



BRIEFING PAPER

Number 07303, 17 July 2019

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

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Inside:

1. PSHE: position on the curriculum
2. Reforms: Statutory Health Education from September 2020
3. Quality of PSHE provision
4. Reports and earlier calls for statutory PSHE



Contents

One page briefing	3
1. PSHE: position on the curriculum	4
1.1 Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE)	4
PSHE Association	5
1.2 Relationships and sex education (RSE)	5
2. Reforms: Statutory Health Education from September 2020	7
2.1 Children and Social Work Act 2017 powers	7
2.2 Call for evidence	8
2.3 Statutory Health Education	8
Consultations	8
Statutory guidance: Physical health and mental wellbeing education	8
The position of economic education	11
3. Quality of PSHE provision	12
3.1 Ofsted report on PSHE provision (2013)	12
3.2 Teaching	12
4. Reports and earlier calls for statutory PSHE	14
4.1 Education Committee report and recommendation for statutory PSHE	14
Joint letter from select committee Chairs (January 2016)	15
4.2 Women and Equalities Committee inquiry and Government response	15
New letter from select committee Chairs (November 2016)	16
4.3 Government decision not to make PSHE statutory (February 2016)	16
Subsequent Government comment and reconsideration	17
4.4 Legislative proposals	17
Labour Government plans	17
Labour commitment to statutory PSHE (2016)	18
Recent Private Members' Bills	19
Amendment to <i>Psychoactive Substances Bill</i>	19
4.5 Support for statutory PSHE	20
4.6 Opposition to statutory status	21

One page briefing

What is PSHE?

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

...a planned programme of learning through which children and young people acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to manage their lives, now and in the future.

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.

In September 2013, following an internal review, the Department for Education issued new [guidance on PSHE](#), which makes clear that it is largely up to schools to determine what is taught; it also states that the then Government did not intend to publish new non-statutory programmes of study for PSHE.

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

Statutory Health Education from September 2020

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. A call for evidence on PSHE teaching ran from December 2017 – February 2018.

In July 2018, the Government [announced](#) the introduction of statutory Health Education, alongside the publication of its response to the call for evidence and proposals on RSE. A [consultation](#) was opened on draft regulations and draft statutory guidance to implement the changes. The Government published its [response to the consultation](#), alongside updated [draft regulations](#) and [draft guidance](#), were published in February 2019.

[*The Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education \(England\) Regulations 2019*](#) have now passed through Parliament and provide for statutory health education in schools from September 2020.

Schools are 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 taught in schools across England. The PSHE Association defines PSHE as:

...a planned programme of learning through which children and young people acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to manage their lives, now and in the future.¹

PSHE is a non-statutory subject. However, the [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.²

In September 2013, the Department for Education issued [new guidance on PSHE](#), which makes clear that it is largely up to schools to determine what is taught; it also states that the then Government did not intend to publish new non-statutory programmes of study for PSHE.

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.

Schools should seek to use PSHE education to build, where appropriate, on the statutory content already outlined in the national curriculum, the basic school curriculum and in statutory guidance on: drug education, financial education, sex and relationship education (SRE) and the importance of physical activity and diet for a healthy lifestyle.³

The new guidance followed a review of PSHE carried out by the Coalition Government, which reported in March 2013, separately from

¹ PSHE Association, [What is PSHE and why is it important?](#) [accessed 15 September 2015]

² Department for Education, [The national curriculum in England: Framework document: for teaching 1 September 2014 to 31 August 2015](#), September 2013

³ Department for Education, [Personal, social, health and economic education](#), 11 September 2013

5 Personal, social, health and economic education in schools (England)

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 Government has also asked the association to promote the teaching of consent as part of SRE.⁶

The PSHE Association has published its own [programme of study](#) for PSHE, covering Key Stages 1-5. The programme has three core themes:

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

Within these headings the programme includes focus on a variety of areas, 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.⁷

1.2 Relationships and sex education (RSE)

Sex and relationship education (SRE) is distinct from PSHE, although many issues relating to SRE 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 SRE requirements.

Changes to SRE – including a change in name – are currently in progress, and are taking place alongside changes to PSHE detailed in section 2 of this briefing.

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

Current position

The [gov.uk website](#) provides a brief overview of the rules relating to SRE in schools:

Sex and relationship education (SRE) is compulsory from age 11 onwards. It involves teaching children about reproduction,

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

⁵ Department for Education, [Consultation on PSHE Education: Summary Report](#), March 2013

⁶ Department for Education, [Personal, social, health and economic education](#), 11 September 2013

⁷ PSHE Association, [PSHE programme of study \(Key stages 1-4\)](#), October 2014

sexuality and sexual health. It doesn't promote early sexual activity or any particular sexual orientation.

Some parts of sex and relationship education are compulsory - these are part of the national curriculum for science. Parents can withdraw their children from all other parts of sex and relationship education if they want.

All schools must have a written policy on sex education, which they must make available to parents for free

Academies and free schools do not have to follow the National Curriculum and so are not under the same statutory obligations as local authority maintained schools. As such, they are not obliged to teach sex and relationship education;⁸ if they do provide it, they must have regard to the [SRE guidance](#) issued by the Secretary of State.⁹

From 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 SRE – 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 involve:

- 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 will come into force in September 2020.

