

Research Briefing

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Personal, Social, health, and economic education in schools (England)



Summary

- 1 PSHE: position on the curriculum
- 2 Statutory health education
- 3 Pre-2017 reports and calls for statutory PSHE

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Summary

What is PSHE?

The PSHE Association defines personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) as:

a school curriculum subject that helps children and young people stay healthy, safe, and prepared for life – and work – in modern Britain. When taught well, PSHE education also helps pupils to achieve their academic potential.

What provision do schools currently have to make?

PSHE is a non-statutory subject, but the Government expects all schools to make provision for it.

The Department for Education [guidance on PSHE](#) makes clear that it is largely up to schools to determine what is taught, with teachers “best placed to understand the needs of their pupils.”

The Government provides funding to various bodies, principally the PSHE Association, to support the teaching of PSHE.

Statutory requirements

While PSHE is not statutory, a good deal of material often covered in PSHE is statutorily required as part of [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education](#).

In March 2017, the then Education Secretary, Justine Greening, [announced](#) her intention to put Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) on a statutory footing. She also announced her intention to create a power to make PSHE statutory in future, following further work and consultation.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 provides for PSHE to be made statutory at all schools in England through regulations. [The Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education \(England\) Regulations 2019](#) provide for statutory health education in schools from September 2020.

Schools were encouraged to adopt the new curriculum early, from September 2019.

Guidance on physical health and mental wellbeing education is included as part of the statutory guidance for [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education](#).

1 PSHE: position on the curriculum

1.1 Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE)

Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) is a programme of learning taught in schools across England. The PSHE Association defines PSHE education as:

...a school curriculum subject that helps children and young people stay healthy, safe, and prepared for life – and work – in modern Britain. When taught well, PSHE education also helps pupils to achieve their academic potential.¹

PSHE is a non-statutory subject in most schools in England. The subject is compulsory in [independent schools](#), where the PSHE curriculum “must be designed to encourage respect for other people.”² Although PSHE does not form a statutory part of the National Curriculum, the Department for Education’s [National Curriculum Framework](#) states that:

All schools should make provision for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), drawing on good practice. Schools are also free to include other subjects or topics of their choice in planning and designing their own programme of education.³

However, since the Government made Relationships Education at Key Stages 1 and 2, Relationships and Sex Education at Key Stages 3 and 4, and Health Education from Key Stage 1 to 4 (collectively known as RSHE) compulsory in September 2020, many aspects of PSHE education are now on a statutory footing in all schools in England. (See section 1.2 for more information on RSHE.)

Programme of study

The Department for Education has issued [guidance on PSHE](#), last updated in September 2021, which makes clear that it is largely up to schools to determine what is taught:

¹ PSHE Association, [What is PSHE education?](#) [accessed 15 July 2024].

² Department for Education, [The Independent School Standards](#), April 2019. Independent schools must meet the Independent School Standards, as set out in the [Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

³ Department for Education, [The national curriculum in England: Framework document](#), December 2014.

Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is an important and necessary part of all pupils' education. All schools should teach PSHE, drawing on good practice, and this expectation is outlined in the introduction to the proposed new national curriculum.

PSHE is a non-statutory subject. To allow teachers the flexibility to deliver high-quality PSHE we consider it unnecessary to provide new standardised frameworks or programmes of study. PSHE can encompass many areas of study. Teachers are best placed to understand the needs of their pupils and do not need additional central prescription.

However, while we believe that it is for schools to tailor their local PSHE programme to reflect the needs of their pupils, we expect schools to use their PSHE education programme to equip pupils with a sound understanding of risk and with the knowledge and skills necessary to make safe and informed decisions.

The original guidance followed a review of PSHE carried out by the Coalition Government, which reported in March 2013, separately from its review of the National Curriculum.⁴ The [Summary Report](#) of the consultation on PSHE education (which includes discussion of sex and relationship education) sets out the views of the respondents to that consultation.⁵

PSHE Association

The Government provides grant funding to the [PSHE Association](#) to work with schools to advise them in developing their own PSHE curriculums and improve the quality of teaching. The association focuses on signposting schools to resources and in expanding their Chartered Teacher of PSHE programme.

