

# **‘British Values Are Also Values All Around the World’: Teaching Fundamental British Values through a human rights lens**

## **Abstract**

Since 2014, the promotion of Fundamental British Values (FBV) has been a requirement across formal schooling in England. The agenda has, however, faced criticism from various stakeholders. Much of this denunciation has been directed at the opaque nature of FBV, but the agenda is problematic for more concerning reasons. It is arguable that, in light of the current threat from ethno-nationalism, frameworks such as FBV that focus on a particular definition and formulation of national values run the risk of being interpreted in a manner that is exclusionary and liable to ‘other’ different ethnic groups in the classroom. The FBV framework furthermore overlooks the fact that the UK is already subject to numerous international human rights obligations, including many that mandate the provision of holistic and effective Human Rights Education at all levels of formal education. This article therefore draws upon the findings of a pilot study conducted with Year 5 learners in four primary schools in the West Midlands showing that teaching about human rights through the FBV agenda is possible, by linking discussion of values at the national level to broader human rights principles. Such an approach satisfies the government’s desire for children to learn about FBV, whilst highlighting that these values also exist in a global context. This, in turn, is likely to be a more effective way of encouraging learners to be global citizens who will contribute to the building of a broader culture that is respectful of human rights.

**Keywords:** Human rights; Fundamental British Values; Human Rights Education

## 1. Introduction

Since 2014, the promotion of Fundamental British Values (FBV) has been a requirement across formal schooling in England. The agenda has, however, faced criticism from various stakeholders, including teachers, academics, NGOs and religious groups. Much of this denunciation has been directed at the opaque nature of FBV: teachers tend to struggle with its practical application, given that the accompanying educational guidance offers little by way of instruction for implementation, and academics lament the curiously vague and limited list of supposed ‘British’ values. The agenda is, however, problematic for rather more concerning reasons. Its introduction coincided with a broader European trend towards nationalistic values education in the face of perceived threats from ‘outsiders’, including in countries such as France and Norway (Frej 2016; Pihl 2016). Indeed, the FBV agenda was itself introduced in response to the so-called Trojan Horse scandal, in which hard-line Islamist extremists had supposedly plotted to infiltrate a number of Birmingham schools and run them on strict Islamic principles (Richardson 2015). It is at least arguable, therefore, that in light of the current threat from ethno-nationalism, both in the UK and beyond, frameworks such as FBV that focus on a particular definition and formulation of national values run the risk of being interpreted in a manner that is exclusionary and liable to ‘other’ different ethnic groups in the classroom.

Given that FBV coincided with the Government’s ostensible scepticism towards certain protections within the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (Mason 2013), its introduction may have been intended to reformulate human rights in a ‘British-style’. This would, however, be a worrying development. Not only does it overlook the fact that the UK is subject to numerous human rights obligations, both at the regional and international levels – including many that mandate the provision of holistic and effective Human Rights Education (HRE) at all levels of formal education – but at a more fundamental level, such a development would run counter to the principle of universality

at the heart of the international human rights framework. The introduction of the FBV guidance therefore looks like a backwards step. With the UK obligated to ensure that learners at all stages of formal schooling are taught about human rights, the government should seek to find a solution that addresses both human rights and FBV in a coherent and inclusive framework of education based on universally-accepted human rights values.

This article therefore draws upon the findings of a small pilot study conducted in 2016-17 with four primary schools in the West Midlands showing that teaching about human rights through the current FBV agenda is possible, by linking discussion of values at the national level to broader human rights principles. Such an approach satisfies the government's desire for children to learn about FBV, whilst highlighting that these values also exist in a global context, with feedback from the pilot study workshops showing that the Year 5 participants were able to make the connection between FBV and universal values. This is a more effective way of encouraging learners to be global citizens who will contribute to the building of a broader culture that is respectful of human rights, rather than deepening existing divisions caused by, for example, increasing intolerance to multiculturalism, Islamophobia, Brexit, and the rising popularity of far-right political groups. Furthermore, the arguments put forward in this article are not only relevant to the FBV agenda, but to all potentially divisive national values frameworks. Anchoring values education in HRE, is more likely to create citizens, and societies, that respect and uphold human rights and their underlying values.

