

• GLEAN •

# Our World, Our Say Young People and Global Issues



• GLEAN •

**DFID** Department for  
International  
Development

leading the British Government's fight against world poverty



WE ARE THE FUTURE. WE'RE THE ONES WHO'LL HAVE TO SORT THE CURRENT MESS OUT. SIMPLER

15-17 year old, South Gloucestershire

**In May 2009 GLEAN launched the *Your World, Your Say* survey of young people in the south west of England to discover how much they know about global issues, and, how much they care. 299 students aged between 12 and 21 from schools and colleges took part from across the region. 75% were between 12-14 years of age.**

It would be fair to say that young people are often negatively portrayed in the media and across society as a whole. How often do we hear news stories of teens causing trouble; see photos of hoodies on street corners; or read statistics of a new generation lacking social skills, glued to computer games and completely uninterested in the world beyond the next take away?

This image of the UK's disengaged youth is the burden of an entire generation. It is also misleading. What this research has proved beyond a doubt is that there is a committed, responsible and enthusiastic portion of society who want to know about their world, and, want to tell us about it.

**Why GLEAN?**

*Global Learning Network South West* is a membership network to support, share and inspire more and better global learning across the south-west of England.

**What do we mean by 'global learning'?**

Learning that gets to the heart of education: creative and inspiring, fair and just, respectful of difference and optimistic about the future.

It places learning firmly in a global context and equips learners to participate confidently in our changing world as active global citizens who can change things for the better.

GLEAN can provide support for 'student voice', NQTs, ITE practitioners and trainees, Heads, teachers and other school staff.

Interested? Join us at [www.glean.org.uk](http://www.glean.org.uk)

Copyright © 2010 GLEAN

## Our World, Our Say Young People and Global Issues

### What do young people know about?

**Young people know the most about Climate Change, Racism, Terrorism, Fair Trade/ Trade Justice and Human Rights.**

An impressive 91% of those surveyed said they knew a little or a lot about Climate Change. Climate Change and environmental issues reoccur again and again in this survey as a topic which young people know about, care about and want to take action on.

*If we don't look after the planet now we'll suffer in the future and so will our children*

*15-17 year old, Devon*

**WE ARE THE NEW GENERATION AND IT'S IMPORTANT FOR US TO HELP ADULTS OUT WITH ISSUES SUCH AS GLOBAL WARMING**

*12-14 year old, Devon*

Only 55% of those surveyed said that they knew anything about Global Health Issues such as HIV/ AIDs even though over 9 out of 10 people believe they matter.

Young people in the south west are particularly clued up on racism, with 6 out of 10 feeling that they know 'a lot' about it. This is due perhaps to the importance placed on the Community Cohesion agenda in schools, especially in rural south west communities. In contrast to this however, only 2 out of 10 know 'a lot' about conflict and civil war, despite similar links.

Maybe then it is time for a change in curriculum priorities. According to the survey, students want to know more about Global Health, Water, Education and Gender issues. This interest is a chance to place climate change and racism in a wider context.

### Global Issues Matter

An inspiring **87% of young people say that all 11 issues matter them.** This is a heads up to those who believe that young people are more concerned with television, iPods and XBoxes; as well as a sign that they are internet savvy and not afraid to use it.

**97% of respondents said that *Human Rights* is most important to them** - 70% believing that it matters 'a lot' - followed by *Climate Change* (96%) and *Fair trade/ Trade Justice* (96%).

Young people in our region are engaged with the world around them, and the direct correlation between the issues they know most about, and those which matter most tells us that embedding these issues into the curriculum leaves a long lasting impression. Learning about these issues equips students for their future.

*In a few decades or so our parents won't be here to say 'Racism is bad' or whatever so we, as children of this world need to learn there ARE issues in this life and we are the ones who will need to SOLVE them when the time comes*

*12-14 year old, Bristol*

It is interesting however to note that an issue such as fair trade, which has been in the public consciousness for a number of years and is a fixture in many schools during February *Fair Trade Fortnight*, matters only 'a little' to half of those surveyed. Indeed, **49% measure their knowledge of fair trade and trade justice as the same as their knowledge of working with developing countries: just 'a bit'.**

Climate change, racism, human rights – those issues which are covered throughout the school year and across the curriculum - are better known and understood than the evocative and well publicised issue of fair trade. **The challenge for the fair trade movement is to encourage schools and**

**colleges to look beyond a two week focus to a more cross curricular approach.**

Most importantly for the future of issue based global learning is the evidence that **young people are not making the links between issues such as education, gender, water or conflict and the role which developing countries have to play in overcoming these challenges in their own lands.**

The fact that only 37% of those asked believe that work with developing countries matters a lot, with 13% believing that it doesn't matter at all, tells us that young people are focussing on the impact of the issue but are missing the significance of international development. It is clear that **young people have the interest and passion in global affairs, and schools now need to make connections between challenges and solutions to see the bigger picture.**

### Global Talk

An overwhelming **79% of participants talk about global issues at school, college or university which indicates that schools and colleges in the south west are successfully leading global debate.**

43% of young people discuss these subjects with their family and 29% discuss them with their friends. Only **12% don't talk about them at all.**

### We are the Future

An inspiring 97% of students agree that they have an important role to play in shaping the future of the world. When asked why, 1 out of 3 gave their reason as 'we are the future'.

