Building Blocks and Beyond: How Human Rights Education in Initial Teacher Education May Help to Change the Human Rights Landscape in Scotland

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ABSTRACT
Following the recently published report Building Blocks for Improving HRE within ITE in Scotland (2015), this article identifies some of the challenges facing Human Rights Education (HRE) in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Scotland and provides suggestion for how these could be overcome, or at least alleviated. It argues that HRE in ITE is important not only for equipping teachers with the confidence and skills to be able to provide effective and empowering education in this area in their classrooms, but also for contributing to a broader cultural change where human rights are mainstreamed and accepted to a greater extent within society. The article suggests, however, that a number of changes in both policy and practice would be necessary to overcome the current barriers to HRE and to ensure that education in this area is consistent, widespread and effective.

INTRODUCTION
Human Rights Education (HRE) refers broadly to education and training that aims to contribute to the building of a universal culture of human rights through teaching about human rights and fundamental freedoms (UNESCO and OHCHR 2006: 11). According to the most recent international legal instrument to exclusively address HRE, the UN Declaration on HRE and Training (2011) (UNDHRET), such education ‘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’ (UNDHRET, Article 2 [1]).

With roots in the 1945 Charter of the United Nations (Article 1, section 3) the concept of HRE has grown steadily in prominence and significance on the international stage, and has witnessed in the past two decades a proliferation of
instruments and initiatives aiming to further its cause. Given this prevalence and increasing prominence, it is reasonable to conclude that HRE should form a central feature of national education programmes. With its capacity to instil in learners both the desire and means to respect and defend human rights, its importance should not be underestimated.

Schools in particular are viewed as the bedrock for HRE, and a number of the international instruments and initiatives make specific reference to the need for HRE to be included at every stage of formal education (UNESCO 1978: 2; UNESCO 1987: paras 1.1, 1.3 and 2.2). This education should not only consist of formal teaching about the main categories of human rights and relevant international declarations and conventions, but also ought to permeate the hidden curriculum of classroom and school environment (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2001: 7; Howe and Covell 2005: 12). HRE through the hidden curriculum, as opposed to the formal curriculum, necessitates ‘school structures, codes of conduct, mission statements, and classroom interactions that model democracy and respect for the rights of all’ (Howe and Covell 2005: 12). This idea is frequently referred to in the literature as a ‘rights respecting learning environment’.

In order for teachers to be able to provide effective and holistic HRE, however, they themselves must be equipped with relevant knowledge and understanding of the subject and its teaching, and this is where their own education becomes relevant. With this in mind, and following the recently published report Building Blocks for Improving HRE within ITE in Scotland (2015), this article delves more deeply into HRE in ITE at the Scottish HEIs. It not only identifies why the provision of HRE, both in ITE and more broadly, is important, but also highlights that there are a number of challenges facing such education in Scotland. Suggestion is provided as to how these challenges could be overcome, or at least alleviated, and how this change may in turn contribute to broader attitudinal change towards human rights in Scotland.

The article is divided into four sections. Section two begins by emphasising why the provision of HRE within programmes of ITE is important, and by showing how it can contribute to the building of a broader culture that is respectful of human rights. Section three then draws upon (i) the Scottish curriculum and relevant ITE policy; (ii) existing research into HRE in Scotland; (iii) the Building Blocks research findings; and (iv) academic literature in this area, to present a picture of the current challenges facing HRE in ITE in Scotland. In light of this analysis, section four then indicates how these challenges and barriers to HRE could be addressed and suggests that this may in turn contribute to the mainstreaming and entrenching of human rights in Scotland.

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WHY IS HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION WITHIN ITE IMPORTANT?

The importance of HRE arguably should not be underestimated. It enables people to recognise and understand that human rights are not applicable only to those suffering in distant war-ravaged or hunger-ridden countries, but are equal and inalienable standards that belong to everyone, simply by virtue of their common humanity. Its provision is thus important not only for allowing people to recognise rights violations in their own lives, but also for empowering them to stand up for their own rights and for the rights of others (Murphy and Ruane 2003: 302). Without HRE, people may have little or no awareness that they have fundamental rights at all and, as noted by K.-Peter Fritzche, ‘what good does it do to have human rights if we don’t know them, and what good does it do in turn to know them if we don’t understand them?’ (Fritzche 2004: 162).