The PSHE Association has published its own [programme of study](#) for PSHE, which covers key stages 1-5 and is designed to enable schools to integrate statutory RSHE content into their broader PSHE programmes. The programme of study has three core themes:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Relationships
- Living in the Wider World

Under these headings the programme includes information and learning opportunities on a variety of subjects, including diversity and equality, relationships of different kinds, personal financial choices, drugs education, the importance of respecting and protecting the environment, and people's rights and responsibilities as members of families and other groups, and as citizens.⁶

⁴ Written Ministerial Statement at [HC Deb 21 Mar 2013 c52WS](#).

⁵ Department for Education, [Consultation on PSHE Education: Summary Report](#), March 2013; Deposited Paper: [Deposited paper DEP2013-0530 - Deposited papers - UK Parliament](#).

⁶ PSHE Association, [Programme of Study for PSHE education \(key stages 1-5\)](#), accessed 15 July 2024.

1.2

Relationships and sex education (RSE)

Relationships and sex education (RSE) is distinct from PSHE, although many issues relating to RSE may be taught within the PSHE curriculum. As the two subjects are so closely linked, particularly in calls for greater provision, this briefing includes an overview of RSE requirements.

The Library briefing on [Relationships and sex education in schools \(England\)](#), SN 06103, provides more detail on the current position and the reforms.

Since September 2020: statutory RSE

On 1 March 2017, the then Education Secretary, Justine Greening, [announced](#) her intention to put ‘Relationships and Sex Education’ – rather than the previous ‘Sex and Relationship Education’ – on a statutory footing. Section 34 of the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) provides for relationships and sex education to be taught in all schools in England.

The changes involved:

- All primary schools in England teaching ‘Relationships Education’
- All secondary schools teaching ‘Relationships and Sex Education’
- Reformed statutory guidance, following consultation
- Retaining the parental right of withdrawal from sex education, with new rights for children to ‘opt-in’ as they approach age 16
- Flexibility for schools in their approach, including for faith schools to teach within the tenets of their faith

[The Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education \(England\) Regulations 2019](#) confirm that these changes came into force in September 2020. However, in July 2020 the Department for Education announced that, owing to the coronavirus pandemic, this [might in practice be delayed](#), but that schools should be teaching the new material, at least in part, by summer term 2021.⁷

Final statutory guidance on [Relationships education, relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education](#) was published by the Department for Education in June 2019. The DfE also published a [FAQs briefing](#) on the changes.

Review of RSHE statutory guidance

In March 2023, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak [announced](#) that the Government would conduct a review of RSHE statutory guidance, and that he had “asked

⁷ Department for Education, [Implementation of relationships education, relationships and sex education and health education 2020 to 2021](#), 9 July 2020.

the Department for Education to ensure that schools are not teaching inappropriate or contested content in relationships, sex and health education.”⁸

An independent [expert advisory panel](#) was appointed in May 2023 to provide external expertise and to advise the Education Secretary on “how to put in place clear safeguards to stop pupils from being taught contested and potentially damaging concepts.”⁹ The advisory panel [started its work in June 2023](#) and was scheduled to submit its recommendations to the Education Secretary by September 2023.

In May 2024, following the review, the DfE published updated [draft RSHE statutory guidance](#) which includes “clear age limits for the teaching of the most sensitive content” and specifies that “the contested topic of gender identity should not be taught.”¹⁰ A consultation on the draft statutory guidance was open from 16 May 2024 to 11 July 2024.

⁸ Prime Minister’s Question Time, [HC Deb 8 March 2023 c298](#).

⁹ Department for Education, [Review of relationships, sex and health education to protect children to conclude by end of year](#), 31 March 2023.

¹⁰ Department for Education, [Draft Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health education](#), May 2024.

2

Statutory health education

Health education became a statutory requirement in English schools in September 2020. This section sets out the relevant legislation and consultations.

2.1

Children and Social Work Act 2017 powers

On 1 March 2017, the then Education Secretary, Justine Greening, [announced](#) her intention to put Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) on a statutory footing. She also announced her intention to create a power to make PSHE statutory in future, following further work and consultation:

The amendments [to the Children and Social Work Bill] also create a power enabling the Government to make regulations requiring PSHE to be taught in academies and maintained schools – it is already compulsory in independent schools. By creating a power on PSHE, we are allowing time to consider what the right fit of this subject is with Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education.¹¹

Section 35 of the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) provides for PSHE to be made statutory at all schools in England through regulations.

