged various ways that the Scottish Government facilitated the adoption of a human rights approach. Specific references were made to the Scottish Government policy 'Getting it Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC). GIRFEC, which was built from the UNCRC, puts children's well-being and rights at the heart of policymaking and service delivery in Scotland, including education. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 also placed key elements of GIRFEC into statute. Teachers who had taught in schools before GIRFEC was introduced acknowledged that this policy has contributed to a culture shift, which made teachers more open towards a human rights approach.

Each of the schools in Scotland also received support and encouragement from their local authorities to adopt a human rights approach. The ways in which local authorities provided this support varied. Some authorities set targets and funding for all schools to achieve the RRSA by a certain time, others provided information and support for schools to implement a human rights approach. In Scotland, school budgets and priorities are driven, to an extent, by education authorities which is a role presently held by local authorities. Local authority support is, therefore, essential for a school to fund the RRSA in Scotland. The rationale for local authority support, both financially and strategically, may be more prominent in Scotland as a result of Scottish Government buy-in to HRE. In 2014, the Scottish Government provided funding to UNICEF UK for two seconded posts to encourage uptake of the RRSA in Scottish local authorities (Jerome et al., 2015). The aim of the funding was to ensure 50% of all schools in Scotland achieved the award.

Wales

Most schools in Wales that participated in the research were also encouraged or funded by local authorities to take part in the RRSA. One teacher reported that while their local authority had stopped providing funding for schools to participate in the award, they had started to provide in-house training to schools on a human rights approach. It was acknowledged, however, that different local authorities have different priorities and, while some regions in Wales were leading on this agenda, others were not promoting HRE. The Children's Commissioner for Wales was also cited as an important external factor that aided the adoption and implementation of a human rights approach in the schools in Wales.

England

Teachers from schools in England provided a different view, citing a lack of government support as a barrier. This was attributed to a perception among government that HRE was too detached from academic attainment. To ensure HRE, teachers identified a need to convince central government of its potential impact through evidence that it works. While a number of teachers spoke about the positive impact this approach has on attainment, they also acknowledged that it is very difficult to evidence this and to attribute improvements solely to the introduction of HRE. Although drawing together this evidence was considered strategically important to influence central government, teachers also identified the danger in placing too much focus on the impact that HRE has on attainment, given the importance of HRE in and of itself. While some local authorities in England have provided support and funding to schools, none of the participating schools in England received this support.

4.7 A supportive national curriculum

There was a consensus that making HRE part of the required curriculum provides strong incentive and support for schools to embed it and teachers spoke about the different opportunities provided by the national curricula to adopt HRE.

Scotland

The curriculum and all the other changes that have come have most definitely made that [teaching HRE] much easier. And any teachers coming in now, student teachers, that is part of what they do on a day-to-day basis, but that shift has taken quite a bit of time. – Teacher in Scotland

In Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence, in addition to the government policies such as GIRFEC, created an environment which was facilitative to HRE. Aspects of human rights education were embedded into the curriculum and Education Scotland inspections. While teachers in Scotland were positive about the role of the curriculum and inspectorates, one school was advised by Education Scotland that they focused too much on human rights and that they should focus more on other policies such as GIRFEC. Given that the values of GIRFEC align with HRE, schools and inspectorates would benefit from a shared language and framework focused on human rights.

England

You have to prioritise it [HRE] and unless it's put there as something that's statutory, other schools may find it really difficult. – Teacher in England

In contrast, teachers from schools in England spoke about the difficulties that other schools would have prioritising HRE given that it is not a mandatory part of the national curriculum or included in inspectorate frameworks. Again, schools reported a conflict between implementing and justifying a human rights approach and delivering school or curriculum priorities.

It was perceived that Ofsted, the inspectorate body in England, had some responsibility for the over-emphasis on academic attainment in schools at the expense of a more holistic curriculum, including HRE. Teachers reported that the criteria that Ofsted have traditionally used to judge schools were too blunt and overly focused on exam results. This focus has had a detrimental effect, with primary and secondary schools narrowing their overall curriculum to focus exclusively on academic attainment. Teachers also reported that other secondary schools were shortening their key stage three to ensure that pupils get an extra year to study at key stage four (See Annex for details on national curricula).