HRE is furthermore considered to be the most effective means of challenging widespread misconceptions about, and negative attitudes towards, human rights by introducing learners to the relevant values and concepts at an early age (Carrington and Troyna 1988: 7). In this regard, it equips learners with the tools for contributing to the building and promotion of a universal culture of human rights (UNDHRET, Article 2[1]), based upon values such as freedom, equality, dignity, non-discrimination, justice, solidarity, freedom and tolerance¹. This idea is both recognised and emphasised in the HRE instruments and academic scholarship in this area. UNDHRET, for example, expresses that HRE is important for ‘developing a universal culture of human rights, in which everyone is aware of their own rights and responsibilities in respect of the rights of others, and promoting the development of the individual as a responsible member of a free, peaceful, pluralist and inclusive society’ (UNDHRET, Article 4[b]) And Paul G. Lauren emphasises that:

Never before in history has there been what is now described as such a ‘universal culture of human rights’ in which the rights of so many men, women, and children are given so much attention in so many diverse places under the watchful eyes of the world and in which the international community refers to human rights as the common language of humanity (Lauren 1998: 4).

In order to contribute to the building of this culture, however, learners arguably must be enabled to speak the language of human rights. R. Brian Howe and Katherine Covell note that the goal of HRE ‘is to provide the knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills that people need if they are going to build, sustain, or rebuild a society that is democratic and respects human rights’ (Howe and Covell 2005: 7). In this way, such education can be said to contribute to the creation of a culture in which learners are not only able to understand their rights and respect the rights of others, but are also equipped with the knowledge, values and skills required for claiming, defending and promoting human rights more broadly (Osler and Starkey 2000: 98; Okafor and Agbawka 2001: 564; Verhellen 2001: 187; UNESCO and OHCHR 2006: 2 & 11). As recognised by UNDHRET, HRE has a key role to play in ‘contributing to the prevention of human rights violations and

¹ See e.g. Council of Europe, ‘Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education’ (2010) (Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7) at 7, para 2; UNDHRET, Article 4(c) and (d). For detailed discussion of these values, see Chapter 2 at section 2.3.1.
abuses and to the combating and eradication of all forms of discrimination, racism, stereotyping and incitement to hatred, and the harmful attitudes and prejudices that underlie them’ (UNDHRET, Article 4(e)).

HRE is thus a concept that is relevant at all ages and for this reason, much has been written about the importance of its inclusion within formal education from early years to higher education. There has been recognition both within relevant HRE instruments and initiatives and by academic commentators in this area, however, that effective and empowering HRE in the classroom is only possible if teachers themselves receive adequate instruction on the topic (UN General Assembly 1996: paras 24-25; Flowers and Shiman 1997: 166; Jennings 2006; UNESCO & OHCHR 2006: 4 & 40). Indeed, the omission of HRE from ITE is frequently cited as the principal reason for its paucity in schools (Gerber 2008: 252; Waldron et al. 2011: 49), for to be able to provide effective HRE teachers must themselves receive comprehensive training in ‘the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and competencies to facilitate the learning and practice of human rights in schools’ (UNESCO and OHCHR 2006: 19).

Whilst some countries, including Scotland, educate as opposed to train their teachers, the requirements of the international legal framework are equally applicable. For example, UNDHRET mandates that states should ‘promote adequate training in human rights for teachers, trainers and other educators’ (UN General Assembly 2011: Article 7(4)), and the UN World Programme for HRE stressed the importance of including HRE within programmes of teacher education (UNESCO and OHCHR 2006: 40). In accordance with these instruments and initiatives, therefore, HRE should constitute a compulsory element of state programmes of ITE, and states are required to promote ‘adequate training in human rights for teachers, trainers and other educators’ in order to meet their international obligations in this area (UN General Assembly 2011: Article 7(4)).

The provision of HRE within ITE is important not only for equipping student teachers with the knowledge, skills and competencies required to provide effective and empowering education in their classrooms, but also in a broader sense for fostering the attitudes necessary to encourage and enable them to address human rights in their classrooms without concern that the topic is unsuitable for the formal learning environment. It is the case, however, that the current provision of HRE in both ITE policy and practice in Scotland is affected by a number of different issues, and it is to consideration of these that I now turn in the next section.