A [Policy Statement](#) published alongside the announcement indicated that PSHE would be reviewed, in the context of statutory Relationships and Sex Education, to determine what the subject's makeup could be with statutory status, under the following 'broad pillars':

- Healthy bodies and lifestyles, including keeping safe, puberty, drugs and alcohol education;
- Healthy minds, including emotional wellbeing, resilience, mental health;
- Economic wellbeing and financial capability;
- Careers education, preparation for the workplace and making a positive contribution to society.¹²

¹¹ [HC Deb 1 March 2017, HCWS509](#)

¹² Department for Education, [Policy Statement: Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education, and Personal, Social, Health, and Economic Education](#), March 2017.

Information about the introduction of statutory Relationships and Sex Education can be found in the Library briefing [Relationships and Sex Education in Schools \(England\)](#), SN 06103.

2.2 Call for evidence

On 19 December 2017 the Department for Education published a call for evidence on [Changes to teaching of sex and relationship education, and PSHE](#).

Alongside questions about sex and relationship education, the call for evidence asked for views on the most important topics under the umbrella of PSHE for teaching at primary and secondary level, and also what level of flexibility should be given to schools in teaching PSHE. A separate call for evidence published simultaneously asked young people about what teaching in PSHE they had found most useful, and which subjects not covered they would like to have been taught about.

The call for evidence was open until February 2018.

2.3 Statutory health education

Consultations

The [Government response to the December 2017 call for evidence](#) was published in July 2018.

Alongside the publication of the response and proposals on RSE, the Government [announced](#) the introduction of statutory Health Education.¹³

A [consultation](#) was opened on draft regulations and draft statutory guidance to implement the changes in July 2018.

The Government published its [response to the consultation](#), alongside updated [draft regulations](#) and [draft guidance](#), on 25 February 2019.

Statutory guidance: Physical health and mental wellbeing education

[The Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education \(England\) Regulations 2019](#) provide for statutory health education in schools from September 2020. Schools were encouraged to adopt the new curriculum early, from September 2019.

In July 2020 the Department for Education announced that, owing to the coronavirus pandemic, the start of teaching in many schools [might in practice](#)

¹³ Department for Education, [New relationships and health education in schools](#), 19 July 2018.

[be delayed](#), but that schools should be teaching the new material, at least in part, by summer term 2021.¹⁴

Guidance on physical health and mental wellbeing education is included as part of the statutory guidance for [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education](#).

The requirements are set out under the heading ‘physical health and mental wellbeing’, and the guidance highlights “the positive two-way relationship” between physical and mental health.¹⁵

The guidance draws particular attention to menstruation, and that its onset “can be confusing or even alarming for girls if they are not prepared.” It states both curriculum and practical arrangements for pupils should be considered:

Pupils should be taught key facts about the menstrual cycle including what is an average period, range of menstrual products and the implications for emotional and physical health. In addition to curriculum content, schools should also make adequate and sensitive arrangements to help girls prepare for and manage menstruation including with requests for menstrual products. Schools will need to consider the needs of their cohort of pupils in designing this content.¹⁶

Tables on pages 32-35 and 36-38 of the guidance provide a full overview of what pupils should learn as part of health education at primary and secondary level.

To provide an indication of what is included, at **primary** level, pupils should be taught about:

- Mental wellbeing

Including: importance of mental well-being alongside physical health; understanding and discussing emotions; benefits of physical exercise; loneliness; where to seek support; that it is common to have mental health problems and that these can be resolved with support

- Internet safety and harms

Including: balancing time spent online, and the impact of positive and negative online content; respectful behaviour online; that harmful behaviour such as bullying can take place online

¹⁴ Department for Education, [Implementation of relationships education, relationships and sex education and health education 2020 to 2021](#), 9 July 2020.

¹⁵ Department for Education, [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers](#), June 2019, p32.

¹⁶ Department for Education, [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers](#), June 2019, p31.

- Physical health and fitness
Including: the characteristics and benefits of a healthy lifestyle; the importance of exercise; the dangers of an inactive lifestyle
- Healthy eating
Including: what constitutes a healthy diet; the characteristics of a poor diet and associated risks
- Drugs, alcohol and tobacco
Including: factual information about legal and illegal drugs and associated risks
- Health and prevention
Including: how to recognise early signs of illness; safe and unsafe exposure to the sun; the importance of sleep; the importance of good dental health; personal hygiene; immunisations
- Basic first aid
Including: how to call the emergency services; basic first aid, such as dealing with common injuries
- Changing adolescent body
Including: key facts about puberty and the changing adolescent body, particularly from ages 9-11

At **secondary** level, the guidance states that teaching should build on primary learning with “a focus on enabling pupils to make well-informed, positive choices for themselves.”