Teachers noted that the changes in the Ofsted framework may encourage schools in England to focus on a broader and more holistic curriculum, including human rights education. Ofsted's new inspection arrangements, which came into effect in September 2019, changed to introduce a new 'quality of education' judgement. The new framework measurement aimed to ensure Ofsted inspectors spend less time looking at exam results and test data, and more time considering how schools achieved their results (Ofsted, 2019). That is, 'whether they are the outcome of a broad, rich curriculum and real learning, or of teaching to the test and exam cramming' (ibid). Teachers from schools in England also remarked that the promotion of 'cultural capital' by Ofsted, may open up opportunities for schools to adopt a more holistic approach to education.

Wales

I think it has been left very much to the leadership of the school. If it was something that was high on your agenda, or you understood it [...] But now, under the new curriculum where it's making it statutory, it'll be done. – Teacher in Wales

Teachers from schools in Wales similarly spoke about the potential unwillingness of other schools in Wales to adopt HRE given that it is not mandatory. However, they were optimistic about the opportunities that the new Curriculum for Wales (2022) will provide. The new Curriculum for Wales gives schools and teachers more flexibility and autonomy through six 'Areas of Learning and Experience' (AoLE): Expressive arts; Health and well-being; Humanities; Languages, Literacy and communication; Mathematics and numeracy and Science and technology (see Annex for more detail on the new Curriculum for Wales).

Teachers stated that the new curriculum places a strong focus on rights, particularly in the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE), which will encourage schools to integrate them into teaching. The 'Health and well-being' AoLE was identified as another area where there are significant opportunities for schools to teach about human rights and empathy, which one teacher considered crucial to a human rights approach.

5 What is the impact of human rights education?

We asked teachers about the impact of HRE and how they measured this.

5.1 Improved attainment and attendance

We've gone from, in this area, the lowest-performing school five years ago to the highest performing non-selective school in the area. And being a rights-respecting school has been a big part of that. [...] For pupils to attain better, they first need to at least appreciate the importance of education. – Teacher in England

Our attendance data – we have improved significantly. And whilst other schools in the region attendance has dropped, ours has continued to rise. So in Welsh Government data, we're above our model. Our attendance is positive, we're in the top half of schools. – Teacher in Wales

Teachers reported a significant improvement in attainment following the adoption of a human rights approach. While this was hard to attribute exclusively to HRE, given other interventions made by schools, teachers across the three nations acknowledged measurable improvements in comparison to previous years before this approach was adopted. Most teachers also reported a marked improvement in pupil attendance but similarly acknowledged the difficulty in attributing this directly to the human rights approach. Some schools did provide figures showing an improvement compared to previous years and also in comparison to other schools in the local area.

Most commonly, these improvements were attributed to the overall change in the school environment and the creation of a rights-respecting ethos. Teachers acknowledged that pupils feel safe, valued and respected when they are in school, which they linked to a rise in pupils attending classes. Teachers also acknowledged that the new approach allowed pupils to appreciate the importance of education, which further impacted attainment.

5.2 Reduced prejudice and discriminatory attitudes

We're very diverse culturally as a school, and racial incidents are unheard of. Few and far between. We have a racism register which we keep, and since having the rights-respecting stuff, that has reduced. – Teacher in Wales

Challenging prejudice and fostering an inclusive school environment was a key component of the rights-respecting work that participating schools engaged in. Teachers explicitly expressed a desire to equip pupils with the tools and experiences needed to be tolerant, rights-respecting citizens and ran a number of initiatives which aimed to expose pupils to different cultures, traditions and ways of thinking. Teachers reported that this had a positive impact and stated that pupils were more 'outward-looking' and more engaged with human rights as a result. One school reported a reduction in the use of homophobic language among the pupils. The responses to our pupil survey reiterated this, with pupils stating that HRE has opened their eyes to human rights and the work that needs to be done to ensure everyone has access to their rights locally and around the world.

Schools with ethnically and religiously diverse populations also saw a more cohesive and integrated student body as a result of HRE and teachers were positive about its potential to ensure good relations and integration between different groups in other schools. In one school, a reduction in discriminatory attitudes was demonstrated by a reduction in racist incidents. A human rights approach also helped to foster community spirit and a sense of belonging within schools. The rights-respecting approach was something pupils (and staff) from different areas, ethnic backgrounds and religions could unite around.

Some teachers also acknowledged that a human rights approach allowed them to provide a consistent moral message to pupils. As non-denominational schools, they felt that this was important and noted that faith schools are often more explicit about integrating a moral message across the school and curriculum.

