



POLICY STATEMENT: RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION, RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX EDUCATION, AND PERSONAL, SOCIAL, HEALTH AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION

Introduction

The Secretary of State for Education confirms the Government's ambition to support all young people to stay safe and prepare for life in modern Britain by making Relationships Education (Primary), Relationships and Sex Education (RSE - Secondary) and, subject to the outcome of a thorough consideration of the subject, Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE - both) statutory in all schools. The government [laid an amendment](#)¹ to the Children and Social Work Bill on 1 March 2017 which we intend to come into effect from September 2019².

The Secretary of State confirmed that she was actively considering the case for further action on these subjects in September 2016 to the Education Select Committee, underlining the government's commitment to explore all options to drive improvement. The amendment is the result of careful consideration of the evidence on mandating teaching, and embedding improvements, in these subjects.

The Chairs of 5 Select Committees wrote to the Secretary of State in November 2016 to call for further action on these subjects. The government acknowledges the important work of these Chairs and their respective Committees in bringing together the evidence supporting further consideration of the case for change.

Rationale for Government's approach to relationships education, RSE and PSHE in the modern world

Whilst we know that many schools are already teaching these subjects and in some cases doing so very well, it is important that we ensure universal coverage for all pupils and improved quality. There have been many calls for statutory RSE and/or PSHE from leading parent representative bodies such as Mumsnet and PTA UK. A recent YouGov poll shows that 91% of parents believe all pupils should receive PSHE lessons to teach about the risks of sexting, as well as other issues such as contact from strangers online. A recent Barnardo's poll of 11-15 year olds also showed that 74% believed that children would be safer if they had age appropriate classes on RSE. Many teaching

¹ <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/childrenandsocialwork.htm>

² Written Ministerial Statement here: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-03-01/HCWS509/>

unions have also called for statutory status. It is clear, therefore, that parents and schools want them to be taught.

The legislative approach

Given the increasing concerns around child sexual abuse and exploitation and the growing risks associated with growing up in a digital world, there is a particularly compelling case to act in relation to pupil safety. That is why the amendment places a duty now on the Secretary of State to make Relationships Education and RSE statutory through regulations. This approach will allow us time to properly and thoroughly engage with a wide range of interests and expertise. The outcomes of this engagement will then feed into the development of both the regulations making the subjects statutory, and the guidance that will support schools in delivering high quality Relationships Education and RSE.

For PSHE, we are giving a power to the Secretary of State to make it statutory via regulations. Whilst we are clear that the most pressing safeguarding concerns relate to Relationships and RSE, it is evident that wider concerns about child safety and wellbeing relate to the types of life skills this subject can cover, such as understanding of the risks of drugs and alcohol, and safeguarding physical and mental health. We therefore think it is important that we have the ability to make PSHE statutory as well, subject to the outcome of thorough consideration of the subject, and careful consideration of the fit between the content of Relationships and RSE and what could be covered in the PSHE curriculum. We will ensure our work results in a clear understanding about the full set of knowledge and life skills that Relationships Education, RSE and PSHE should provide for young people to support them to be safe, healthy, happy and successful.

We do not think it is right to specify on the face of primary legislation the exact content of the subjects as this would be too prescriptive, removing freedom from schools and running the risk of the legislation becoming quickly out of date as the world changes. The Department's work on subject content (see below) will determine that, working with a wide range of experts and interested parties. More detail on what the regulations will include is below. In summary they will set out specific elements that are required for the introduction of these statutory subjects, such as a requirement for statutory guidance and a right for parents to withdraw their children from sex education. The guidance will support schools in how to approach teaching these subjects and set out the core pillars the subjects should cover.

This approach to making the subjects statutory also, crucially, allows schools time to prepare to deliver the new content, pending review work, from September 2019. The changes triggered by the amendment clearly signal to the school system and wider stakeholders our intention to act, and we know that schools will start planning and preparing to deliver these subjects immediately. However, it will also give us time to listen to schools about the support they need to implement these changes to the highest quality. We are confident, therefore, that this planned and measured approach to change, seeking evidence and collaboration with experts, is the right one and will ensure we use this opportunity to act to greatest effect.

The requirements on schools

The subjects would be made part of the basic school curriculum (as now for sex education in maintained secondary schools), which allows schools flexibility in developing their planned programme, integrated within a broad and balanced curriculum. All primary schools (maintained, academies or independent) will be required to provide relationships education (and will retain their

current choice to teach age-appropriate sex education). All secondary schools (maintained, academies or independent) will be required to provide RSE. Pending the outcome of review work, all primary and secondary schools may be required to provide PSHE or elements of it.

Building on existing good practice

We know that many schools are already delivering these subjects well and will continue to do so. In 2013, Ofsted published a report into current PSHE provision³, which suggested that practice was good in approximately 60% of schools and summarised what effective practice looked like. Many schools use the non-statutory programme of study⁴ provided by the PSHE Association. Government also endorsed the supplementary advice for schools, “Sex and relationships education (SRE) for the 21st century”, which was published by the PSHE Association, the Sex Education Forum and Brook⁵. The advice addressed changes in technology and legislation since 2000, equipping teachers to help protect children from inappropriate online content, bullying, harassment and exploitation.