Pupils are expected to learn about:

- Mental wellbeing
Including: how to talk about emotions; that happiness is linked to being connected to others; how to recognise the early signs of mental wellbeing problems; common types of mental ill health; the positive and negative impact of various activities on mental health
- Internet safety and harms
Including: the similarities and differences of the online and offline worlds; how to identify harmful behaviours online
- Physical health and fitness

Including: the positive impact of physical fitness in mental wellbeing; what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and the impact of an inactive lifestyle; facts about wider issues such as organ/blood donation

- Healthy eating

Including: how to maintain a healthy diet and the health risks associated with unhealthy eating

- Drugs, alcohol and tobacco

Including: the facts about legal substances and illegal substances, and associated risks; the law relating to the supply and possession of illegal substances; the risks of alcohol consumption and what constitutes (relatively) safe consumption; the consequences of addiction; the dangers of smoking tobacco, particularly lung cancer

- Health and prevention

Including: personal hygiene and germs; the importance of dental health; the importance of sleep; the importance of self-examination (in late secondary)

- Basic first aid

Including: treating common injuries; life-saving skills, including CPR; the purpose of defibrillators

- Changing adolescent body

Including: key facts about puberty, the changing adolescent body, and menstrual wellbeing; the main changes which take place in males and females, and the implications for emotional and physical health

Review of RSHE statutory guidance

In May 2024, following [a review](#) of RSHE statutory guidance, the Department for Education published updated [draft RSHE statutory guidance](#). The draft guidance includes age limits “to ensure...children are not introduced too early to concepts that they may not have the maturity to grasp, or which may be distressing.”¹⁷

In the draft guidance, the heading ‘Physical health and mental wellbeing’ is replaced with ‘Health and wellbeing’ and the condition that “schools have flexibility to design and plan age-appropriate subject content” is removed. An overview of what children should learn about health and wellbeing at primary and secondary level is listed on pages 29-32 and 34-38 of the guidance, with age limits specified in bold.

¹⁷ Department for Education, [Draft Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RE\) and Health education](#), May 2024.

The age limits for the health and wellbeing section apply to ‘Online safety and harms’ and ‘Developing bodies.’ The draft guidance sets out what pupils should know about social media, gambling sites, and the risks relating to online gaming, but stipulates that this content should not be taught before year 3. It also advises that learning requirements under the ‘Developing bodies’ section (formerly ‘Changing adolescent body’) should not be taught before year 4. A consultation on the draft statutory guidance was open from 16 May 2024 to 11 July 2024.

The position of financial and economic education

During his statement to the House announcing the July 2018 consultation, the then Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, set out the then government’s reasoning in not also making economic education statutory:

Financial education is already on the curriculum in maths and citizenship, and careers education is an important part of our careers strategy. For those reasons, I do not consider that further economic education needs be made compulsory. I am committed, however, to improving the provision of financial and careers education, and will continue to work with stakeholders to do so.¹⁸

In May 2024, the Education Committee published a report on [Delivering effective financial education](#), shortly before parliament dissolved for the 2024 General Election. The committee recommended that economic and financial education should be made compulsory, in a similar fashion to that which has happened with other aspects of PSHE:

Making the economic and financial elements of PSHE education statutory at primary and secondary school level appears to us to be a simple and effective way of expanding financial education at both levels and signalling the increased importance of the subject to all students.¹⁹

The new government has not yet responded to this report.

¹⁸ [HC Deb 19 Jul 2018 c615](#)

¹⁹ Education Committee, *Delivering effective financial education*, Third Report of Session 2023-24, HC 265, May 2024, p15

3 Pre-2017 reports and calls for statutory PSHE

3.1 Education Committee report and recommendation for statutory PSHE

In 2014-15, the Commons Education Select Committee conducted an enquiry into PSHE and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE), including consideration of whether the two subjects should be made statutory. In February 2015 the Committee [recommended](#) that age-appropriate PSHE, including SRE, should become a statutory subject in primary and secondary schools.²⁰ The Committee believed that the then Government's:

...current strategy for improving PSHE is weak, with a mismatch between the priority that ministers claim they give PSHE and the steps that have been taken to improve the quality of teaching in the subject.²¹

The [Government response](#) published in July 2015 did not take forward this recommendation for PSHE to be made statutory, although it stated that it would be giving further consideration to the Committee's arguments in 2015.²²

The Chair of the new Education Committee formed after the 2015 election, Neil Carmichael, was [critical](#) of the Government's response:

The response made by the Government today is disappointing.

