

RTEI Country Brief 2018 – United Kingdom

Introduction:

The Right to Education Index (RTEI) is global index built out of the right to education framework designed to measure global accountability towards reaching the right to education. This short review outlines key findings revealed by the United Kingdom’s data collection process in 2018. This review identifies areas in which duty-bearers can look to improve efforts and fulfil their responsibilities to fulfilling internationally agreed education targets, such as Sustainable Development Goal 4, both domestically and internationally.

Index Score: 88

Governance 89		Availability ID		Accessibility 88		Acceptability 86		Adaptability 73	
International Framework	84	Classroom ID		Free Education	75	Aims of Education	67	Children with Disabilities	100
National Law	100	Sanitation ID		Discrimination	95	Learning Environment	92	Children with Minorities	50
Plan of Action	100	Teachers	65	Participation	94	Learning Outcomes	100	Out-of-school Education	55
Monitoring and Reporting	100	Textbooks ID						Out-of-school Children	86
Financing	78								
Data Availability	72							ID: Insufficient Data	

Cross-cutting Theme Scores

Girls Education	Children with Disabilities	Indigenous and Minority Populations	Private Education	Teachers	Content of Education
90%	100%	82%	80%	99%	87%

Monitoring and Accountability	National Normative Framework	Opportunity and Indirect Costs	Alignment of Education Aims	Sustainable Development Goal 4
64%	85%	77%	100%	92%

General

The UK scores very highly on the Right to Education Index with an overall score of 88% – a 2% increase since the last survey in 2016. The UK is now the second highest scoring country in the index, falling just behind South Korea. It is likely that the UK would score significantly higher were it not for data shortages – particularly in the ‘availability section.’

Scores were increased since 2016 by 2% in governance, 4% in availability and 3% in adaptability. Acceptability dropped by 6% and availability dropped from 99% to just 16% – though this is a result of inadequate data.

Adaptability

The UK performs averagely on adaptability – ranking eleventh of the twenty-one countries surveyed. Adaptability is the UK’s worst performing area where adequate data exists, just as it was in 2016, although three percentage points have been gained since then.

For the UK to boost its score, the most significant improvements need to be made for children of minorities. Specifically, the UK needs to improve at teaching children who have English as a second language (EAL), who now make up over 15% of schoolchildren¹.

Outcomes for EAL learners vary greatly by area. Where teachers are adequately trained and resourced, EAL students often outperform their native English speaking counterparts. But where training and resources are poor, EAL children frequently underperform.

New teachers most frequently cite teaching EAL students as the area of work they feel least equipped for. Some report getting only two hours of training and no further support. There is also significant disparity between school resourcing for EAL children, where some get expert help from their local authority while others get no support at all.

The only area where the UK’s score has decreased since 2016 is in education for out of school children.

Despite a legal requirement for most youth custody institutions to ensure 30 hours of education per week, in practice the average amount of education time is 17 hours, with some children receiving almost nothing, while others receive 30².

¹ British Council <https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/how-uk-schools-support-young-learners-english>

Monitoring and accountability

Monitoring and accountability is the UK's lowest cross-cutting score by a large margin. The UK's score falls down because there is no national standard setting the number of pupils per class.

There is legislation limiting class sizes to 30 for children between 5-7 years old. For all other age groups and subjects there is only guidance, which is not always adhered to.

Although 90% of students are taught in class sizes of under 30, which is widely regarded as an appropriate limit in most school contexts, reports of oversized classes are becoming more frequent and severe – with a school in Yorkshire recently reporting a class size of 46.

International Development/SDG 4

The UK has a strong score across a range of indices and with a score of 92% the UK ranked the highest among all countries for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. With an index score of 88%, the UK was the second highest performing RTEI country, behind South Korea. As previously demonstrated in the RTEI 2016 data findings, the UK is a Global Leader in its domestic education policies.

The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) released an updated Education Policy in February 2018, entitled 'Get Children Learning' with an emphasis on improving the quality of education and targeted support to the most marginalised groups. The updated policy listed three priorities: 1) Invest in good teaching, 2) Back system reform which delivers results and 3) Step up targeted support to the most marginalised. The new Education Policy's emphasis on quality and inclusivity aligns strongly with the international agreed global education target SDG 4, "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."

With a strong RTEI score and refined commitment to improving the quality and accessibility of education around the world the UK is undoubtedly a global leader in education. There are, however, steps the UK government can take to ensure that the UK can realise its commitments to improving global education and replicate domestic achievements in education with the international community. In 2016, official DFID statistics revealed that the UK government remained short of international targets for Official Development Assistance (ODA) on education. An 2017 IDC inquiry on DFID's approach to Education found that ODA for global education remained far short of the 15% recommended by the global campaign for Education[i].

Moreover, DFID's emphasis on 'get children learning' risks diluting the focus away from the need to achieve inclusive and quality education for all, including technical, tertiary and vocational skills training for adults – as directly referred to in SDG 4 targets and indicators[ii].

² POSTnote, <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0524/POST-PN-0524.pdf>

Data Availability

Data availability achieved a relatively low score of 72%, a 4% decrease from the previous UK RTEI country brief compiled in 2016. There was distinct lack of data available for Classrooms, Sanitation and Textbooks (in addition to a collection of questions which were deemed inapplicable for the UK) which cumulated in insufficient data for an overall score on availability.

While the data in this study refers to the UK as a whole, education policy in the UK is devolved between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, so disparities between the four nations are not taken account of in this study.

Recommendations:

1. To address the shortcomings in education for EAL children, the Government should adequately resource local authorities and set clearer criteria for local authorities to fulfil in relation to EAL students. There may also be a role for Ofsted, the education regulator, to more closely monitor and enforce EAL outcomes.
2. To ensure all children in custody receive an appropriate education, it will be for enforcement agencies such as the Prisons Inspectorate to ensure mandatory requirements are met. Prisons must also be adequately resourced to ensure safety for both students and staff and so that disruptive children do not prevent others getting access to education.
3. To improve their score, the UK Government and devolved administrations should consider legislation to limit class sizes in line with recommendations made by national teaching and education unions.
4. The UK should increase its funding to global education through both its bilateral and multilateral programming.
5. The UK should ensure global education programmes replicate the success of domestic education programmes, particularly relating to progress towards the achievement of SDG 4.

[i] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmintdev/367/367.pdf>

[ii] <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>