*We are the future - we are the leaders, the movers, the thinkers, the shakers of tomorrow. If we don't shape the future who does?!*

*15-17 year old, Devon*

Because we are the future of our world and we

*are the ones who will have to live with the adult's mistakes*

*12-14 year old, Devon*

**BECAUSE WE ARE THE FUTURE AND WE CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING IF WE START TO WORK ON IT NOW ON ISSUES SUCH AS CLIMATE CHANGE AND RACISM**

*12-14 year old, Devon*

Young people clearly have very strong feelings about their role in the world, and what they can achieve. They are confident in their abilities to shape the future that they deserve and **there is an overwhelming belief that they have a responsibility to take care of the world now.**

*Once the older people aren't here anymore it's up to the younger people to help the world and save it. When there all gone it will be up to their children and then their children. It's up to all of us to give and take with environmental issues*

*12-14 year old, Wiltshire*

**BECAUSE WE ARE THE FUTURE AND IF WE WANT TO IMPROVE IT FOR OUR CHILDREN AND THEIR CHILDREN WE NEED TO STEP UP A GEAR!**

*12-14 year old, Bath*

Yet, there is an argument which says that our children should not be feeling this weight of responsibility on their shoulders, that young people are being robbed of a childhood because they are exposed to worries far beyond their years, this 12-14 year old's answer is perhaps proof of that:

*Our grandparents have had their turns and now it's our turn. We have been left with a giant mess and it's up to us to sort it out. If we don't there will be no world left for our children and our children's*

children... We have lots of things to save and to stop because as I said we have been left with a mess. There are millions of things that we can and need to start and stop

*12-14 year old, Devon*

This responsibility can sometimes be heavy,

**WE INHERIT THE EARTH FROM OUR PARENTS. IF WE DON'T LOOK AFTER OUR WORLD WE HAVE LET DOWN EVERYBODY, PAST AND FUTURE**

*15-17 year old, Devon*

As global educators what we don't want to do is instigate mass panic and complex global issues must be delivered with sensitivity. However the causes of the worries which weigh on young and old shoulders alike are man-made and so must the solutions be.

Sorting 'the giant mess' out is only going to be achieved by a joint effort and the inescapable fact is that our young people are the long term future of the planet. They must have their say, and they have the right to act. Emphatically, what this survey has proved is that young people want to know.

We are the future generation of the planet and we must be good enough to help with the important issues

*12-14 year old, Devon*

Even though this elder generation are doing their bit the problems won't be gone and our generations will have to do their best to do something about it. That's why we should start now

*12-14 year old, Devon*

**WE ARE GOING TO BE ADULTS AND WE'LL BE THE PEOPLE TRYING TO STOP CLIMATE CHANGE AND STOPPING WARS. WE WILL BE TRYING TO FIX THE PROBLEMS OF NOW IN THE FUTURE**

*12-14 year old, Devon*

If young people feel this weight of responsibility they also see clearly how they are going to 'fix the problems' - through education.

If all people have access to education when they're young, their awareness of issues will grow and they will be able to address these issues, and hopefully, take action. If in the future, a whole generation of adults have been brought up with the same awareness and concern for issues, they could have a great positive impact on the world's future

*15-17 year old, Gloucestershire*

Many of the 194 comments made by participants in this survey highlighted the importance of education in providing them with the tools to change the world. If all young people have access to the same education, we are left in no doubt that it will bring change.

Educated students form new opinions that can be used in the future

*15-17 year old, Bristol*



We will soon be ruling the world so if we don't know about these issues we will not be any good at shaping the future

12-14 year old, Devon

### We will change the world

Not only do young people want to tackle these problems head on, they believe that they can make a difference. It is this feeling of empowerment which shows the true success of global education and student voice initiatives. Our students have the confidence and self belief to test their abilities against controversial and complicated issues, and then change the world.

We are full of fresh and new ideas of shaping our economy into a better and safer place for us all. We talk and think about these issues and think that some of the things happening in the world are unacceptable

12-14 year old, Wiltshire

YOUNG PEOPLE START NEW THINGS THAT LAST FOR YEARS UNTIL MORE YOUNG PEOPLE CHANGE THE WORLD AGAIN

12-14 year old, Devon

### Barriers to participation

Some students went further than identifying the ways in which they could shape the future to considering barriers which prevented them from participating fully in decision-making. Unsurprisingly, one which was mentioned most was the way in which they are perceived by society.

If you are asking if, at this age, we have a large role to play- No, because we are poorly represented and young people are frequently maligned by the press

15-17 year old, Gloucestershire

All teenagers are known as mobs and some are not

but like to have a laugh

12-14 year old, Devon

In global education we challenge negative perceptions of other countries, through global education we give young people the opportunity to challenge stereotypes far closer to home.

Older students are perhaps more realistic about what can be achieved,

Whilst we may have new ideas we lack the experience to implement many of them. I think our naiveté means we can be impractical

though this doesn't mean that they should be underestimated,

However naiveté can be a powerful resource since it causes us to challenge and question.