Ministers entirely sidestep the call made by MPs in the closing months of the last Parliament to give statutory status to PSHE.

They also reject or brush over nearly every other recommendation made by the previous Education Committee in their key report published five months ago.

It is unclear why it should have taken the Government so long to publish such a feeble response.²³

In November 2015, the Chair of the Committee [wrote](#) to the Education Secretary to stress that the Committee expected an update on statutory

²⁰ House of Commons Education Select Committee, [All schools should have to provide PSHE and SRE](#), 17 February 2015.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Department for Education, [Government response: Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools](#), Cm 9121, July 2015, p9.

²³ House of Commons Education Select Committee, [Government response to sex education report is "feeble"](#), 16 July 2015.

status, and urging that the arguments in favour of statutory status should be considered carefully.²⁴

In December 2015, Natasha Devon, founder of the Self-Esteem Team and mental health champion at the Department for Education, told the Education Committee in [oral evidence](#) to its inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of looked after children that she believed the Education Secretary favoured statutory status, but that there were budgetary issues:

Q50: [...] As far as I am aware—this is just anecdotal—Nicky Morgan is in favour of it being made statutory, so the question is: what more can we do? My hunch is that financial considerations are at the root of the decision not to make it statutory, because as soon as you make it statutory you have to give it a budget.²⁵

Joint letter from select committee Chairs (January 2016)

In January 2016, the Chairs of four Commons select committees – education, health, home affairs and business, innovation and skills – [wrote](#) to the Education Secretary, citing committee reports and statements from the Children’s Commissioner and the Chief Medical Officer, in support of statutory PSHE and SRE.

The letter stated that it was “clear to the four of us that there is a need to work towards PSHE and SRE becoming statutory in all schools.”²⁶

3.2

Women and Equalities Committee inquiry and Government response

As part of its inquiry into sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, the Women and Equalities Committee [asked](#) for comments on the strength of the Government's evidence on the current status of PSHE and its work in this area, to inform its questions to Ministers on 12 July 2016.²⁷

The [Committee’s report](#) was published in September 2016. It recommended that that PSHE and SRE should be made statutory subjects as part of the Education Bill then planned for autumn 2016.²⁸ (That Bill was subsequently dropped.)

²⁴ Education Committee, [Letter from Neil Carmichael MP to Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP](#), 25 November 2015.

²⁵ Education Committee, Uncorrected oral evidence: [Mental health and well-being of looked after children](#), HC 481, 16 December 2015.

²⁶ Education Committee, [Letter from Neil Carmichael MP, Dr Sarah Wollaston MP, Rt Hon Keith Vaz MP, and Iain Wright MP, to Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP](#), 8 January 2016.

²⁷ Women and Equalities Committee, [Personal, Social, Health and Economic education and the curriculum](#), 5 July 2016.

²⁸ Women and Equalities Committee, [Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools](#), Third Report session 2016-17, HC 91 para 151.

The [Government's response](#), published in November 2016, did not include a commitment to make either PSHE or SRE statutory. The Government stated that it would consider improvements to the teaching of both subjects:

...we will look at how what is taught in PSHE and SRE can fit into a whole school approach and reflected in codes of practice. We are conscious that the existing SRE guidance was last updated in 2000 and the case for further action on PSHE and SRE delivery is actively under review, with particular consideration to improving quality and accessibility.²⁹

The Committee Chair, Maria Miller, was [critical](#) of the response, and in particular the lack of a commitment to statutory SRE:

In particular the Government needs to prioritise action to ensure Sex and Relationship education reflects the realities of the 21st century rather than the pre-smartphone age when guidance was last updated.³⁰

New letter from select committee Chairs (November 2016)

Following the Government's response to the Women and Equalities Committee report, [five select committee Chairs wrote to the Education Secretary](#), to express disappointment at the lack of an announcement of statutory PSHE, and urged the Government either to support a current Private Member's Bill for statutory PSHE (see section 3.4) or bring forward proposals of its own.³¹

The five Chairs were Neil Carmichael (Education Committee), Maria Miller (Women and Equalities), Yvette Cooper (Home Affairs), Dr Sarah Wollaston (Health), and Iain Wright (Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy).

