



# Human rights education

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Michael Olatokun, Research Fellow in Citizenship Education and the Rule of Law, and Sabina Garahan, Researcher, wrote a blog about the importance of human rights education for the British Institute of Human Rights' "March for Human Rights" Campaign.

On 28 March 2018, a group of academics, campaigners and civil society leaders will gather at the Bingham Centre to discuss how we can best use human rights education ("HRE") to empower young people across the country to become active citizens in their communities. Frequent visitors to this site will already understand the importance of human rights in practice, crucial to protecting individuals from abuse of public power and giving effect to their rights. For these aims to be achieved, it is vital that the public is both aware of, and understands, what human rights are. Despite this, HRE rarely forms part of the discussion, presenting a missed opportunity to inform citizens of their rights from an early age and, thus, to make human rights more effective for all.

Never again

HRE is one of several means proffered by the international community to protect human dignity in the post-World War II "never again" narrative framing of international human rights law. Written into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with its importance being accepted and recently restated by the 47 Member States of the Council of Europe, HRE forms part of the Key Stage 4 citizenship education curriculum in England and Wales. Based on the insurmountable logic that individuals cannot protect themselves or others against violations of their rights if they do not know what they are, human rights education buttresses the rule of law and democracy in society.

What is HRE?

HRE is a transformative process that is distinct from other forms of teaching. In order for lessons to meet the full definition of HRE, they must be about, through and for human rights. Each of these components is briefly explored below.

About human rights

The content of HRE must provide learners with a level of knowledge that is sufficient to allow them to determine when human rights are infringed and what the relevant protections in a given situation are. This may also include exploring key social justice achievements that have been won through human rights litigation.

Through human rights

HRE should be delivered in a way that is compatible with human rights. Ensuring that all students have equal access to HRE is one way of achieving this. For instance, the human rights values of universality and equality would clearly not be respected if, in a co-educational school, the subject was taught only to male students.

HRE should also promote a more dynamic and engaged classroom setting. The traditional style of teaching where students often receive information in a ready-prepared format may be less appropriate here than democratised, peer-led classrooms where students have a real opportunity to shape lesson delivery and discourse.

For human rights

Successful HRE gives learners the skills and confidence to participate in public life, stimulating behaviours that encourage them to make a positive impact on their communities and to campaign on the issues they care about. HRE can in this way be transformative for society as well as the individual.

Those working in the education sector can request free HRE resources [here](#).

As Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations and Nobel Peace Prize winner, said:

"Human rights education is much more than a lesson in schools or a theme for a day; it is a process to equip people with the tools they need to live lives of security and dignity ... let us continue to work together to develop and nurture in future generations a culture of human rights, to promote freedom, security and peace in all nations."

URL: <https://binghamcentre.biicl.org/comments/12/human-rights-education>