15- 17 year old, Gloucestershire

Another factor which impacts on youth participation is a lack of representation in an adult world.

Some adults believe that young kids don't know much and don't give them an equal say in what goes on around our country/area or even in the world

12-14 year old, Devon

There is a growing move to involve young people in decision-making at all levels, but do all students have the same opportunities?

One of the challenges of present and future local and national governments is to widen the net of youth participation to ensure as far as possible that all young people are asked their opinions, and that they are listened to.

### My World, My Say

Global education feeds into the student voice agenda in schools, colleges and universities.

Consultation with young people is a vital part of instigating local and global change. Not only can their input help community development at every level, we are also preparing them for the world which they will lead. Students are seeking opportunities to get their voices heard. For them, it is an important part of shaping their future.

If young people can get their views heard then they may be able to influence the decisions that adults make concerning our planet, as we are the ones who will have to live on Earth in the future, and have to try and mend the damage done by previous generations

*12-14 year old, Devon*

**WE HAVE THE POWER TO INFLUENCE MANY PEOPLE INTO TAKING ACTION AGAINST OR FOR SOMETHING THEY NORMALLY WOULDN'T**

*15-17 year old, Bristol*

For this reason then, bringing a global dimension into schools or colleges will become increasingly important as student voice is developed further through school council and other education decision making structures. Empowering young people in a school setting will prepare them for playing an active role within the local community and in an interdependent world.

We are the future of the world, full stop. If we were to go there would be no future of the world, let alone a shape. We must therefore take responsibility in setting ourselves a good field with which to play on before the game begins, once we leave education

*15-17 year old, Bath*

## Action for Change

How can educators engage the student body? 64% of young people surveyed were 'interested' or 'very interested' in holding an event or making a film or documentary while just over half (53%) wanted to volunteer with a charity or organisation. This is interesting considering the problems that many organisations seeking to work with young volunteers between 16 and 25 have in engaging them in activities. There is also great enthusiasm among 12-14 year olds for volunteering which perhaps should be taken into account by global education providers within their project work considering that 15 is the cut-off age for volunteers.

Two activities popular within global education are two which young people rate lowest: only 35% of them would be interested in starting an action group and only 32% would become an 'ambassador' for a global issue they cared about.

Clearly the more traditional activities are those which still grab students' attention. Even peer education, currently promoted by many schools and organisations, has not yet been tried and tested. 1 in 3 young people are 'not sure about' it and 1 in 4 say it's 'really not my thing'.

36 participants suggested other activities, 20 of these were focussed on taking action against issues, many of them awareness raising events although a few people suggested writing to an MP. Carrying on the climate change theme almost a third of these people wished to take actions on environmental issues. It illustrates that young people have knowledge of key decision-makers and know the ways in which they can influence them.

Also of interest are signs of a thorny issue which is becoming increasingly more relevant in an independent, diverse world as educators continue to challenge perceptions. Almost a third of the

ideas were to do with 'helping those in need' through fundraising.

We could have a market day and sell environmentally-friendly and fair trade things to gain money for poor countries in need of help

*12-14 year old, Devon*

While a rewarding and worthy activity undertaken in the context of a wider partnership or relationship, raising money for 'poor people' can have a negative impact on student perceptions of other countries. Though popular and enjoyable it can sometimes be the first option for young people when asked to take action on global topics. The challenge for educators is to bring different opportunities to take action into the classroom while being aware of the positive and negative impact of those actions.

Prove practical effective action can be taken by anybody

*15-17 year old, Bath*

This was the attitude of a student from Bath when asked what a student voice network could do in the south-west; and it's interesting that although 2 out of 3 participants were not interested in joining a student voice network they were very clear about what it could achieve. 59% thought that it should run training sessions for young people on issues and skills and 55% believed that it could start young people-led action groups in schools and communities (even if few of them would join them!). 13 students posted other responses and 8 of these identified talking to other young people and hearing their views as useful activities.

Some of the members could go to other schools and speak to the pupils to encourage them to speak out about global issues and hand out leaflets giving more information to parents about how they can help and how to get their children involved with organisations in their local area

*12-14 year old, Devon*

## We say, We do

WE ARE THE FUTURE, IT'S UP TO US, WE CAN'T MOAN IN THE FUTURE IF WE THINK LIFE AND ITS STRUCTURES ARE RUBBISH IF WE DON'T ACTUALLY ACT ON THEM

*15-17 year old, Bath*

GLEAN's student voice work has confirmed the evidence of the *Your World, Your Say* survey: young people are ready and willing to learn about the world and then go out to meet it.

A sense of responsibility for their world is already present, as is excitement and enthusiasm about what it has to offer. Yet, to understand the complexities of the challenges the globe is facing now and will face in the future they need the opportunity to learn, to explore and to experience the world in the present.

Integrating the global dimension into the curriculum will become increasingly important as young people engage with the world around them and begin to make connections between local and global issues. It is necessary that opportunities should be provided to explore global issues and ways of taking action. 'My world, My say' has to lead to 'I say, I do'.