CURRENT BARRIERS TO HRE PROVISION IN ITE IN SCOTLAND

There are a number of current barriers to the inclusion of holistic HRE within ITE in Scotland, and this section seeks to provide an overview of these. It begins by considering the current place and role of HRE within the CfE and in relevant policy affecting ITE and proceeds to consider the findings from both existing research into HRE in Scotland and from the recently published Building Blocks report. Suggestion will then be provided in the concluding section of this article as to how these problems may be alleviated or overcome.
Whilst the Scottish Government has previously advised that ‘human rights’ and ‘a rights-based approach to education’ are concepts relevant to the provision of education under CfE (Scottish Government 2010: 6), there is only one express reference to ‘human rights’ within the core freestanding curriculum subject areas, in a Religious and Moral Education Experience and Outcome requiring learners of primary age to develop views about values such as fairness, equality and human rights. Other curriculum areas, including Health and Wellbeing and Social Studies, discuss ‘rights’ as a general concept, but these references are not couched in the express terminology of ‘human rights’. Human rights ideas and terminology do also feature in the Global Citizenship ‘theme across learning’, which requires teaching on issues including ‘human rights, [...] social equality and appreciation of diversity’, and preparing learners for ‘active participation in a global, multi-cultural society’ (Learning and Teaching Scotland 2011: 11).

Whilst the CfE does, therefore, include some specific instruction for providing HRE, this remains relatively sparse and is predominantly not couched in the express terminology of ‘human rights’. Furthermore, with regard to its inclusion as an element of Global Citizenship, existing research has shown that guidance on the themes across learning and their subsidiary strands largely omits the specific instruction and detail that would encourage teachers to embrace HRE holistically (Struthers 2015b: 63). In order for HRE to have a more prominent role both within ITE provision and in classroom practice, therefore, it is arguable that it would need to be more explicit and influential within the CfE.

Ideas consistent with the provision of HRE are included to a greater extent within relevant policies that influence ITE practice in Scotland, and the existing references to rights-related concepts in these documents provide a useful foundation for further engagement with HRE at the HEIs. The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) regulates the teaching profession and, as part of this role, maintains the Standards for Provisional Registration (the Standards). The Standards outline the expectations upon student teachers at the completion of ITE (GTCS 2012), with responsibilities on ITE providers, the students themselves and the Local Authorities involved in school placements for students to ensure that the criteria are met. In order to be provisionally registered, students must demonstrate competence in three areas:

- Professional values and personal commitment;
- Professional knowledge and understanding; and
- Professional skills and abilities (p. 3).

Professional values and personal commitment lies at the heart of the inter-relationship between the three categories, and it is within this category that the teaching requirements most relevant to HRE are found. Teachers are required, for example, to value and demonstrate a commitment to social justice, including embracing locally and globally the educational and social values of equality and justice, and to recognise the rights and responsibilities of current and future generations (p. 5). They must respect social and cultural diversity and promote the principles and practices of local and global citizenship (p. 5). Teachers are additionally required to demonstrate commitment to the principles of democracy, and to show respect for the rights of all learners as outlined in the UNCRC,
including recognition of learners’ entitlement to be involved in decisions regarding their learning experiences (p. 6; Struthers 2015a: 10).

A fundamental requirement of accreditation of ITE programmes in Scotland is that student teachers ‘have the capacity to meet the Standards for Provisional Registration’ (GTCS 2013: para 3.1). All accredited ITE providers should therefore be facilitating each of the elements of ITE that touch upon HRE discussed above. Recent research suggests, however, that HRE is currently fragmented and inconsistent within programmes of ITE and that this can affect its subsequent provision in classroom practice in Scottish schools.

This existing research has indicated that HRE is included in Scottish classrooms with varying degrees of consistency owing largely to insufficiencies in both the confidence and abilities of many teachers to provide suitable education in this area (BEMIS 2013; Struthers 2015b). Prior to the Building Blocks report, the full extent and sufficiency of HRE within programmes of ITE run by Scottish HEIs had not been the subject of comprehensive study, and information on this subject was therefore piecemeal and sparse. There were examples of existing research projects that indirectly addressed this issue, however.

At a 2011 conference on HRE organised by the Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland (BEMIS) for example, teachers who attended ‘showed a lack of awareness of HRE as a distinct concept and also highlighted a lack of knowledge and confidence with regards to the teaching of HRE’ (BEMIS 2013: 7). The subsequent mapping exercise conducted by BEMIS then substantiated this finding by demonstrating through survey data that a considerable majority of teachers identified lack of training in this area as by far the most significant barrier to their provision of HRE (p. 47).

