

The Future of UK Aid and Development Assistance: The Case for Global Learning

Once one of the leading countries in the world with regards to promoting public understanding and engagement in international development, the UK is now one of the few OECD countries that does not resource or take a strong policy position on promoting a deeper understanding of international development and global issues through education.

At a time when there is a rise of both far-right populism, and forms of ethnic nationalism, there has never been a greater need (arguably since the 1930s) to promote the importance of internationalism and a global outlook. We live in a global society. As the recent DFE International Education strategy states, there is a need to create more opportunities for young people to be able to develop the confidence and skills to thrive in a globalised world. To do this, they need not only access and support for intercultural exchanges, but also opportunities to learn more about global issues and how they can support the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

What is needed is for UK government to develop a joined-up strategy for global learning and the promotion of global citizenship within all forms of education, by combining the resources of several government departments.

A call for the development of such a strategy was made in 2024 by a coalition of over 50 civil society organisations, and numerous universities: 'The Case for Global Learning'.¹ This call, and an associated set of detailed recommendations, was launched in July in the House of Commons, and secured the support of parliamentarians such as Fabian Hamilton, Alex Sobel, Angus MacDonald, Martin Rhodes, Steve Race, Tim Farron, Sarah Green, Richard Burgon and Seamus Logan.

From 1997 to 2010, the UK was regarded as the leading country in the world for promoting and resourcing such 'development education' approaches. It was because of this support that there were such successful initiatives as Make Poverty History, the integration of global dimension within formal education, and a wealth of projects that engaged a wide range of civil society organisations in partnership with schools, colleges and universities.

From 2012 to 2018, over 10,000 schools across the UK engaged in the government funded Global Learning Programme. Since 2021, there has been no funding from UK government for any initiatives that promote learning within schools on understanding the wider world. There have been initiatives on climate change, but they have tended to focus on nature study and the outdoor environment, skirting around the more complex issues of interdependence and inequity.

As a consequence, educational bodies have not had the resources to address the rise in narrow nationalistic sentiments, or to promote the importance of developing in learners a sense of global responsibility.

¹ <https://www.thegloballearningnetwork.org/the-case-for-global-learning/>

Support for international development and aid has to be linked to the promotion of a critical global outlook, internationalism, and an understanding that our lives and economies are interconnected, and more importantly, interdependent.

To this end, and mindful of the funding restraints on government departments, we recommend the following:

- 1) FCDO commits to work with other government and bodies such as the Global Learning network, similar networks in Scotland and Wales, and relevant academics, to develop a strategy that promotes understanding of international development and global issues. This strategy would focus on the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as making connections to domestic agendas around community cohesion, migration, and climate change.
- 2) UK government commits to signing and supporting the European Declaration on Global Education to 2050² initiative.
- 3) FCDO works in partnership with other government departments to identify common themes which can help to promote a sense of internationalism and global citizenship across UK educational institutions and relevant bodies in society. This to include explicit references to global citizenship in relevant national curricula, and ensuring that schools, colleges and universities are encouraging initiatives that are in line with pronouncements by bodies such as UNESCO on global citizenship, particularly their 2023 Recommendation on Education for Human Rights, Sustainability, Peace, Global Citizenship and international Understanding³. This means giving specific reference to the value of educational institutions encouraging a global outlook, the value of learning about the wider world, and intercultural understanding.

Please do be in touch with me if you have any questions or comments. We look forward to your response.

Best regards,

Professor Douglas Bourn



² <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f6decace4ff425352eddb4a/t/6982093b5c81dc19773ff9d2/1770129723476/GE2050-declaration.pdf>

³ <https://www.unesco.org/en/global-citizenship-peace-education/recommendation>