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.

⁸ Unless there is a clause in their funding agreements requiring SRE to be taught.

⁹ Department for Education and Employment, [Sex and Relationship Education Guidance](#), July 2000

2. Reforms: Statutory Health Education from September 2020

2.1 Children and Social Work Act 2017 powers

On 1 March 2017, the 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.¹⁰

It is intended that the announced changes to Relationships and Sex Education would be in place for teaching to begin in September 2019. No indication has been given of a timetable for the potential introduction of statutory PSHE.

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.¹¹

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

¹⁰ [HC Deb 1 March 2017, HCWS509](#)

¹¹ Department for Education, [Policy Statement: Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education, and Personal, Social, Health, and Economic Education](#), March 2017

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.¹²

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](#) have passed Parliament and provide for statutory health education in schools from September 2020.

Schools are 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](#).

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.¹³

The guidance draws particular attention to menstruation, and that its onset "can be confusing or even alarming for girls if they are not

¹² Department for Education, [New relationships and health education in schools](#), 19 July 2018

¹³ 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

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.¹⁴

Tables on pages 32-35 and 36-38 of the draft 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 would 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
- 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

¹⁴ 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

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

Pupils would be 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

The position of economic education

During his statement to the House announcing the July 2018 consultation, the Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, set out the 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.¹⁵

3. Quality of PSHE provision

3.1 Ofsted report on PSHE provision (2013)

Ofsted has published a [series of reports](#) on PSHE provision and good practice. The most recent report, [Not yet good enough: personal, social, health and economic education in schools](#), was published in May 2013. The report stated that learning in PSHE education was:

...good or better in 60% of schools and required improvement or was inadequate in 40%...

In the two fifths of schools where learning was weak, pupils had gaps in their knowledge and skills, most commonly in the serious safeguarding areas of personal safety in relation to sex and relationships, mental health, and alcohol misuse.¹⁶

3.2 Teaching

The 2013 [Ofsted report](#), stated that the teaching of PSHE required improvement:

Teaching required improvement in 42% of primary and 38% of secondary schools. Too many teachers lacked expertise in teaching sensitive and controversial issues, which resulted in some topics such as sexuality, mental health and domestic violence being omitted from the curriculum. This was because subject-specific training and support were too often inadequate. In 20% of schools, staff had received little or no training to teach PSHE education. Teaching was not good in any of these schools.¹⁷

The report recommended that schools should “ensure that staff teaching PSHE education receive subject-specific training and regular updates, including in the teaching of sensitive issues.”¹⁸

From 2004 to 2010 the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Health funded a certificated national programme of PSHE Continuing Professional Development (CPD); the Education Committee recommended in its February 2015 report that this funding be reintroduced.¹⁹ The Government rejected this recommendation in its [response](#).²⁰ The response highlighted the PSHE quality mark (see Nicky Morgan speech, on page 5 of this briefing):

To enable schools to demonstrate excellence in the quality of their PSHE teaching, the Government [has] announced the development of a new, rigorous PSHE quality mark. This will give parents more information about the quality of a school’s PSHE provision and will highlight schools which are already providing opportunities for wider development for their pupils through PSHE. It will make it easier for schools struggling in this area to

¹⁶ Ofsted, [Not yet good enough: personal, social, health and economic education in schools](#), May 2013, p4-5

¹⁷ Ofsted, [Not yet good enough: personal, social, health and economic education in schools](#), p7

¹⁸ Ibid., p8

¹⁹ House of Commons Education Select Committee, [All schools should have to provide PSHE and SRE](#), p3

²⁰ Department for Education, [Government response: Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools](#), p5

13 Personal, social, health and economic education in schools (England)

work with the best. The new PSHE quality mark will be brought in line with similar accreditations of its type which require schools to provide evidence for the depth and quality of their teaching in a particular area. The new accreditation will drive improvement in the subject, with many schools seeking the award expected to make tangible improvements to their teaching to achieve the quality mark.²¹

²¹ Ibid., p4

4. Reports and earlier calls for statutory PSHE

4.1 Education Committee report and recommendation for statutory PSHE

In 2014-15, the Commons Education Select Committee conducted an enquiry into PSHE and 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.²² 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.²³

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 2015.²⁴

The Chair of the new Education Committee, 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.²⁵

In November 2015, the Chair of the Committee [wrote](#) to the Education Secretary to stress that the Committee expected an update on statutory status, and urging that the arguments in favour of statutory status should be considered carefully.²⁶

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

²² House of Commons Education Select Committee, [All schools should have to provide PSHE and SRE](#), 17 February 2015

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Department for Education, [Government response: Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools](#), Cm 9121, July 2015, p9

²⁵ House of Commons Education Select Committee, [Government response to sex education report is "feeble"](#), 16 July 2015

²⁶ Education Committee, [Letter from Neil Carmichael MP to Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP](#), 25 November 2015

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.²⁷

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.”²⁸

4.2 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 2016.²⁹

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 2016.³⁰ (That Bill was subsequently dropped.)