With this in mind, the article is split into five main sections. Section two identifies some of the problems with the current FBV agenda, including that it is ambiguous, divisive and potentially alienating for minority groups. This is followed in section three by discussion of why HRE may represent a more effective framework for the teaching of values, and thus provide a solution to the problems plaguing the FBV agenda. Section four draws upon the findings from the pilot study to offer suggestion for how HRE could be

implemented effectively at primary level through the existing FBV agenda. It discusses the development and use of educational resources, in keeping with the Ofsted-inspected FBV requirements, that link to broader human rights values, and draws upon learner feedback to show that this approach was successful. The article concludes in section five by arguing that with the right resources, classroom teaching can be used to alleviate the risk of potentially subversive or discriminatory interpretation of FBV through better links with the broader human rights framework; thus satisfying the government's desire for children to learn about FBV, whilst showing that these values also exist in a global context.

## **2. Problems with the current FBV agenda**

Whilst successive governments have attempted over the years to define the concept of 'British values', this endeavour has been largely piecemeal and inconsistent. In 1997, when Tony Blair's New Labour came to power, British values were deemed to include 'fighting poverty and unemployment', 'securing justice and opportunity' and being a 'compassionate society' (Blair 1997). By 2000, this definition had changed to 'fair play, creativity, tolerance and an outward-looking approach to the world' (Blair 2000). And by 2006, Blair's British values had begun to look more like the current formulation of FBV, denoting 'the belief in democracy, the rule of law, tolerance, equal treatment for all, respect for this country and its shared heritage' (Johnston 2006).

Whilst this is just one example of the incoherence in attempting to define British values, the elusive concept has been a shifting feature of our political landscape for a number of years (Struthers 2017; Winter and Mills 2018). It was in 2011, however, that the current formulation of FBV began to take shape, albeit in a context not directly related to education. The term first appeared in the Coalition Government's review of the Prevent Framework (HM Government 2011), representing the first serious attempt to define British values in a strategically important government document. The result was

unsurprisingly rather muddled. Within the Strategy's Glossary of terms, 'extremism' is defined as 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs' (HM Government 2011: 107). In the main body of the document, however, British values are additionally deemed to include 'equality of opportunity, freedom of speech and the rights of all men and women to live free from persecution of any kind' (HM Government 2011: 34). Of particular note, too, is that elsewhere in the Strategy, the concept of FBV is linked to human rights. In her prefatory comments, for example, the then Home Secretary, Theresa May, posits that the Government 'will not work with extremist organisations that oppose our values of universal human rights, equality before the law, democracy and full participation in our society', and later in the text, 'our core values' are stated to include 'our belief in human rights, democracy and the rule of law' (HM Government 2011: 53).

This document paved the way for the extension of FBV into other aspects of public life, including into formal education. Against the background of the Trojan Horse affair, Michael Gove, then Education Secretary, announced in the summer of 2014 that schools were under an obligation to not only respect FBV, but also to actively promote them (Gove 2014). The stated aims of the initiative were 'keeping our children safe and ensuring schools prepare them for life in modern Britain' (Department for Education 2014a). No further clarification on what FBV actually encompassed was provided at this time, and it was not until publication of the non-statutory spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) FBV guidance for maintained schools in November 2014 that the current form of FBV took shape, with the concept defined as 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs', (Department for Education 2014b: 5). These values are to be promoted through a whole-school ethos, with schools instructed to:

- enable students to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence;
- enable students to distinguish right from wrong and to respect the civil and criminal law of England;
- encourage students to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative, and to understand how they can contribute positively to the lives of those living and working in the locality of the school and to society more widely;
- enable students to acquire a broad general knowledge of and respect for public institutions and services in England;
- further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling students to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures;
- encourage respect for other people; and
- encourage respect for democracy and support for participation in the democratic processes, including respect for the basis on which the law is made and applied in England.