3.3

Government decision not to make PSHE statutory (February 2016)

In February 2016, the then Education Secretary Nicky Morgan [wrote](#) to the Education Committee Chair to state that PSHE would not be made statutory:

The vast majority of schools already make provision for PSHE and while the Government agrees that making PSHE statutory would give it equal status with other subjects, the Government is concerned that this would do little to tackle the most pressing problems with the subject, which are to do with the variable quality of its provision, as evidenced by Ofsted's finding that 40% of PSHE teaching is less than good. As such, while we will continue to keep the status of

²⁹ Women and Equalities Committee, [Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools: Government response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2016-17](#), First special report of 2016-17, para 56.

³⁰ Women and Equalities Committee, [New law needed to protect children from sexual harassment and violence](#), 29 November 2016.

³¹ Education Committee, [Letter from Neil Carmichael MP and others to Rt Hon Justine Greening MP](#), 29 November 2016.

PSHE in the curriculum under review, our immediate focus will be on improving the quality of PSHE teaching in our schools.³²

The letter also stated that the DfE would be working with a group of leading headteachers and practitioners in the following months to produce an action plan and recommendations for improving PSHE, including publishing a comprehensive PSHE toolkit for schools.

Neil Carmichael, the Chair of the Education Committee, was [quoted](#) in Schools Week stating that he was “disappointed that the government is not going as far as the committee would like but pleased they are working on an action plan with the profession to improve the teaching of PSHE.”³³

It was [reported](#) in the press that the decision not to make PSHE statutory was taken by the Prime Minister.³⁴

The PSHE Association was [strongly critical](#) of the decision, with the Association’s Chief Executive, Joe Hayman, describing it as “an appalling failure,” and stating that:

What is most baffling about this decision is that the Government has a range of objectives it seeks to achieve through PSHE education, including teaching pupils to stay safe online, promoting children and young people’s mental health and preventing radicalisation, child sexual exploitation and violence against women and girls. Its decision not to address a status quo in which these issues are addressed by untrained teachers in inadequate curriculum time – or left off the curriculum altogether – is self-defeating and leaves vulnerable young people at risk.³⁵

The letter was also discussed in a House of Lords debate on the day of its publication – see [HL Deb 10 Feb 2016 c2233-2236](#).

Subsequent Government comment and reconsideration

In September 2016, the newly appointed Education Secretary, Justine Greening, [indicated to the Education Committee](#) that she was open to reconsidering the position of PSHE and SRE.³⁶

A subsequent [response to a Parliamentary Question](#) by the Education Minister Edward Timpson confirmed:

As the Secretary of State said at the Education Select Committee hearing in September 2016, we need to look again at how schools deliver high quality

³² Education Committee, [Letter from Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP to Neil Carmichael MP](#), 10 February 2016.

³³ Schools Week, [Government rules out making PSHE and SRE statutory](#), 10 February 2016.

³⁴ Telegraph, [David Cameron just blocked compulsory sex education - and the women in his Cabinet are furious](#), 11 February 2016.

³⁵ PSHE Association, [Statement on government decision to reject statutory status for PSHE education](#), 10 February 2016.

³⁶ Education Committee, [Role and Responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Education](#), 14 September 2016, HC 196.

PSHE including SRE. We are considering all the options and will come to a view soon.³⁷

During the [Second Reading debate](#) in the Commons on the Children and Social Work Bill [HL] in December 2016, the Minister indicated that he had asked officials to “accelerate” their work on PSHE and SRE, so that he could report on the Department’s conclusions at a later point during the passage of the Bill.³⁸

3.4

Legislative proposals

Labour Government plans

[The Children’s Plan](#), published by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families in December 2007, emphasised the then Labour Government’s view it was important for schools to develop young people in the round, as well as ensuring that they receive an excellent education. Amongst other things, it announced a review of the delivery of sex and relationships education, and also set out the Government’s commitment to examine the effectiveness of drugs education. Subsequently a Drugs and Alcohol Advisory Group was commissioned to carry out a review and to make its recommendations to the Secretary of State. Both these reviews recommended that good PSHE was vital to providing a healthy, rounded education.³⁹

On 23 October 2008, Jim Knight, the then Schools Minister announced in a [Written Ministerial Statement](#) that the Government had decided that PSHE should have statutory status.⁴⁰ The Minister asked Sir Alasdair Macdonald to report to the Secretary of State on a practicable way forward. Sir Alasdair reported to the Secretary of State in March 2009: [Independent Review of the proposal to make Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education \(PSHE\) statutory](#).

