



UNA-UK

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Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State
Department for Education
Castle View House
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18 October 2010

Dear Michael,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chair of the United Nations Association of the United Kingdom (UNA-UK), in the light of the proposed review of the content of the National Curriculum.

UNA-UK strongly supports the continued inclusion of citizenship as a distinct, statutory subject for secondary school children. It is the only National Curriculum subject that teaches young people about their rights and responsibilities as citizens, thereby developing their understanding of democracy, politics, law and the economy. Helping students to become engaged and informed citizens is surely an important step towards realising this Government's vision of a 'big society'.

Ofsted and NFER reports in 2006 and 2010 have noted that where citizenship is taught well, schools are 'positive about the impact of CE on student confidence and behaviour and on their future actions and activities in the community...[and] can see the wider benefits of CE for their schools, their students and their communities'. Stronger political support so that the teaching of this important subject continues to improve is surely the right way ahead.

Measures to give schools greater local determination of the curriculum will undoubtedly bring benefits but UNA-UK believes that it is in the best interests of young people and of society as a whole, that citizenship education remains as an essential subject. That would also help to ensure that the UK is compliant with its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, which the new Government formally accepted on 11 May 2010.

Over the past few years, much of UNA-UK's youth work has focussed on teaching about the UN through the citizenship curriculum – we hope that fostering knowledge of global issues in the UK will lead to an international 'big society'. To this end, we lobbied in 2006 for references to the UN to be retained in the citizenship curriculum and have since produced free materials to support teaching of international issues. UNA-UK also maintains a thriving youth and student network which aims to strengthen the kind of public responsibility and engagement that is at the heart of current government plans.

UNA-UK has recently joined the Democratic Life coalition, which brings together supporters of citizenship education including the Citizenship Foundation, the British Youth Council and Community Service Volunteers. I hope that you will be open to discussions in the coming weeks with the Democratic Life coalition about the importance of citizenship education in the curriculum.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick
Chair, UNA-UK