BEMIS mapped the extent of HRE in Scotland with a view to developing an outreach Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme for interested teachers. Though this project did not map the extent of HRE within ITE specifically, the research survey did query the extent of training or awareness raising that teachers felt they had received on human rights or the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (both pre and post qualification) and an overwhelming majority responded that they had received no training or awareness raising on human rights (78% of the 346 respondents to the question) (p. 37).

The research additionally highlighted that the most commonly cited barrier to HRE identified by teachers is their own lack of relevant knowledge and/or training in the area. Perhaps of most concern, however, was the finding that a number of recently qualified probationer teachers indicated that they had not received any training or awareness raising on human rights or the UNCRC during their ITE (p. 38), suggesting that Scottish HEIs are not currently addressing the paucity of HRE within ITE programmes. These research findings led BEMIS to advise that:

1 In partnership with key stakeholders: UNESCO, Amnesty International, SCCYP, Education Scotland and the IDEAS network.
2 It is acknowledged that the question in the BEMIS survey referred to ‘training or awareness raising on human rights’, which may have misled participants who interpreted the question as referring only to additional training, and not their core teacher education.
3 62% of the 47 respondents who provided further information in response to the relevant survey question expressly mentioned lack of knowledge and/or training.
The large number (78%) of respondents who stated that they have not had access to any form of HRE training at all, either during their ITE programmes or through professional development, is concerning, not least because of the limitations this will have on young people’s entitlement to HRE (p. 59).

Of the 22% of teachers that had received some training on HRE, it was encouraging that the majority of this had been conducted within HEIs during pre-qualification education, though most respondents did stipulate that this amounted to just one lecture or tutorial on the topic within broader training on the curriculum areas of Global Citizenship and Health and Wellbeing (p. 38). In their final report, BEMIS thus concluded that:

As teachers have strongly indicated a lack of training in this area, we believe that a national training programme should be considered to empower educators to develop and harness their interest in HRE in such a way that it permeates all aspects of learning, teaching and curricula (p. 61).

The subsequent Building Blocks project then sought to investigate in more detail the extent and nature of HRE provision across ITE in Scotland. It evaluated and assessed current HRE provision within programmes of ITE at the relevant Scottish HEIs, including highlighting examples of good practice and identifying deficiencies that often result in teachers not incorporating HRE into their classroom teaching.

The project was conducted in three stages. An initial desk-based scoping exercise was carried out to establish the extent of HRE currently available within ITE programmes in Scotland. This involved assessing whether the institutions: run compulsory modules on HRE or include human rights topics within other compulsory modules; refer students explicitly to compulsory or optional additional reading on HRE; and offer compulsory or optional sessions on HRE run by external organisations, such as NGOs. The second stage consisted of qualitative semi-structured interviews with a relevant staff member from each of the HEIs in Scotland currently offering programmes of ITE. These interviews provided more detail on the scope and content of HRE within programmes of ITE at the relevant institutions and sought to determine how best to improve HRE provision in ITE.

The final stage of the project involved consultation with members of an Advisory Group consisting of representatives from: BEMIS; ScotDEC; Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People; University of Aberdeen; University of Glasgow; and University of Strathclyde. The Advisory Group provided comments on the findings from the initial fact-finding stages of the project and gave feedback on the content and recommendations of the final report.

The information provided by the universities highlighted examples of good practice across ITE provision in Scotland, and all of the HEIs currently offering relevant programmes are delivering HRE to a certain extent within their courses. Regarding the provision of modules, for example, whilst at the time of writing none of the universities currently run compulsory modules exclusively addressing HRE, several do include reference to HRE concepts within other mandatory modules (Struthers 2015a: para 3.3.1(i)) and many offer optional modules that address certain elements of HRE (para 3.3.1(iii)). Concerning course readings, too, some of the universities were referring students explicitly to compulsory readings on
HRE, in particular to the UNCRC and related academic articles, or to children’s rights more generally, and others included optional additional readings on HRE and related areas. And most of the HEIs also incorporated sessions on HRE run by external organisations, such as the Red Cross, The International Development Education Association of Scotland (IDEAS), Nil by Mouth and Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People, with these sessions reported to involve explicit teaching on HRE and relevant related terminology (para 3.3.3).