In a [Written Ministerial Statement](#) on 5 November 2009 the then Secretary of State, Ed Balls, announced his decision to proceed with legislation to make PSHE education part of the statutory National Curriculum in both primary and secondary education, and that parents’ right to withdraw their children from sex and relationship education (SRE) should continue but only until their children reach the age of 15, so that every young person would receive at least one year of SRE before the end of compulsory education.⁴¹

Measures to legislate for these proposals were included in the Children, Schools and Families Bill before Parliament shortly before the 2010 General

³⁷ [PQ 47734, 18 October 2016](#)

³⁸ [HC Deb 5 Dec 2016 c84](#)

³⁹ DCSF Press Release, All pupils to get healthy lifestyle lessons, 23 October 2008.

⁴⁰ [HC Deb 23 Oct 2008 c15-17WS](#)

⁴¹ [HC Deb 5 Nov 2009 c49-52WS](#)

Election. For background see [Library research paper 09/95](#) on the Children, Schools and Families Bill, Session 2009-10 (pages 23-27).

Many of the Bill's provisions, including the introduction of compulsory PSHE education and the provision that all children receive at least one year of sex and relationship education were removed during the consideration of Lords Amendments on 8 April 2010 immediately before the dissolution of Parliament for the General Election.

The provisions in the Bill that did survive are now contained in the [Children, Schools and Families Act 2010](#).

Labour commitment to statutory PSHE (2016)

In March 2016, the then Shadow Education Secretary, Lucy Powell, [announced](#) that making PSHE statutory in all state schools would be “one of the first things Labour does in government” and stated that:

Improving [PSHE's] status would help reverse the downward trend in lesson quality. It would ensure there was a broad and balanced framework of standards, with up-to-date guidance that reflects the world we live in. Alongside this, we want a new generation of PSHE leaders in every school, sharing best practice.⁴²

Recent Private Members' Bills

In July 2016, Caroline Lucas presented the [Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education \(Statutory Requirement\) Bill 2016-17](#), in favour of statutory PSHE including SRE and education on ending violence against women and girls; and to provide for initial and continuing teacher education and guidance on best practice for delivering and inspecting PSHE and SRE education. The Bill received a Second Reading prior to the dissolution of Parliament for the 2017 General Election.

Caroline Lucas also presented bills in favour of compulsory PSHE during both the 2014-15 and 2015-16 parliamentary sessions, neither of which received a second reading.

Teresa Pearce, who was sixth in the 2015 Private Members' Bill Ballot,⁴³ presented the [Compulsory Emergency First Aid Education \(State-funded Secondary Schools\) Bill 2015-16](#) in June 2015. First Aid is a topic that is currently often taught within PSHE. The Bill had its [Second Reading](#) on 20 November 2015.⁴⁴ The debate was not concluded and the Bill did not advance further.

Amendment to Psychoactive Substances Bill

An amendment was tabled by Labour during the Committee Stage of the Psychoactive Substances Bill [HL] in the House of Commons in October 2015 to

⁴² Times, [Labour will ensure children are taught the dangers of sexting](#), 22 March 2016.

⁴³ Parliament, [Private Members' Bill Ballot](#), 4 June 2015

⁴⁴ [HC Deb 20 Nov 2015 c937-961](#) and [c984-1019](#)

make PSHE a foundation subject in the National Curriculum in England. In keeping with the Bill, the amendment included particular requirements relating to drugs education.⁴⁵

Lyn Brown spoke to the amendment, and also the New Clause, for Labour. She was critical of PSHE provision in England, citing the Ofsted [report](#) published in 2013⁴⁶:

Ofsted...found that in 60% of schools PSHE training was not good enough and certainly needed to improve, and the evidence from the Government's own inspectors suggests that the Government's approach to PSHE just is not working. And all this is happening while the presence of NPS [new psychoactive substances] has begun to grow in our communities.⁴⁷

