

RTEI Country Brief 2016 – United Kingdom

Introduction

The Right to Education Index (RTEI) is a new global index designed to drive accountability towards realising the right to education. This short report reviews the key findings revealed by the UK RTEI data collection process, identifies areas in which decision makers should look to improve efforts to realise the right to education, and sets forth several policy recommendations.

RTEI 2016 – How did the UK perform?

Index Score: 86

Governance 87		Availability 99		Accessibility 84		Acceptability 92		Adaptability 70	
International Framework	80	Classrooms	100	Free Education	83	Aims of Education	95	Children with Disabilities	83
National law	100	Sanitation	100	Discrimination	79	Learning Environment	92	Children of Minorities	40
Plan of Action	100	Teachers	98	Participation	89	Learning Outcomes	90	Out of School Education	55
Monitoring and Reporting	100	Textbooks	No data					Out of School Children	100
Financing	68								
Data Availability	76								

Overall the United Kingdom scored very strongly on the Right to Education Index with an index score of 86, making it the highest performing of the study. It consistently ranks above the average score for the various themes studied and only on one occasion, with regards to ‘Adaptability’, does it score at the same level as the average score.

Whilst the data and related index refers to the UK as a whole, it is worth noting that the different constituent countries of the UK have devolved education systems so their scores may be different to the UK result.

Issue area 1 – Children of minorities (Adaptability)

As outlined above, of the five themes ‘Adaptability’ came out with the lowest index score for the UK. Within Adaptability, RTEI revealed children of minorities as an area of particular concern. Compared to the Adaptability theme average of 0.7, children of minorities received a score of 0.43, which was also by some margin the lowest subtheme score across the questionnaire results.

According to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment 11, Paragraph 61, “States parties should ... establish mobile schools for indigenous peoples who practice nomadic traditions.” In practice in the UK, students from Roma, Gypsy or Traveler backgrounds are not provided with mobile schools and this impacted negatively on the UK

score in this subtheme. On average, children from these three minority groups are amongst the lowest achieving students and are more likely to be identified as having special educational needs (SEN)¹. The reasons for this inequity are complex and robust evidence that is able to inform policy change is limited.

RTEI also revealed that there is no legislation in the UK ensuring that children are able to receive education in their mother tongue. With over 100 languages spoken in the UK, and 1 in 5 of those who reside in Britain not speaking English as their mother tongue², this finding does raise questions in regard to the right to education. At primary level, over 20% of students do not receive education in their mother tongue, for secondary level the figure is slightly lower at 15%.

Despite not being legally obliged to deliver education to children in their mother tongue, the UK Government does allocate government funding to ensure that students for whom English is not mother tongue receive support to learn English. In 2014, the UK Government spent £244 million on teaching English, bilingual teaching assistants and interpreters.

Recommendations

1. The UK Government should commission a research project to identify what determines high educational attainment among students from Roma, Gypsy and Traveler communities. This research should be used to inform future policy.
2. The UK Government should update its 2007 guidance paper, 'Supporting children learning English as an additional language Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage' to ensure that pre-school and primary school staff are equipped with the best possible guidance to deliver quality education to students for whom English is not mother tongue.

Issue area 2 - SDG 4.3 (Cross-cutting)

While each of the five RTEI themes are broken down into subthemes, several cross-cutting issues are also analysed throughout the questionnaire. One of the issues looked at is progress towards the realisation of SDG4. The UK scored a particularly weak index score of 0.49 on progress towards SDG 4.3, which aims, by 2030, to ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university. The SDG 4 indicator framework measures progress towards this goal by tracking the participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex. RTEI, however, disaggregates between technical and vocational training, and other forms of further education, including tertiary education.