5.3 Improved pupil behaviour

Behaviourally, we saw a marked improvement when we went to the restorative practice, which was a direct result of being respectful to our pupils and talking about rights. That approach has led to a difference, definitely. You won't hear pupils being shouted at here. There is that right to being disciplined with dignity and that's not having somebody shout in your face. I can directly say that that's due to being a rights-respecting school, and to teaching about rights. – Teacher in England

I would say it's affected everything. Exclusion rates, definitely. You can see that in the statistics, as soon as we started that [RRS] award. – Teacher in Scotland

Teachers reported a marked improvement in pupil behaviour and a reduction in conflict in most schools. This also resulted in a reduction in exclusions in most cases. These improvements were commonly attributed to the rights-respecting ethos, the value placed on mutual respect and tolerance throughout the school and the move to restorative approaches to conflict. Improved behaviour was also linked to increased pupil participation and input into decision-making. Given that pupils were regularly consulted on school policies and often collaborated in designing school rules, adherence to rules and policies improved.

A smaller number of schools reported a reduction in bullying as measured by schools' internal recording systems. It was also noted that a human rights approach facilitated better relationships between staff and pupils which has led to pupils feeling more able to report bullying and a belief that they would be listened to and action would be taken to address it.

5.4 Improved pupil well-being, engagement and confidence

By learning about human rights it's given me the freedom of expressing my thoughts and given me an idea of what I want to do in my future [...] My confidence and independence has been widened and it's really brought me into the person I am. – Pupil

Overwhelmingly, teachers reported an increase in pupil well-being, which they measured through pupil surveys. This improvement has been attributed to the improved relationships between teachers and pupils, allowing pupils to be more confident to raise matters that are worrying them with teachers. Furthermore, the rights-respecting approach and the introduction of strong pastoral programmes encouraged staff to ask pupils more about their well-being and facilitated an open and inclusive school environment.

Teachers reported increased pupil engagement and participation following the creation of pupil voice mechanisms. This has led to improved confidence among pupils, particularly when engaging in discussions and debates and better pupil–teacher relationships. These benefits were further reflected in responses to our pupil survey. Several pupils who were involved in pupil leadership groups and councils felt their self-esteem, confidence and independence had improved as a result of this participation. Teachers also acknowledged that the RRSA opened up numerous opportunities for pupils, particularly those who are Rights Ambassadors, which they would otherwise not have had. These opportunities were presented through advocacy work, for example, pupils got the chance to visit Downing Street and meet politicians through the rights-respecting work.

5.5 Better teacher recruitment and retention

It helps with recruitment. Why wouldn't you want to go to a school that looks in-depth at the rights of the child and that makes sure that they get the very best learning conditions in classrooms. So I have much less staff turnover now than I did when I came here. Because we have that climate which is better – Teacher in England

An improvement in staff retention and recruitment was reported in a small number of schools. Teachers attributed this to the improved ethos and working environment within the school and acknowledged that this was particularly valuable given teacher shortages.

Conclusion

Human rights education is important in order to ensure that all people are aware of, and empowered to act on, their human rights. HRE is also an entitlement and is enshrined in several key international human rights instruments including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UK Government, therefore, has an international obligation to promote HRE.

While schools are not required to adopt a human rights approach, they have a positive duty to promote equality and cohesion among different groups. The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requires all public bodies and those carrying out public functions to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunities and foster good relations. This responsibility falls on all schools in England, Scotland and Wales and is also the responsibility of Education Authorities in Scotland. Adopting a human rights approach towards education may enable them to fulfil this duty.

Implementing HRE also makes good educational sense. Our research findings demonstrate the positive impact of HRE on pupils and schools. Teachers reported improved attainment and attendance; a reduction in prejudice and discriminatory attitudes; improved pupil behaviour and a reduction in exclusions; improved pupil well-being and pupil engagement; and better teacher recruitment and retention.

Our research also provides examples of how 10 secondary schools across Great Britain have implemented HRE. Creating a rights-respecting ethos, integrating human rights across the curriculum, fostering pupil participation and ensuring an inclusive and fair learning environment were key steps for schools in this process. We hope that these steps can act as an initial template for other schools who want to adopt this approach.

While the research illustrates how schools have adopted a human rights approach and the benefits of HRE, it also highlights the challenges in developing this approach, which have implications for expanding it across the sector. It finds that support for HRE remains uneven among teachers, senior leadership teams, local and national governments and inspectorates. If HRE is to be developed across the sector, more must be done to promote it and illustrate its benefits. Further evidence of the impact of a human rights approach is important here, particularly its long-term impact, to provide a strong evidence base to both practitioners and policymakers.