Although the values included in the guidance are ostensibly unobjectionable, the FBV agenda nevertheless attracted criticism from various sectors. Some commentators were concerned about the opaque nature of the definition of FBV, prompting one to point out that these so-called ‘British values’ are not in fact values at all, but instead represent ‘the basic qualifications for not being a failed state’ (Boyce 2014). Others highlighted the incomplete nature of the list. Hugh Starkey, for example, observes that none of the values listed are absolute; each has to be ‘complemented, balanced, and qualified by another value: ‘rule of law’ by justice, for example, and ‘tolerance’ by inclusion and belonging’ (Richardson 2015 quoting Starkey 2015), and Christine Winter and China Mills question why concepts such as equality, anti-racism and social justice are overlooked (2018: 7).

Much of the criticism went beyond concern with the definitions provided, however, and instead struck at the very heart of the FBV agenda. Commentators, teachers, NGOs and religious groups alike were concerned about the potential for subversive interpretation of the guidance, with this risk being ostensibly higher owing to the fact that the FBV agenda had been introduced as a response to the Trojan Horse scandal (House of Commons Education Committee 2015: 24; Winter and Mills 2018: 6). Many stakeholders highlighted the possibility of the guidance encouraging, or at least failing to discourage, differential treatment of minority groups, particularly Muslims (Bamber, Bullivant, Clark and Lundie 2018; Richardson, 2015; Winter and Mills 2018; Busher, Choudhury and Thomas 2019: 6-7; Association of School and College Leaders 2016). Robin Richardson observes in this regard that students from minority ethnic, and particularly Muslim, backgrounds are likely to feel increasingly alienated by the rhetoric around FBV, particularly in light of the fact that ‘the discourse of politicians and some of the media implies that a central purpose of teaching British values is to control and regulate young Muslims rather than to empower them’ (Richardson 2015: 45). Indeed, academic commentary in this area has suggested that these concerns are borne out in practice, with some teachers revealing uninformed and potentially discriminatory views surrounding the concept of Britishness (Maylor 2016; Keddie 2014). The teachers’ union NASUWT also identified the risk of nationalistic and divisive interpretation of the guidance, advising that:

There is a fear that the term ‘British Values’ implies that these are values that are unique to Britain, which could foster alienation and division, implying that Britain is somehow better and more civilised than other countries. The requirement has also sometimes been misinterpreted as an instruction to promote stereotypical ideas of what it means to be British or to celebrate Britain’s imperial past. (NASUWT 2016)

With the FBV guidance having been drafted in response to a perceived threat relating to a specific minority group, it is difficult to refute any suggestion that it stems not from a foundation of equality, justice, non-discrimination and respect for human dignity, but rather from suspicion, prejudice and fear. This risk is exacerbated further by the scant nature of available instruction and training on the teaching of FBV. Indeed, existing empirical studies have shown that teachers entering the profession in England may not be aware of the requirement to promote FBV, with Elton-Chalcraft *et al* reporting in 2017 that 34% of the student teachers in their research were unaware of their FBV obligations (Elton-Chalcraft, Lander, Revell, Warner, and Whitworth 2017: 39). Although this study assessed student teachers as opposed to those already in the profession – and the number of participants was relatively low – the findings are nevertheless unsurprising given the lack of clarity around the concept of FBV. If many student teachers are not being educated on FBV during their teacher training, the risk of misinterpretation of the guidance in classroom practice seems even higher.

Unlike the preceding Prevent Strategy, the FBV agenda does not mention human rights, and therefore fails to make links between the values included within it and broader, universal values. Human rights concepts arguably feature in the guidance, including equality, freedom and non-discrimination (Starkey 2018: 159), but these are not linked to international human rights instruments or initiatives to which the UK is party. Any overlap between FBV and human rights is thus likely to be serendipitous, rather than intended. It may be the case, however, that teachers themselves are effectively making this connection. In this regard, during the course of an empirical study carried out by Alison Struthers into the provision of HRE at primary level in England, data collected in two rounds shows that teachers were educating about human rights more in 2017 than in 2013 (70% and 60% respectively: Struthers forthcoming). More significantly, the findings from the second tranche of surveys showed that 75% of teachers from a sample of 382 respondents from across England viewed FBV as a vehicle through which to teach about rights. Both of

these findings are positive and indicate that teachers are likely to be receptive to the inclusion of human rights within the promotion of FBV. Furthermore, there is a ready-made structure for achieving this: through drawing upon the established international framework for the provision of HRE.