Despite these positive findings, however, the Building Blocks research nevertheless indicated that the extent to which HRE features as a compulsory and consistent component of ITE programmes varies considerably between the institutions. Regarding course modules for example, where HRE is included exclusively within optional modules, only students taking these modules receive this more detailed HRE instruction. Students not electing to take these modules are therefore unlikely to be equipped with the relevant knowledge and understanding necessary for providing effective HRE in their own subsequent teaching practice. And with regard to course readings too, at the universities where only students engaging in more detailed study relating to human rights read comprehensively on the topic, the remaining students are likely to emerge from their degree programmes with insufficient knowledge and understanding of human rights to be able to translate this into effective teaching practice. Similarly, whilst some of the human rights-related sessions run by external organisations at the HEIs are compulsory for all students at a certain stage of their degree programme, many are optional extras for those interested. In the latter cases, only those students with an existing interest in human rights issues are likely to utilise the resources and teaching practices developed and promoted by these organisations in their own subsequent classroom teaching.

Whilst the Building Blocks research therefore showed that each university is delivering elements of HRE within its syllabus, it is the case that the scope and content of this provision varies considerably between the Scottish HEIs. As the prior BEMIS research demonstrated, a number of newly qualified teachers are thus entering practice without comprehensive knowledge of how to provide effective education in human rights and are consequently avoiding teaching in this area because they lack confidence in both the subject matter and their own teaching abilities.

Owing to the de-centralised nature of ITE in Scotland, at certain universities only those students with a particular interest in human rights will elect to study the subject, and the majority of students will therefore complete their degree programmes with little, or perhaps even no, knowledge and understanding of teaching in this area. Without detailed and consistent education in HRE across ITE providers in Scotland, the provision of HRE within primary and secondary classrooms is in turn also likely to remain piecemeal. If teachers themselves have had little exposure to HRE within their ITE programmes, they will be less likely to feel confident enough in their own abilities to address these issues with the learners in their classrooms.

Existing research has also revealed potentially deeper and more complex barriers to the provision of HRE, however, and these are likely to provide a challenge for its greater inclusion in programmes of ITE. It has been suggested
within the relevant academic literature, for example, that student teachers may be apprehensive about teaching in this area, or can be dissuaded from doing so by supervising members of staff on their placements. Regarding the first of these, in their 2014 empirical study into student teachers’ engagement with HRE, Claire Cassidy et al. noted that:

One student acknowledged that she was frightened of the ‘blame culture’ and that because she was a new and inexperienced teacher, she thought it was safest to ‘always cover your back’. (Cassidy et al. 2014: 27)

And on the second, the authors recount that:

One student had planned an integrated topic to introduce human rights issues to a primary five class (aged 9 years), but her supervising teacher consulted a colleague and decided that it was ‘a bit too controversial’, and despite the student having assured the class teacher that she knew what she was doing, the discussion between the two colleagues led to the student undertaking a ‘non-controversial’ topic. (p.29)

Scenarios such as these serve only to increase the likelihood of student teachers being hesitant about providing HRE when they enter professional practice. Something of a vicious circle is likely to be the result: teachers may be reluctant to provide HRE in a cultural landscape that is sceptical of human rights (Struthers 2015c; Struthers 2015d: Chapter 4), particularly if they are dissuaded from doing so during their university placements; learners then emerge from formal education with little understanding and acceptance of human rights; negative perceptions of human rights persist and affect the next generation of teachers; and so on. If student teachers are afraid to teach about human rights, or are advised against doing so by more senior members of staff, negativity and misconceptions surrounding human rights in the broader culture are likely to subsist.

This in turn relates to a further potential barrier to the provision of HRE in ITE. Learners may come to university with little knowledge of, or engagement with, issues around human rights and social justice, and may be unwilling to take responsibility for their own education in this area. Or they may come with existing preconceptions, or in many cases misconceptions, of these issues, which will affect any instruction that universities seek to provide. The GTCS Standards include professional values that are also personal values, which creates problems where these values are for some individuals ostensibly incompatible. Simply including HRE content in a programme of ITE may have no bearing upon students who already have entrenched values or attitudes towards human rights. In such situations, broader societal conceptions of human rights again affect teaching practice in this area, which feeds in to the vicious circle identified above. Until this cycle can be interrupted, therefore, it may be difficult for ITE providers to influence or change the opinions, attitudes and values of students who come to university with existing misconceptions of human rights.