There is no data available to track enrolment rates for technical and vocational training in the UK, despite many other OECD countries doing so. While some subjects such as engineering do have figures, no aggregate figures are available, making it difficult to

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181669/DFE-RR043.pdf

² <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2270638/Revealed-The-language-map-England-shows-40-people-say-English-mother-tongue.html>

measure UK progress in this area. 22% of 25-64 year-olds are educated to bachelor degree level in the UK, compared with the OECD average of 16%. When it comes to upper-secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary, however, of those aged 25-64, 37% are educated to this level in the UK, compared to the OECD average of 43%. The UK lags behind many of its European counterparts on technical skills training at the upper-secondary level³. According to Wolf (2016), a series of government reforms from the late 1980s onwards, rather than increasing secondary and tertiary level alternatives to academic upper-secondary courses and university degrees, instead left England with undeveloped vocational and technical provision.

Recommendations

1. The UK Government should improve its data collection of technical or vocational upper-secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education.
2. The UK Government should play much more active role in structuring and assuring English non-academic qualifications, something which is prevalent in other OECD countries and in secondary and upper secondary academic qualifications.

Issue Area 3 – International Development

The United Kingdom has a strong score across a range of indices and with an index score of 87% it is the highest performing RTEI country. This shows the UK to be a global leader in terms of its domestic education policies, with particular strengths in areas which are important for official development assistance (ODA).

The RTEI data shows that the UK allocated 0.03% of GNI to foreign aid in relation to education. Within the UK's Department for International Development, education ranks as the third highest priority by financial allocation, using project budgets by sector for the financial year 2016/17.⁴ In the 2016 Bilateral Development Review, the UK government recognised the importance of education and its positive impacts on employability, and in helping young people to 'live healthier and more productive lives'.⁵

With the combined nature of a high RTEI score and commitment to education in its development programmes the UK is a global leader in this sector. To further cement this position and ensure that it is able to reach the most marginalised globally with transformative education programmes, the UK should increase the percentage of its budget that it gives in ODA to education through its bilateral work. When doing so, priority in programme planning must be given to ensure that programmes are available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable, capturing best practice from its domestic education work, as outlined in the RTEI, to ensure that the high standards are replicated wherever it disburses funds. A joined up approach such as this encourages the positive elements of skill and expertise sharing which can facilitate a two-way partnership towards a stronger, global education system.

³ Wolf, A (2016). *Remaking Tertiary Education: Can we create a system that is fair and fit for purpose?* Available at: <http://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/remaking-tertiary-education-web.pdf>

⁴ <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/> [accessed 16 January 2017].

⁵ Department for International Development, *Bilateral Development Review (2016)*, p35.

An immediate priority for the UK should be to ensure a successful replenishment of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), with an ambitious UK pledge, as well as working to ensure that GPE's programmes reflect and embody the principles tested in RTEI.

Recommendations

1. The UK increases its funding to global education through both its bilateral programmes and its support to key multilaterals such as GPE
2. The UK should ensure that all its education programmes embody the positive aspects of its domestic education policies as highlighted by RTEI. It's imperative that the gains in the UK are shared to facilitate a stronger, global education system.

Data availability

There were some significant shortages in data when completing the RTEI questionnaire in 2016. For several indicators which required data disaggregation, UK Government data only provided for disaggregation between male and female students. Data disaggregated by income, rurality, and more often than not, disability, was not available. UK Government data was in some cases disaggregated in other ways, however. For example, the UK uses students who receive free school meals as one way of disaggregating by income. While this is in fact determined by income in the UK, the lack of data disaggregated by income quintile meant it was not possible complete some sections of RTEI.

As the UK is made up of constituent nations with varying degrees of devolution, data availability varied nation to nation, with occasions where different parameters were used and reported on. To ensure the UK, as a nation state, is able to fully understand its constituent makeup, guidelines for reporting should be established which offer a template for UK data collection and publishing whilst respecting the nuances and differences required by the constituent nations.

Of the 15 countries that participated in the 2016 RTEI process, the UK, with an index score of 0.76, ranked 8th on data availability behind Honduras, Australia, Philippines, Chile, Palestine, Ethiopia and Tanzania.