### **3. HRE as a Beneficial Framework for the Teaching of Values**

A number of issues with the FBV agenda have been identified above. It is considered by many to quite simply be unacceptably vague and ill-thought through. Others have more fundamental concerns about its divisive nature and potential for misinterpretation. How then could these problems best be addressed? This section will argue that because the UK has signed up to numerous regional and international human rights instruments that mandate the provision of holistic HRE at all levels of formal education, the FBV agenda should be construed with these broader existing obligations in mind. Whilst the FBV guidance was introduced as a means of promoting those values likely to bring people in the UK 'together as a diverse, unified nation' (Cameron 2014), their potential for subversive interpretation runs the risk of significantly undermining this goal. Human rights values, by contrast, stem from notions of universality and common humanity (Donnelly 2013: 94-99), and are therefore considerably more likely to contribute positively to the building of a broader culture that respects and upholds human rights.

Since the adoption of the Charter of the United Nations in 1945, the UK has been subject to international obligations that mandate the teaching of human rights values, including respect, equality and freedom, across the spectrum of formal schooling. These obligations stem principally from the international HRE framework, with the most recent international instrument to exclusively address the subject, the UN Declaration on HRE and Training (2011) (UNDHRET), advising in Article 2(1) that HRE comprises:

all educational, training, information, awareness-raising and learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and thus contributing, *inter alia*, to the prevention of human rights violations and abuses by providing persons with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviours, to empower them to contribute to the building and promotion of a universal culture of human rights.

Accordingly, HRE is deemed to be vital for building a universal culture which respects and upholds human rights values. Its provision facilitates a better understanding of the common humanity inherent in the whole concept of human rights: that they are applicable not only to those suffering in distant war-ravaged countries but are equal and inalienable standards that belong to everyone, simply by virtue of being human. And, perhaps of particular importance in the context of formal education, HRE enables people to recognise violations of rights in their own lives (Fritzsche 2004: 162), whilst empowering them with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for defending and promoting rights more broadly (Howe and Covell 2005: 7).

It is unsurprising, therefore, that a number of key international human rights instruments have enshrined the right to HRE, including: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Article 26(2); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966); and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (UNCRC), Article 29(1). Each of these documents represents not just a moral position, but also a legal commitment, obliging signatory states to ensure that their laws, policies, and practices conform to the standards within them (Howe and Covell 2005: 25). In addition, the framework is supported by a broad network of explanatory guidance, academic commentary and teaching materials, offering states detailed instruction for practical implementation. By signing and ratifying the above instruments and expressly supporting

key soft law HRE initiatives, including UNDHRET, the UK has accepted the international requirement to provide age-appropriate HRE at all levels of formal education (Ministry of Justice 2011). A reasonable definition of the values to be taught in schools should therefore reflect the requirements enshrined in these texts, for any satisfactory interpretation of the term 'British values' ought to acknowledge the broader values frameworks accepted by the UK (Starkey 2018: 154-155).

The teaching of human rights values is central to the existing HRE framework. UNDHRET, for example, expressly directs that HRE encompasses education 'about human rights, which includes...the values that underpin them' (Article 2(2)). Learners should, therefore, be furnished with an understanding of the values that lie at the root of human rights. It is, however, rather easier to state this than it is to determine the scope and nature of these values. None of the relevant international instruments or initiatives include a comprehensive list of human rights values, though it is possible to offer a plausible interpretation based on the text of the documents themselves. Through analysing the prevalence of values within key international human rights instruments, including the UNCRC, the ICESCR and UNDHRET, it is reasonable to suggest that justice, dignity, freedom, equality, fairness, respect for others, tolerance, and non-discrimination, all constitute human rights values (Struthers, forthcoming).