Schools are also operating in a context of limited resources and capacity. While there are many ways that schools can adopt a human rights approach, this research focused on those who were accredited with the UNICEF RRSA. This incurs a cost and, in times of diminishing school budgets, teachers acknowledged that the RRSA will not always take precedence. Our findings also suggest that whole-child development and human rights education are often neglected in favour of other priorities such as exam results and attainment in other schools. This raises questions about the nature and purpose of education more broadly and speaks to ongoing conversations across the education sector.

Our research findings further indicate that knowledge about HRE and the UNCRC remains inconsistent. Some of the teachers who participated in the research expressed frustration that the UNCRC was not very well-known, given the UK's commitment to uphold and promote it. It was also reported that some staff in participating schools felt ill-equipped to teach HRE when a human rights approach was initially introduced. In Scotland, however, there was a greater awareness of the UNCRC among school staff, given that it is explicitly mentioned in the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) requirements. This is an example from which the other nations can learn. To raise awareness and equip teachers with the tools required to teach about, through and for human rights, HRE must be incorporated into initial teacher training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

Crucially, our research findings demonstrate that local and national government support is important to overcome these challenges, and highlight that progress across the three nations has been different. In Scotland and Wales, national measures have been introduced which promote the UNCRC and HRE. Most notably, the Scottish and Welsh Governments have, to an extent, integrated the UNCRC into domestic law which has encouraged some local authorities and schools to see HRE as part of their remit. Local authorities have, therefore, been crucial in driving this approach in Wales and Scotland through the provision of funding, training and resources. This has not been the case in England.

National governments have also responded differently to calls to make HRE mandatory in the curricula. In Scotland, HRE is embedded in the Curriculum for Excellence and Education Scotland inspections and teachers identified this as an incentive for schools to teach it. In England and Wales, the national curricula and inspectorate frameworks do not provide the same incentives. The new Curriculum for Wales 2022, however, provides significant opportunities to promote and embed HRE given that HRE and the UNCRC are integrated across areas of learning and experience. Our research findings suggest that, unless HRE is a mandatory part of the curricula and inspectorate frameworks, schools may find it difficult to prioritise and it will remain the duty of individual schools and dedicated rights champions within them to push it forward.

Annex- National curricula

England

Maintained schools in England must teach the subjects in the national curriculum (DfE, 2014). The national curriculum is divided into four key stages. Key stages 3 and 4 are covered at secondary school level. Compulsory national curriculum subjects at key stage three (years 7, 8 and 9) are: English, maths, science, history, geography, modern foreign language, design and technology, art and design, music, physical education, citizenship and computing. During key stage 4 (years 10 and 11) the compulsory national curriculum subjects are 'core' and 'foundation' subjects. Core subjects are English, maths, science. Foundation subjects are computing, physical education, citizenship. Schools must also offer at least one subject from each of these areas: arts, design and technology, humanities, modern foreign languages.

In addition to the national curriculum, maintained schools in England at secondary level must also offer a programme of sex and relationships education (SRE) and religious education (RE) for all registered pupils (DfE, 2014). These elements, plus the national curriculum, comprise the statutory curriculum for maintained schools. The 2015 Government passed legislation requiring revised relationships and sex education to be offered by all secondary schools. The intention is for first teaching of the new R(S)E to begin from September 2020, following consultation and parliamentary debate. From September 2020 it will also be compulsory for all schools to teach health education.

Academies and free schools don't have to follow the national curriculum. They must, however, offer a broad and balanced curriculum that covers English, maths and sciences. They are also required to teach RE and, as of September 2020, RSE and health education. Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) was compulsory in independent schools prior to 2020 and continues to be so.

Wales

The National Curriculum for Wales (2008) is a curriculum for pupils between the age of 3 and 16. It is divided into four key stages; Key stages 3 and 4 are covered at secondary level. The national curriculum for key stage 3 (ages 11–14) in Wales includes the following compulsory subjects: English, Welsh, mathematics, science, design and technology, information and communication technology, history, geography, art and design, music, physical education and a modern foreign language. Key stage 4 (ages 14–16) includes English, Welsh, mathematics, science and physical education. Every maintained secondary school in Wales is also required to provide religious education, personal and social education, sex education and during the third and fourth key stages, work-related education.