This section has identified that there are a number of barriers affecting the provision of HRE in ITE in Scotland, ranging from paucity of explicit guidance within the CfE and relevant policy to the fragmented and inconsistent nature of HRE provision at the HEIs. Existing research has also revealed that deeper and more complex factors, such as teachers’ reservations about the nature of the subject matter and their own lack of engagement with the issues, may affect the
extent of HRE provision both at university (including on teaching placements) and in subsequent teaching practice. How, then, might these obstacles be overcome, or at least alleviated?

CONCLUDING REMARKS: HOW MIGHT THESE BARRIERS BE OVERCOME?

The comprehensive and holistic provision of HRE within teacher education in Scotland is likely to be a necessary step for contributing to a culture that is more accepting of human rights. It is, of course, not a panacea, but is an effective means of overcoming a key hurdle in the provision of HRE within formal education: concern about the appropriateness of the subject matter. The provision of HRE in ITE would be likely to equip teachers with the confidence required for translating their knowledge and understanding of human rights into empowering and effective HRE. How, then, might this best be achieved?

Certain suggestions made in the Building Blocks report may provide useful first steps in improving HRE within ITE in Scotland. The report set out recommendations for reform based upon both the doctrinal research carried out for the project and the empirical data gathered in the course of the qualitative interviews (Struthers 2015a: chapter 5). Whilst there is potential scope for more comprehensive reform in this area in the future, the report’s recommendations sought to reflect what is achievable and most likely to work in the current educational landscape. The absence of central control over the provision of ITE in Scotland in particular makes any suggestion for a prescriptive core module, or similarly standardised and inflexible equivalent, unattainable at present. The report’s recommendations thus represented building blocks towards a more comprehensive approach to HRE provision in ITE in the future.

The Building Blocks research identified that a core of required components for HRE that HEIs can then build upon to suit the needs of their particular programmes would be a useful first step towards improving the provision of HRE within programmes of ITE in Scotland, with the majority of the interviewees considering that this would be best achieved through the development of a flexible and non-prescriptive web-based resource.

Detailed recommendations for what should be included within the web-based resource can be found in the report, but it is worth emphasising that one of the principal suggestions for the content of the resource was that it should not only direct teachers to relevant existing teaching resources (paras 4.1.2, 4.1.5 and 4.1.7), but also provide general advice and guidance about what human rights are and why the provision of HRE is important (paras 4.1.1, 4.1.3 and 4.1.6). This basic information was considered to be important, for as the existing research in this area has suggested (BEMIS 2013: 39-40; Cassidy et al. 2014), teachers are reluctant to educate about topics with which they have little or no familiarity, and particularly topics which tend to be viewed as controversial in a formal educational setting (Molnar 1986: 72; Pollard 1988: 62).

The Building Blocks research, whilst acknowledging specific examples of good practice in this area – such as those discussed in the previous section – identified an overarching problem with the provision of HRE in ITE in Scotland: that the flexible and de-centralised nature of the system means that some students are
entering practice with neither the confidence nor the competence to provide effective and empowering HRE. And in the absence of such confidence and competence, these teachers are in turn more likely to be influenced by broader societal, and often negative, perceptions of human rights.

Indeed, in this regard, it is pertinent that representatives from the universities expressed concerns related to this particular issue (para 3.3.4). A small number of students have, for example, reportedly expressed the opinion that children have too many rights and that teaching them about human rights would only compound this. Such opinions are likely to stem from broader negative attitudes towards human rights in the UK, with media stories frequently being drawn upon to support the proposition that human rights protection has gone too far. Hyperbolised stories about human rights are now commonplace, particularly in the tabloid press, leading many to believe that the human rights framework only benefits those who are considered unworthy, such as prisoners or those claiming on tenuous grounds that they have a right to a family life in this country (McQuigg 2014: 120).

Whilst many of the most sensationalised media stories concerning human rights have been discredited as exaggerated at best, and entirely apocryphal at worst (Huppert [no date]), it is not difficult to understand why teachers at the chalkface of formal education may be apprehensive about educating in this climate. When great swathes of the public have negative attitudes towards human rights, it is simply unrealistic to expect teachers to be naturally positively inclined towards teaching in this area. It is precisely because of the prevalence of such negative attitudes that the provision of HRE within ITE is so important, however: only through effective teaching in this area will the pre-conceptions and misconceptions of student teachers be addressed. ITE providers must be in a position to make students aware of the wider ethical framework in which human rights are situated to ensure that students are not opposed to the idea of learners having rights in the classroom and school environment.