Whilst the international framework is thus rather vague on the precise meaning of the values at its root, at the core of the human rights movement arguably lie values that stem from notions of universality and the equality and dignity of every human being (Donnelly 2013: 28-29 and 94-99; and Griffin 2008: 39). The UK is signatory to a number of important human rights instruments that mandate the holistic and effective provision of HRE, and the teaching of human rights values therefore ought to be included in formal schooling at the national level. By overlooking the relevance and significance of the human rights framework, however, the FBV guidance cannot realistically be considered to meet,

or even to come close to meeting, the UK's international obligations regarding the teaching of human rights values. Despite the fact that some human rights values may be found within the FBV guidance, the agenda nevertheless prioritises a particular governmental interpretation of FBVs, thus squeezing out alternative understandings of the values important for formal education, including human rights. As a result, teachers may be overlooking the importance of teaching broad, universal values on the basis that they are already under an obligation to teach a very specific understanding of FBV (Starkey 2018: 159).

This particular problem does have a possible solution, however. The ethical aims of HRE include promoting the idea that the values at the root of human rights stem from a conception of common humanity, where the rights of everyone are respected and upheld. Interpreting FBVs against a background of human rights values would undoubtedly assist in ensuring that the values being taught in schools are understood as emanating from the foundation of universality, thus countering any possible interpretation that particular values are relevant only to certain ethnic groups. With this in mind, the next section draws upon the results of a pilot study conducted with four schools in the West Midlands to suggest how this can be achieved in practice at primary level.

#### **4. Pilot Study: 'Teaching FBV in Primary Schools'**

The previous section identified that the UK has signed up to key international instruments and initiatives that mandate the teaching of human rights values. Any requirement for teachers to educate about the values with which people in the UK are considered to identify therefore leads naturally to an interpretation that FBV could provide a natural home for broader education on human rights values. This section seeks to show that this is not only possible with learners of primary school age in England but is actually beneficial in allowing those learners to make connections between values in the UK and universal

values that stem from notions of common humanity and equal human dignity. It discusses the development and piloting of educational resources, in keeping with the Ofsted-inspected FBV requirements, that link FBV to broader human rights values, and draws upon participant feedback to show that this approach was successful in encouraging learners to think beyond narrow constructions of national values, thus helping to shape them into more global citizens.

#### ***4.1. Research Methods***

The pilot project ‘Teaching FBV in Primary Schools’ consisted of carrying out two workshops with six different classes of Year 5 learners (aged 9-10) in four primary schools in the West Midlands between March and May 2017. These workshops sought to enable learners to consider FBV in the broader context of human rights. Year 5 learners were selected on the basis that: (i) the existing research of the project PI was based around FBV and HRE at primary level; and (ii) we considered these learners to be old enough to have some understanding of the values and to be able to formulate ideas around them.

The overall aim of the project was to demonstrate that FBV can effectively be taught through a human rights lens, and its objectives were to: (i) develop resources on human rights values appropriate for Year 5 learners; (ii) demonstrate an increase in the learners’ understanding in relation to three core human rights values: respect, tolerance, and justice; and (iii) disseminate the findings both locally and nationally. The first stage of the project was to design the workshop themes and teaching activities, and the second stage involved piloting these. The activities and resources developed were organised into two workshops, of two hours each, both of which would be run in each of the Year 5 classes. The first workshop – which will be discussed in detail below – addressed respect and tolerance, and the second justice and the rule of law, which are all concepts featured within the FBV

guidance but which can also be linked effectively to broader values in the international human rights framework.<sup>1</sup>

The project team is aware of the limitations of this pilot study. For example, the schools were all local authority maintained primary schools in a narrow geographical area. Three were located in Kenilworth, a relatively affluent and homogenous town in Warwickshire, and one in a more socially-deprived and ethnically diverse area of Coventry. The three Kenilworth schools all had lower than average percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) in 2017/2018 (5.2%, 5.3% and 15.5%, compared to the national average of 24.3%), whereas the Coventry school had a higher than average percentage of pupils eligible for FSM (51.3%). The pilot is nonetheless instructive for demonstrating the feasibility of satisfying the UK Government's FBV requirement, whilst simultaneously teaching learners about universal values through the broader human rights framework.