The Welsh Government is currently introducing the new Curriculum for Wales 2022 for learners aged 3 to 16. The new curriculum aims to support learners to become: 'ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives; enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work; ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world and healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society (Welsh Government and Education Wales, 2020a). The new Curriculum for Wales 2022 gives schools and teachers more flexibility and autonomy and has six 'Areas of Learning and Experience' (AoLE): expressive arts; health and well-being; humanities; languages, literacy and communication; mathematics and numeracy and science and technology (ibid). The Welsh Government has set up a Pioneer Schools Network to pilot the new curriculum which will be implemented across all schools from 2022.

Scotland

In Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence, introduced in 2010–11, provides a framework for learning and teaching rather than a national curriculum. Responsibility for what is taught rests with councils and schools although they must take national guidelines and advice into account. The Curriculum for Excellence gives education authorities and schools more flexibility and autonomy to enable young people aged 3 to 18 to become 'successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors' across specific curriculum areas (Education Scotland). The eight curriculum areas are: expressive arts; health and well-being; languages; mathematics; religious and moral education; sciences; social studies and technologies (ibid). Three of the curriculum areas (Literacy, Numeracy and Health and well-being) are particularly important and all staff are responsible for providing these experiences and delivering these outcomes.

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Introduction

INTRODUCE SELF AND HRE RESEARCH.

- **Aim of the research:** Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. As part of this project, we have identified a number of schools from across England, Scotland and Wales who have adopted a human rights-based approach to education and are conducting qualitative interviews with teachers and head teachers in order to determine good practice and impact.
- **The interview will focus on:**
 - Your school's understanding of human rights education
 - Your school's approach to human rights education
 - Examples of best practice within the school
 - The role of the curriculum
 - The barriers to adopting a human rights-based approach in education and the challenges you faced
 - The opportunities that facilitated the adoption of this approach
 - The impact of human rights education
- Your responses will help share learning and information about good practice across the sector to help drive positive change.
- The interview will take around 60 minutes to complete depending on what you have to say.
- **Equality and Human Rights Commission Code of Conduct and Confidentiality:** Please be assured that anything you say during the interview will be treated in the strictest confidence. Information about individuals who participate in the research will be anonymised in the final report. Schools may be named as good practice case studies or as a participant in the appendix of the report, but only with the prior consent of the head teacher.
- Interview recordings and summaries will be saved on a restricted-access area of our server that can only be accessed by the research team. EHRC research is fully compliant with GDPR legislation.
- Please note the Equality and Human Rights Commission must act on any incidents relating to child protection or breaches of the Equality Act. In the unlikely event that this happens, right to confidentiality will be waived.
- Please can you confirm that you understand the following statements, and if applicable, indicate that you are happy to continue with the interview on this basis:

- **I understand the above information and I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.**
- **I agree for my organisation's name, contact details and interview responses to be stored at the EHRC.**

[INTERVIEWER TO ASK WHETHER RESPONDENT IS HAPPY TO CONTINUE WITH THE INTERVIEW]

- **3) Optional: I consent to my organisation being named as a participant in an appendix to the EHRC's published report (no individuals will be named).**
- **4) Optional: I consent to my organisation being identified as an example of good practice in the body of the report or in an associated case study report (you will be given the opportunity to review the content prior to publication, and have the case anonymised at that point if you prefer).**

[INTERVIEWER TO ASK WHETHER RESPONDENT IS HAPPY TO CONTINUE WITH THE INTERVIEW]

Finally, do I have your permission to record this? It's just so I can revisit the detail of what you said without having to take lots of notes. Only the research team at the EHRC will have access to it.

A) Understanding of human rights education

- What is your understanding of human rights education?
- What do you think the key elements of a human rights approach are?

B) Implementation

One of the things we are interested in is your approach to human rights education and how you have implemented a human rights-based approach.

- How have you integrated a human rights-based approach into your school?
 - Prompts: Whole-school approach or subject-oriented?
 - Changes to formal rules, policies, structures, training, school documents?
 - How have pupils been involved in this process? Prompts: pupil steering group?
 - How do you ensure a human rights approach is embedded in the school when pupils and staff are regularly changing?
- Thinking about the original decision to adopt a human rights-based approach, were there any key factors that encouraged or influenced you to do so?