Changing broader cultural attitudes will not be achieved overnight, and cannot be done simply through the provision of additional resources for students in ITE. ITE can provide an initial step in this broader process of change, however. By implementing the core of HRE envisaged by the Building Blocks project, for example, HRE will become more ingrained in teacher education and will be likely to have a greater impact on the opinions and views of the students passing through the process. This in itself may encourage these students to take more personal responsibility for their own knowledge and teaching practice in this area. With HRE occupying a more visible and mainstream position in ITE, students may be more willing to research these issues for themselves, and subsequently include such teaching to a greater extent in their classroom practice.

Additional recommendations for improving the provision of HRE within current programmes of ITE at Scottish HEIs were also put forward in the report, with these having further potential to change the broader HRE landscape. From a policy perspective, for example, HRE is now an entitlement that should be reflected in ITE and the most effective way of achieving this is by utilising the language of the Scottish policy context. In order to ensure that HRE becomes more deeply embedded within teacher education in Scotland, therefore, competence in HRE
should arguably be included as an express requirement of provisional registration with the GTCS (Struthers 2015a: para 4.1.4). The Standards are the one element that binds the HEIs, and ensuring that competence in HRE is included as a requirement for initial registration may be an important step towards the comprehensive and consistent provision of HRE in classrooms across Scotland.

On a broader scale, a more coherent framework for the inclusion of HRE within ITE, as well as in teacher education and classroom practice more broadly, may contribute to a more widespread change in the human rights culture in Scotland. Here, the international legal framework for HRE may be instructive. Within this framework, HRE is frequently categorised under the formulation of education about, through and for human rights. The first of these elements denotes teaching about human rights, and their governing legal instruments and underlying values, in a culturally and contextually relevant manner (Brabeck and Rogers 2000: 170; Stone 2002: 540; Struthers 2015b: 56-58). This means ensuring that the teaching of human rights relates to the immediate experiences of learners in the classroom, as opposed to being viewed as an abstract and distant concept. Education through human rights then mandates the creation of classroom environment where the rights of both learners and teachers are respected, through, for example, the exercise of rights such as expression, opinion and participation (Sinclair 2004; Lundy 2007; Struthers 2015b: 58-59). Finally, education for human rights requires that learners are provided with the skills and competencies that would enable them to translate their knowledge of human rights into social and political reality (UNESCO 1978: para 3(iii); Ramey 2012: 58; Struthers 2015b: 59-60). This ensures that HRE is not simply an academic subject to be taught in schools, but rather is an empowering concept that will encourage learners to take action to promote and defend human rights and to contribute to the building of a broader human rights culture.

By formulating HRE in this way, it becomes a more straightforward exercise to ensure that each of the required elements is being addressed with teachers during their ITE. Using this model, it would be insufficient for programmes of ITE to simply furnish student teachers with formal knowledge of human rights and international instruments. They would need to truly grasp the values at the root of human rights and be able to recognise situations in which human rights are not being respected, in order to encourage the learners in their classroom to do the same. Even this deeper and contextually relevant knowledge about human rights alone is insufficient however, for it omits the further key elements of the framework. Student teachers would need to understand and accept that their classroom environments must be rights respecting and that their learners ought to be equipped with skills, such as critical reflection, analysing situations in moral terms and advocacy, that would enable them to recognise injustice and inequality in the world around them and to take action to do something about it. ITE should provide student teachers with the knowledge, skills and values to be able to do so.

Without the holistic provision of each element of this framework, HRE in programmes of ITE is unlikely to be coherent and consistent, and the problems identified both in the Building Blocks project and in the existing research are likely to subsist. Only when teachers come to view HRE as a natural and important
part of their education and subsequent classroom practice – as opposed to a hot potato to be avoided – will there be any chance of interrupting the vicious circle that is currently affecting the extent and nature of HRE provision both in Scottish HEIs and in schools. Until this happens, however, teachers are more likely to steer clear of HRE, thus leaving the broader societal scepticism and misconceptions surrounding human rights unchallenged.

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