We also understand that this pilot remains silent on how Ofsted would view the interpretation of FBV through a human rights lens, and more generally what the Government's position would be on utilising FBV as a vehicle through which to discuss broader human rights values. The Ofsted Handbook states that:

[I]nspectors will consider how well the school prepares pupils positively for life in modern Britain and promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith (Ofsted 2018: 42).

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<sup>1</sup> The Government's interpretation of FBV comprises democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. Whilst democracy and liberty were not directly covered in this pilot, these can be easily incorporated into FBV teaching in the same vein as the other values discussed.

Although we suggest that this pilot study shows that it is possible to teach about human rights whilst fulfilling these Ofsted requirements, the results of this project must be considered in the context of the broader governmental scepticism towards certain protections within the ECHR. A different view might therefore be taken as to the desirability of teaching FBV through a human rights lens.

Regarding the method of evaluation of the results, notes were taken by a research assistant during the workshops. These observational notes assessed both how the workshop was delivered and, more importantly, the learners' responses – verbal, written and behavioural – to the different activities. All learners were additionally asked to complete an anonymous feedback form at the end of the two workshops in order to evaluate their understanding of the activities and what they remembered, as well as enjoyed. The feedback forms were short – comprising 5 to 6 questions – but allowed learners to: (i) reflect on why they liked or disliked certain activities; and (ii) express what they felt they had learned from the workshop.

For the data evaluation process, the answers to each question on the feedback forms were typed up and analysed for recurring answers. The most common answers were then coded. For example, when asked what they felt they had learned, answers could be categorised under the following codes: 'new vocabulary', 'about refugees', 'about values', 'about Human Rights', 'other', 'off-piste answers' or 'no answer'. This allowed a better understanding of what the learners felt they had taken away from the workshop. The most interesting, surprising, or developed answers were also highlighted to use as examples.

In addition, answers produced by the learners in writing during the workshops were also typed up and analysed. For example, learners were asked at the beginning of the first workshop to write on post-it notes what they understood 'tolerance' to mean. The same question was then asked in the feedback form at the end of the workshop in order to

determine how overall understanding had changed, if at all, during the course of the workshop. A quantitative analysis was applied to the notes taken by the research assistant during the workshops, in order to gauge the success of the activities and extent of learner engagement during specific tasks. This was particularly useful for deciding how to adapt the delivery of the workshop activities to maximise learner engagement.

## ***4.2 Research Findings***

The findings from the study suggest that the promotion of FBV in keeping with the Government's educational agenda can be satisfied by interpreting FBV through a human rights lens. The FBV guidance stresses that “[p]upils must be encouraged to regard people of all faiths, races and cultures with respect and tolerance” (Department for Education 2014b: 4), which is a requirement that seems to align more with a universal perspective than a British-specific one. This is something which was addressed through various activities in the first project workshop on respect and tolerance.<sup>2</sup>

The opening activity encouraged consideration of the difference between FBV and universal values, with learners being asked what is meant by a ‘value’. At first, learners seemed to struggle to formulate an explanation for this concept, with some stating that a value relates to ‘how much money’, and others getting closer saying that it is about ‘qualities and things’. Some indicated, without prompting, that it concerns ‘what British is about’, ‘something that is important for us here in the UK’, or ‘what makes us different’. Suggesting the idea of qualities ‘which a person or a friend might have’ seemed assist learners in better grasping the concept of ‘values’.