- Possible prompts: the council, other schools in the area, encourage by UNICEF, leadership of head teacher?
- How did you enable the teachers in the school to teach about and through human rights?
 - Were teachers already equipped to teach about, through and for human rights?
 - Do you think teachers, in general, get sufficient training to be able to teach about and through a human rights approach?

C) Examples of best practice

Thank you for you all your insight so far. To determine good practice, it would be really useful to look at what your school is doing well.

- Thinking generally about your approach, what elements or initiatives do you feel worked particularly well and/or have been particularly effective?
 - Why is that?
- Do you feel there are elements that could be improved upon or could go better?
 - Why is that?
 - Do you have plans to improve on these?

D) The curriculum

- When considering human rights education, do you think it situates easier into a specific subject(s) or curriculum area?
 - If yes, which one(s)? Why?
 - If not, how is this integrated throughout the curriculum?
- Do you think the new Welsh curriculum offers greater opportunities for HRE? How? (Wales only)

We are also interested in whether / how certain subjects have been approached from a human rights and equalities perspective in human rights-based schools.

- Does your school use a human rights framework to teach about...can you give us any examples...can you send some material...
 - Relationships and sex education
 - Citizenship
 - Religious Education
 - Collective worship (England and Wales only)
 - Fundamental British Values (England and Wales only)
- Does a HRE approach better equip staff to approach these subjects or other controversial topics?

E) Barriers and facilitators to HRE

Thank you for your answers so far. One aim of the research is to understand the barriers and opportunities for adopting a human rights-based approach.

- Were there any key factors which facilitated the success of a human rights-based approach?
 - What opportunities do you think are essential for other schools to identify or put in place to ensure a smooth implementation of HRE?
- What challenges or barriers, if any, have you faced in adopting a human rights-based approach in your school?
 - Possible prompts: Parent's unhappy, difficulty in incorporating HRE into the curriculum, lack of resources, resistance
 - How did you overcome these barriers?
- What changes, if any would be needed to ensure and enable more schools to successfully adopt a HRE approach and teach human rights?
 - Possible prompts: Mainstreaming human rights in the curriculum, human rights integrated into the inspectorate framework, school-to-school learning, CPD, training, resources

F) Impact

- What has the impact of a human rights-based approach been?
- Has there been any changes in:
 - Levels of prejudice and discriminatory attitudes and/or behaviours
 - Prevalence of bullying, especially identity-based bullying
 - Exclusion rates and pupil behaviour
 - Pupil attendance
 - Academic attainment
 - Pupils' well-being
 - Pupils' confidence and resilience
 - Pupils' engagement in decision-making
 - Pupils' engagement in human rights issues
 - General fostering of good relations in the local community beyond the school gates
 - Any other relevant aspects of school life
- How do you measure/monitor this impact? Interviewer to probe around evidence of impact.
- To what extent can these benefits be attributed directly to HRE?
- How does a human rights approach exceed the criteria of a 'good school'?

G) Conclusion and wrap up

Thank you for time today, your answers have been extremely useful to the EHRC research. Is there anything that you would like to mention that we have not covered today?

Appendix 2: Pupil questionnaire

About the research

The Equality and Human Rights Commission is Great Britain's national equality body. Our job is to help make Britain fairer. We do this by protecting and enforcing the laws that protect people's rights to fairness, dignity and respect.

We are conducting research on human rights education in secondary schools. The research aims to understand how schools embed human rights within the classroom and how this approach impacts pupils. We are speaking to teachers and pupils in 10 schools across Great Britain who have adopted a children's rights approach.

Your responses will be used to understand good practice and the findings will be used in a research report which will be published next year.

How we handle your data

This survey is anonymised and confidential. We are not collecting any personal data as part of this survey, so please do not leave any information in the comments boxes that may identify you (for example your name, age, class). All data will be handled in line with our [privacy notice](#).

Thank you for filling out our questionnaire.

1. Do you feel like you have a real say in the decisions that affect you in school? If yes, how? If no, why not?
2. Are pupils encouraged to stand up for their own rights in class?
3. What has your school done in relation to human rights that you particularly liked? (Give details)
4. Is there anything you don't like or that you have found difficult? Why is that?
5. What would you like to see changed or included in lessons about human rights?
6. Do you think a rights approach has made a difference in the school and in your wider community? If yes, how? If no, why not?
7. Has learning about human rights impacted you personally? If yes, how?
8. Do you think there are people in the school for whom the rights respecting work hasn't had any effect? If yes, why do you think this is?

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Contacts

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