Implementation should be planned at an appropriate pace to allow schools to start the work now, making steady, effective improvements to their provision. This ensures that we are building an evidence-based approach to reform that works for schools and makes sure that all children benefit from a more consistent approach.

As mentioned, we will ensure the subjects are carefully designed to safeguard and support pupils and are deliverable for schools. Nevertheless, we are clear on the themes and issues they should cover, in an age-appropriate way, to achieve this. Relationships and RSE will be age-appropriate, building knowledge and life skills over time in a way that prepares pupils for issues they will soon face. They will likely focus on:

- **different types of relationships**, including friendships, family relationships, dealing with strangers and, at secondary school, intimate relationships;
- how to recognise, understand and build **healthy relationships**, including self-respect and respect for others, commitment, tolerance, boundaries and consent, and how to manage conflict, and also how to recognise unhealthy relationships;
- how relationships may **affect health and wellbeing, including mental health**;
- healthy relationships and **safety online**; and
- factual knowledge, at secondary school, around **sex, sexual health and sexuality**, set firmly within the context of relationships.

The review work (see below) will determine what statutory PSHE could look like in the context of statutory Relationships and RSE, and will also consider age-appropriate content and guidance. We would expect this to cover broad pillars of:

- 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;

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/not-yet-good-enough-personal-social-health-and-economic-education>

⁴ <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/sites/default/files/PSHE%20Association%20Programme%20of%20Study%20May%202016.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/resources/sex-and-relationship-education-sre-21st-century>

- careers education, preparation for the workplace and making a positive contribution to society.

Key principles of statutory change

We have committed to retain parents' **right to withdraw** their child from sex education within RSE (other than sex education in the National Curriculum as part of science)⁶, as currently, but not from relationships education at primary. This is because parents should have the right to teach this themselves in a way which is consistent with their values. The Secretary of State will consult further in order to clarify the age at which a young person may have the right to make their own decisions⁷. The outcome will be set out in regulations which will be subject to consultation and debate.

We are also committed to ensuring that the education provided to pupils in Relationships Education and RSE is **appropriate to the age of pupils and their religious background**. The Secretary of State must give guidance to schools on how to deliver this. This provision enables faith schools to teach these subjects according to the tenets of their faith, whilst still being consistent with requirements of the Equality Act.

Regulations

As well as enshrining the two points above on parental rights and appropriate teaching, the regulations will ensure that:

- the Secretary of State issues guidance on delivering these subjects, which all schools must have regard to, including setting out that pupils are taught:
 - safety in forming and maintaining relationships,
 - the characteristics of healthy relationships,
 - how relationships may affect mental and physical health; and
- schools must publish and make available a policy on the subjects.

The Secretary of State may also lay regulations to make PSHE statutory in all all schools (it is already statutory in independent schools), and these, pending the outcome of consideration of content, would set out similar requirements on guidance (without specifying content) and school policies.

Both sets of regulations may also set out further requirements related to these subjects, for example further, limited specifics on subject content. Any additional requirements will be identified by work with stakeholders conducted by the Department for Education.

Work to consider content of Relationships Education, RSE and PSHE – terms of reference

The Department for Education intends to conduct thorough and wide ranging engagement on the subjects – considering subject content, school practice and quality of delivery - to determine the

⁶ Parents will also have a right to withdraw their child from any sex education (beyond the science curriculum) that primary schools choose to teach.

⁷ Providing a parent with a blanket right to withdraw their child from sex education is no longer consistent with English caselaw (or with the ECHR and UNCRC).

content of the regulations and statutory guidance. This will have significant involvement of the teaching profession. The Department will also engage with, and seek evidence from schools and teachers; parents and pupils; experts in safeguarding and child wellbeing; subject experts; faith groups; voluntary organisations and other interested parties; and other government departments and public sector bodies. We will set out more details when the work gets underway. On the guidance, this work will:

- produce fit for purpose guidance that ensures schools can adapt their age-appropriate subject content to pupil needs;
- consider how to ensure the guidance avoids being prescriptive about content, but includes the concepts set out in paragraphs 12 and 13 above;
- consider how the guidance can best meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people including those with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities or who are educated other than in mainstream settings;
- be mindful of the wider curriculum landscape and the size/shape of the schools curriculum (including demands on curriculum time); and
- consider how to introduce an approach to regularly ensure a refresh of each set of guidance

In the context of quality of delivery and implementation, the work will consider:

- building the knowledge and skills of teachers and leaders (and what support schools may require for this);
- understanding and disseminating evidence-based good practice;
- developing high-quality resources;
- creating the right level of focus to raise status; and
- whether it will be useful to change the name of PSHE via guidance.

Ofsted will consider the implications of the new requirements for school inspection.

Out of scope will be:

- consideration of the statutory status of Relationships Education and RSE,
- question of whether there should be a right to withdraw a pupil; or
- requirements which place significant new burdens on schools.

Timeline

The work to consider content will begin this spring and we expect that it will result in draft regulations and guidance for consultation in the autumn of 2017. Following consultation, regulations will be laid in the House, alongside final draft guidance, allowing for a full and considered debate. The statutory guidance will be published in early 2018, once the regulations have been passed (and at least one full year before academic year 2019/20).

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