Learners were then asked to write down on a post-it note one value which they consider as being important to British people, and on another post-it, one which they consider as

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<sup>2</sup> Space constraints dictate that each activity for the pilot workshops cannot be described in this article, but for a full summary of the project activities, see Struthers, Siddle and Mansuy, 2017.

being important to everyone in the world. The activity suggested that learners actually had a better understanding of universal values, as some seemed to confuse FBV with British cultural symbols, writing, for example, ‘cup of tea’ or ‘posting a letter’. The majority of the responses on the British values post-it notes were relevant, however, including: ‘kindness’, ‘respect’, ‘equality’, ‘peace’, ‘fairness’, ‘love’, and ‘hope’. The answers given in relation to universal values were often similar, with ‘peace’, ‘love’, and ‘hope’ featuring once again, but with the addition of terms such as ‘family’, ‘safety’ and ‘compassion’. Despite the most popular values varying from school to school – possibly as the learners were influenced by school values - this activity nevertheless resonated with some learners who appeared to fundamentally grasp its underlying message, with one explicitly recognising that ‘the British values are also values all around the world’. This type of more universal thinking can play a role in encouraging the development of children as global, rights-respecting citizens.

In the second activity, learners were given a potato and asked to study it closely and note any distinguishing features. The potatoes were then mixed together, and the learners were instructed to find their potato. The aim of this exercise was to highlight that even though we each have different characteristics, we are all human beings with the same universal human rights.<sup>3</sup> At a fundamental level, the learners seemed to grasp this underlying message, with feedback including comments such as: ‘it helped me to think how we’re all humans (potatoes) but we are all different’; and ‘I liked the potato activity because it teaches you that everyone has the same human rights but they have a different personality and distinguishing features’. Engagement with the learners during the activity furthermore revealed that about half of them had existing familiarity with the term ‘Human Rights’. Whilst it was not possible to gather data on the source of learners’ knowledge about human rights – for example, whether this was through the media, family, or formal education – it

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<sup>3</sup> The authors would like to acknowledge and thank Amnesty International for providing the inspiration for this activity.

is nevertheless a positive finding that suggests it would be beneficial to build more human rights language and ideas into values teaching at primary level.

The fifth activity indicated that learners are able to understand universal values in the context of specific human rights issues as well. It involved the learners putting themselves into the roles of individuals involved in a refugee family's journey to another country. Each group of five learners was given a different journey scenario, including a list of characters, which they had to think about and discuss. They were instructed to consider aspects such as why the refugee family may have left their country, what their journey might have been like, as well as what their expectations for the destination country might be. Learners were generally able to empathise well with their characters and, when asked how their character might be feeling, their comments included the following: 'I am scared we are going to be turned away and sent back to where we came from'; 'I am tired and run down because this keeps happening and I am worried and scared about my child's future'; and 'I feel devastated about what happened to our home but I am happy that we are leaving. Because we are refugees, the people might not be very respectful'.

When asked what they had learned at the end of the workshop, 49% of learners mentioned refugees, with examples of their comments including: that they 'learnt what refugees do in their life and what danger they are put in'; 'that refugees really need help'; that 'refugees are very scared and that they don't get treated fairly'; 'how many people are suffering and how they suffer'; 'how refugees struggle so badly in the fight for survival'; that 'refugees are in many ways similar to us'; and that 'it made [them] think about families that are in that state and how lucky [they themselves] are to not be in that state'. This demonstrates not only that learners could understand the significance of these broader issues, but also that they engaged deeply with them and the associated values, including fairness and empathy; a beneficial perspective with the potential to contribute to the building of a more tolerant and inclusive society.

The feedback forms submitted at the end of the respect and tolerance workshops suggested that learners were able to grasp the meaning of these concepts, with 80% of learners demonstrating that they had learned about respect and tolerance through the activities. Perhaps more significantly, the learners appeared to be thinking deeply about these values as examples of universal values that we share with people around the world. They seemed able to connect FBV with broader conceptions of human rights, demonstrating understanding: about ‘British values and global values’; that ‘we all have human rights’; and that respect means ‘to treat others how you want to be treated and not care if they are different, we’re all humans’. Learners directly referencing terms such as ‘human rights’, ‘global’, and ‘values’ in a contextually relevant manner indicates an understanding of the applicability of these values universally, as opposed to simply in the UK context. It can be suggested, therefore, that teaching on the concepts of respect and tolerance, as encouraged in the FBV guidance, does not necessarily benefit from an exclusively ‘British’ perspective, but is likely to be a richer learning experience if couched in language and values of the broader human rights framework.