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.³¹

²⁷ Education Committee, Uncorrected oral evidence: [Mental health and well-being of looked after children](#), HC 481, 16 December 2015

²⁸ 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

²⁹ Women and Equalities Committee, [Personal, Social, Health and Economic education and the curriculum](#), 5 July 2016

³⁰ Women and Equalities Committee, [Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools](#), Third Report session 2016-17, HC 91 para 151

³¹ 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

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.³²

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.³³

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).

4.3 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 PSHE in the curriculum under review, our immediate focus will be on improving the quality of PSHE teaching in our schools.³⁴

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

³² Women and Equalities Committee, [New law needed to protect children from sexual harassment and violence](#), 29 November 2016

³³ Education Committee, [Letter from Neil Carmichael MP and others to Rt Hon Justine Greening MP](#), 29 November 2016

³⁴ Education Committee, [Letter from Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP to Neil Carmichael MP](#), 10 February 2016

working on an action plan with the profession to improve the teaching of PSHE.”³⁵

It was [reported](#) in the press that the decision not to make PSHE statutory was taken by the Prime Minister.³⁶

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.³⁷

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.³⁸

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 PSHE including SRE. We are considering all the options and will come to a view soon.³⁹

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.⁴⁰

4.4 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

³⁵ Schools Week, [Government rules out making PSHE and SRE statutory](#), 10 February 2016

³⁶ Telegraph, [David Cameron just blocked compulsory sex education - and the women in his Cabinet are furious](#), 11 February 2016

³⁷ PSHE Association, [Statement on government decision to reject statutory status for PSHE education](#), 10 February 2016

³⁸ Education Committee, [Role and Responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Education](#), 14 September 2016, HC 196

³⁹ [PQ 47734, 18 October 2016](#)

⁴⁰ [HC Deb 5 Dec 2016 c84](#)

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.⁴¹

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.⁴² 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.⁴³

Measures to legislate for these proposals were included in the *Children, Schools and Families Bill* before Parliament shortly before the 2010 General 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.⁴⁴

⁴¹ DCSF Press Release, All pupils to get healthy lifestyle lessons, 23 October 2008

⁴² [HC Deb 23 Oct 2008 c15-17WS](#)

⁴³ [HC Deb 5 Nov 2009 c49-52WS](#)

⁴⁴ Times, [Labour will ensure children are taught the dangers of sexting](#), 22 March 2016

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,⁴⁵ 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 2015.⁴⁶ 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 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.⁴⁷

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 2013⁴⁸:

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.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰ Lyn Brown supported statutory PSHE as "an important tool in our fight against psychoactive drugs and those who push them,"⁵¹ 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."⁵²

⁴⁵ Parliament, [Private Members' Bill Ballot](#), 4 June 2015

⁴⁶ [HC Deb 20 Nov 2015 c937-961](#) and [c984-1019](#)

⁴⁷ New Clause 4 – [list of amendments 27 October 2015](#)

⁴⁸ Ofsted, [Not yet good enough: personal, social, health and economic education in schools](#), May 2013

⁴⁹ [PBC 29 Oct 2015 c76](#)

⁵⁰ [PBC 29 Oct 2015 c76](#)

⁵¹ [PBC 29 Oct 2015 c79](#)

⁵² [PBC 29 Oct 2015 c81](#)

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.⁵³

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 241.⁵⁴

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

4.5 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 great potential of the subject is not being realised, and that system change is needed.⁵⁵

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.⁵⁶

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.”⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸

The Sex Education Forum is also [campaigning](#) for an entitlement to statutory PSHE, focused on SRE.

The Children’s Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, was quoted in a recent press article on sexual offences in UK schools as supporting statutory PSHE to help children “understand what is inappropriate or illegal behaviour.”⁵⁹

Another recent [report](#) in the *Telegraph*, on child sexual abuse, noted the support of the NSPCC and Barnardo’s for statutory PSHE.⁶⁰

⁵³ PBC 29 Oct 2015 c84

⁵⁴ Debate at [HC Deb 20 Jan 2016 c1437-1481](#)

⁵⁵ Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education Expert Group, [Report and Recommendations](#), p4

⁵⁶ PSHE Association, [Pledge your support for statutory PSHE education](#) [accessed 14 September 2015]

⁵⁷ PSHE Association, [Personal, Social, Health and Economic \(PSHE\) education – a curriculum for life: The case for statutory status](#), October 2015, p3

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ BBC News, [School sex crime reports in UK top 5,500 in three years](#), 6 September 2015

⁶⁰ Telegraph, [Lessons to prevent sexual abuse should be mandatory, experts demand](#), 3 September 2015

4.6 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.⁶¹

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 themselves as responsible for the teaching of English, maths, history and science.⁶²

[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.⁶³

⁶¹ HC Deb 15 Jul 2015 c931

⁶² Family Education Trust, [Further Written Evidence to the Education Committee](#), November 2014

⁶³ Evangelical Alliance, [Written Evidence to the Education Committee](#), July 2014

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