Lyn Brown criticised a lack of “comprehensive drug education” in England, arguing that a better approach was taken in Wales, where education was “at the forefront” of drugs prevention policy.⁴⁸ Lyn Brown supported statutory PSHE as “an important tool in our fight against psychoactive drugs and those who push them,”⁴⁹ and said that the amendment for progress on education to be included in the review of the Act “would focus minds in the Home Office and compel it to put in place the most effective and comprehensive awareness campaign possible.”⁵⁰

Speaking for the Government, Mike Penning stated that the Department for Education would be writing to the Education Committee by the end of the year on the status of PSHE.⁵¹

Lyn Brown returned to these issues at [Report Stage](#) in the Commons, and tabled a further amendment (New Clause 1) for statutory PSHE. The New Clause was defeated by 307 votes to 241.⁵²

The Bill received Royal Assent as the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016.

3.5 Support for statutory PSHE

The PSHE Expert Group established by the Coalition Government (see page 6) recommended that PSHE be made statutory:

...as a means of ensuring that the subject is always delivered by trained and supported teachers, with adequate curriculum time. It is our view that the

⁴⁵ New Clause 4 – [list of amendments 27 October 2015](#).

⁴⁶ Ofsted, [Not yet good enough: personal, social, health and economic education in schools](#), May 2013.

⁴⁷ [PBC 29 Oct 2015 c76](#)

⁴⁸ PBC 29 Oct 2015 c76

⁴⁹ PBC 29 Oct 2015 c79

⁵⁰ PBC 29 Oct 2015 c81

⁵¹ PBC 29 Oct 2015 c84

⁵² Debate at [HC Deb 20 Jan 2016 c1437-1481](#)

great potential of the subject is not being realised, and that system change is needed.⁵³

The PSHE Association is conducting a [campaign](#) in support of statutory status for PSHE. The campaign lists a wide range of supporters, including the NUT, Royal College of Nursing, and British Red Cross.⁵⁴

In October 2015, the PSHE Association published a [paper](#) making the case for statutory status, which stated that “statutory status for PSHE education is supported by 92% of pupils, 90% of parents, 88% of teachers and 85% of business leaders.”⁵⁵ The paper argued that non-statutory status was the root of the problems facing PSHE:

As a non-statutory, non-examined subject, PSHE education is not held to the same standards of rigour as other subjects and PSHE teachers are not given the curriculum time or training they need to deliver to the standards we should expect.⁵⁶

3.6 Opposition to statutory status

During the First Reading debate of the [Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education \(Statutory Requirement\) Bill 2015-16](#), (see section 3.1), Philip Davies argued against the Bill and the principle of PSHE being made statutory:

I oppose the Bill in principle. Parents who do not want their children to have the values of their teacher inflicted on them when they may be against the values of those parents should be supported by this Parliament in being able to remove their children from such lessons if they see fit. Parental responsibility, parental choice and the freedom of parents to allow children to be brought up with their values should be protected in this House, not just trampled over because we happen to have different individual opinions.⁵⁷

Opposition to statutory PSHE often focuses on the issue of parental responsibility and whether it is appropriate for the type of issues covered in PSHE to be taught by teachers rather than parents. In written [evidence](#) to the Education Committee, the Family Education Trust stated that “most of the components of PSHE are the primary responsibility of parents” and that:

The more that schools take to themselves responsibility for these areas, the less parents will be inclined to view them as their responsibility. If PSHE were to become a statutory part of the curriculum alongside other curriculum subjects, there would be a very real danger that, over the course of time, parents would no more consider themselves responsible for these aspects of their children’s physical, emotional and social development than they typically regard

⁵³ Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education Expert Group, [Report and Recommendations](#), p4.

⁵⁴ PSHE Association, [Pledge your support for statutory PSHE education](#) [accessed 14 September 2015].

⁵⁵ PSHE Association, [Personal, Social, Health and Economic \(PSHE\) education – a curriculum for life: The case for statutory status](#), October 2015, p3.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ [HC Deb 15 Jul 2015 c931](#)

themselves as responsible for the teaching of English, maths, history and science.⁵⁸

[Evidence](#) to the Committee from the Evangelical Alliance raised similar issues, emphasising the role of parents in teaching the topics covered in PSHE, with particular reference to the sensitivity of SRE.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Family Education Trust, [Further Written Evidence to the Education Committee](#), November 2014.

⁵⁹ Evangelical Alliance, [Written Evidence to the Education Committee](#), July 2014.

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