Whilst space constraints dictate that the second workshop on justice and the rule of law cannot be discussed in as much detail, the findings were comparable. Although the activities were set against the background of the English judicial system, the values and broader ideas being communicated were not specific to this context. The workshop did not frame justice and the rule of law as distinctly English or British concepts, but rather placed these as concepts relevant to international human rights law. There is no evidence that this impeded learner understanding of their importance, and indeed many responses in the feedback forms revealed deeper understandings of these concepts: ‘that justice is a global value’; that ‘justice is very important and it is a very important human rights value’; that justice ‘is a valuable human right’; and that ‘all countries should have the same rights’. This is the type of language and perspective which could assist in ensuring that learners

are thinking more universally and inclusively about justice and the rule of law in the broader context of human rights.

## **5. Concluding Remarks**

This article has highlighted some of the problems with the FBV agenda. Stakeholders have expressed concern not only about the vague and confusing nature of the current definition of FBV, but also about the potential for the framework to be interpreted in a subversive or discriminatory manner. Through drawing upon the results of a small pilot study in four West Midlands primary schools, the article has suggested how the risk of such interpretation may be lessened. Through utilising resources that couch FBV in the broader context of human rights, learners may be likely to better understand that although the FBV guidance promotes values that are important to people living in the UK, these values are also universally promoted through the international human rights framework. With the right resources, therefore, classroom teaching can be used to minimise the risk that the FBV guidance could be interpreted in a manner that ‘others’ or alienates particular minority groups in the formal learning environment. Such an approach not only satisfies the government’s desire for young people to learn about FBV, but does so in a way that shows that these values also exist in a global context. In this regard, teaching FBV in this manner would be more likely to encourage learners to become global citizens who will contribute to the building of a broader culture that respects and upholds human rights.

The international human rights framework is comprehensive in its requirements for the provision of holistic HRE. Relevant instruments and initiatives are accompanied by explanatory guidance, general comments, and a wealth of academic commentary and teaching materials. The FBV agenda looks hasty and ill-conceived by comparison. Teachers are offered little by way of instruction on how best to comply with the obligation to promote FBV in the classroom, and the Elton-Chalcraft *et al* study discussed above

suggests that the topic is not being addressed adequately within teacher training programs (Elton-Chalcraft *et al* 2017: 39). Interpreting FBV in the broader context of human rights is thus not only likely to encourage learners to become global citizens with an interest in human rights-related matters but may also be an effective means of offering clarity on teaching in this area. When FBV, such as respect, tolerance and justice, are studied through the lens of human rights, learners are equipped with a better grasp of the nature and wider significance of these values. Adopting this approach is not only likely to prevent minority groups in the classroom from feeling alienated, but may also actively sow the seeds of global and active citizenship, thus truly contributing to the positive preparation of learners ‘for life in modern Britain’, as a multi-cultural, diverse nation (Ofsted 2018: 42).

Whilst this article has drawn upon the results of a small-scale pilot study with just four primary schools in a limited geographical area, it has nevertheless indicated that, with the right resources and capacity, teaching FBV through a human rights lens can be an effective means of alleviating some of the problems with the existing FBV agenda. Values such as respect, tolerance and justice do not benefit from attracting the label of ‘British’, and the Year 5 learners in this study were able to make connections between FBV and broader human rights values. Furthermore, they made insightful comments in their feedback forms indicating that they were considering these values deeply from a global and inclusive perspective. With the rise of ethno-nationalism across Europe, the findings from this small-scale study offer a glimpse of how an education system that couches its values education in broader global values could be more effective at countering divisive narratives than one framed in nationalistic terms. As mentioned in the introduction to this article, the UK is just one of a number of European countries prioritising national values education in the face of perceived threats from ‘outsiders’; similar educational initiatives can be found in countries such as France and Norway. This is a worrying trend. In a world increasingly characterised by deep division, extremism and populist sensationalism,

it is of even greater importance that young people embrace universal values that have the capacity to unite, rather than further divide, that world.

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